

Sustainability Working Group (SWG)

(Draft) Minutes: September 11, 2023 (in person)

Attending: Ralph Harder (recorder)

Sharon Benoit

Ben Lounsbury

Silver Moore-Leamon

Camille Parrish

Sasha Goodwin

Excused: Tim MacLeod

Jaye Rich

Guest: Mayor Jason Levesque

Agenda Items:

- Update Auburn Recycling Advocates: Candidate Meeting, future activities
Successful Candidate night event held at Side by Each
- Survey of current drop-off recyclers - proposed questions
Survey questions have been proposed. Consensus is to limit number of questions to three but for now will hold off on surveying at Public Works site.
- Current status drop off recycling at Gracelawn, any Auburn City/Casella data?
There are now four collection bins. Drop off hours and access to site have not been restricted as planned and discussed at City Council.
- FAQ List. Is recycling necessary?
We have a list of questions the answers to which could be used to educate users of the service, current city Councilors or candidates for city elective offices
- Agricycle composting info session
Possible future educational session organized by Auburn Recycling Advocates group
- Status Auburn Solid Waste RFP, South Portland Composting RFP
Per City Manager RFP now due by March 2024
- SWG Future meeting schedule
Moving to every two weeks
- Discussion Mayor's Proposal

Bulk of our time was spent listening to the Mayor and then discussing his proposal. He requested that our feedback be

given to the City Manager by Thursday in time for discussion with Casella.

Feedback:

- This is a compressed timeline that doesn't give the matter the attention it deserves.
- The proposal basically implements what the Ad Hoc Recycling committee recommended 3 years ago: education, data collection on the overall performance of the program, stricter performance standards on the vendor, consideration of other vendors or other modifications to the program.
- The proposal does not evaluate or incorporate composting, a key prior recommendation.
- Comparing outcome data for three different scenarios: historical data, data from the current drop-off program and the proposed pilot data is flawed for reasons outlined below. If the intent of the pilot is to assess the results of the vendor's education program and their ability to accurately measure participation rate and contamination rate vs controls, there is no adequate control group - a group in which those interventions are not being made.
- There are assertions in the proposal – eg. incineration is equivalent to recycle/reuse in its environmental impact – that contradict established science of greenhouse gas cycle analysis.
- Correct and complete data from historic, current centralized location, and upcoming pilot program is needed for any comparison. How can we compare data across these programs when:
 1. The sample sizes will all be different- all citizens (historic), those who have transportation and time to drive to the central location (current), and those who live in W, Th, and F pick-up locations (pilot). Can they tell us how they will handle this variable in their comparison?
 2. The historic data for contamination rate is not accurate for Auburn, whatever they define as contamination rate. It is a percentage that represents all of the towns who bring recycling to Casella, as we were told during our visit. How will they be able to state that Auburn's historic contamination rate was 15% when they don't have the data specific to Auburn? For example, Auburn's could have

been 5%, but other towns were 25% and in the mix of recyclables the contamination rate overall comes out to 15%. How can one have any confidence in this number? What constitutes "contamination" must be defined.

3. How was the 7-8% recycling rate historically calculated? Is this a percentage of total tonnage of waste (trash and recycling) collected? If so, then how will the recycling rate of the pilot program be calculated for comparison to the other programs, unless the amount of trash specific to these households is also measured? Is this the plan?
4. What is the tonnage for the 2 months for 2022 and 2023 that is being used currently for comparison? Is the 2022 tonnage consistent with previously reported tonnages that were used in the last recycling report? If not, explain.
5. Are data from the centralized location going to be used once the pilot program begins? With the change in number of people needing to use the centralized location, M and T pickups, how will this change be accounted for in the analysis? This will no longer be a control group if the numbers are changed. If these data will not be used, how will you account for only having 2-3 months of data for this location, and that data were collected during a time of disruption at the central location- from too few bins, other towns using the bins, confusing information about location and times of use of the bins, etc.?
6. How will the new educational programming be evaluated? Will it be city-wide? Why is this educational programming only now being implemented?
 8. What outcomes will be assessed? What will be considered successful, or not, by the city?
7. We ask that SWG/SNRB have unfettered access to primary data as it is collected by Casella

Next 2023 Meeting Date:

September 28

