

Brookline Solid Waste Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes for January 4, 2022

Submitted by Susan Rittling

The meeting came to order online via Zoom at 6:30 PM.

Committee members present: John Dempsey, chair, Susan Rittling, Deane Coady, Mary Litterst, Kathleen O’Connell, Clint Richmond.

DPW staff present: Kevin Johnson, Alexandra Vecchio, Chaimaa Medhat

Members of the Public: Kaity Robbins, Ann Herforth, Paul Hsieh, Mary Sabolsi

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 by Mr. Dempsey, who requested public comment on items not on the agenda. There were no comments.

The minutes from the December 7th SWAC meeting submitted by Ms. Coady were reviewed. Ms. Litterst moved to accept as written, seconded by Mr. Richmond, all in favor.

Introductions

Mr. Dempsey then introduced Chaimaa Medhat, the new assistant recycling coordinator for the Town of Brookline, described a little of her relevant background and extended a very warm welcome to her on behalf of SWAC.

School composting

Ms. Coady and Mr. Dempsey provided an update on the school composting program. The dedication of several volunteers who help out at lunch at Old Lincoln School and the school custodian, Larry Cronk, was commended. The 9th graders at OLS are doing well with composting as long as there is someone next to the bins to help with any confusion. It was noted that these students will be relocating soon to the new 9th grade school, on a tight schedule. Ms. O’Connell reported that students at BHS are very invested in the program but there is a need for consistency in what is compostable or recyclable. While there is also confusion about what plastics are or are not recyclable, most are trying to do their best. There is little contamination when “waste watchers are stationed by the receptacles but, with rising Covid numbers, the schools may be transitioning back to “grab and go” lunches which reduces the options for composting. Omicron is also delaying the deployment of reusables, but there is optimism that there will be more reusables at the new school building. Staff are open to improvements and education for students, with the help of Ms. Medhat.

BHS Waste Audit

The BHS Environmental Action Club’s Waste Audit report was postponed to next month because of the holiday break and unexpected school closure.

Task Force

Creation of the Task Force to Expand Food Waste Diversion was discussed. It was emphasized that this is a SWAC committee, and should be chaired by SWAC members. Mr. Dempsey suggested Dr. Rittling and Ms. O’Connell as co-chairs. SWAC members and members of the

public are invited to join the task force, and DPW shared a one-page announcement soliciting paragraphs of interest from the public. Applications should be submitted by Jan 21st to be reviewed by the co-chairs and interested SWAC members, with the members to be appointed at the next SWAC meeting on Feb 1, 2022. The announcement will be distributed to appropriate list serves, SWAC member's individual networks, DPW website and the We Recycle Brookline App. Discussion ensued on the types of individuals to be appointed, including those living in multi-unit buildings, and those with no preconceived ideas about composting, students from the PSB. There was also discussion about the charge of the task force and the precise language of the revised warrant article:

“THEREFORE, be it resolved that Town Meeting urges SWAC to identify any upcoming opportunities for the Town to consider the expansion of its mandatory recycling program to include all compostable organic waste generated by residents serviced by the Town's municipal waste collection program.”

Ms. Coady suggested “universal” would be better terminology than mandatory to describe the composting program. The number of members for the task force was also discussed, looking for a size where scheduling will not be too difficult, probably 5-7. It is hoped that Ms. Medhat will attend as many meetings as she can fit in her schedule, and to serve as a liaison to DPW and Mr. Johnson. Her role will be clarified as the task force proceeds. Discussion continues about how the charge for the task force is primarily research. The time commitment for task force members was also discussed, with three hours per month for 10 months agreed as a reasonable target. Revisions to the announcement will be made by Ms. Vecchio and Ms. Medhat for review by the co-chairs and release within two-three days. Applications to be reviewed by the co-chairs.

There was continued discussion and suggestions from the committee for the Task Force chairs.

Ms. Coady has some excellent reports on composting programs including one from the City of Cambridge that she will share.

Mr. Dempsey warned that there will be a number of odd situations that will arise and need to be dealt with, such as shared compost buckets, and Mr. Johnson noted that proper storage and rodent control will be important issues for residents.

Ms. Litterst noted that the role of the task force will be to identify the range of issues to be addressed, but not necessarily to address each one.

There was discussion about performing community surveys, although it was thought that it may be too early for this.

The wording of the Warrant Article was somewhat vague, with a directive to increase substantially the number of residents composting. It will be the job of the task force to decide which questions and directions to pursue.

Rather than just a final report, it was suggested that the Task Force can provide frequent updates on progress.

It was suggested to categorize questions about composting to those that are addressable and those that are not. The task force may produce intermediate outcomes, not a final report.

Identifying grant opportunities is another approach.

Ms. Litterst has links to some of the actions being taken state wide in California. Do any by-laws need to be changed to accommodate town wide composting? This comes back to the question of scope, which will be the first thing the task force will need to determine.

Personnel costs for DPW collection of compost was also brought up vs using an outside contractor.

Zero Waste Coordinator

Ms. Vecchio announced the receipt of a grant to fund a Zero Waste Coordinator position, and that DPW is currently advertising this position. This position will be key to moving forward with the Zero Waste Framework. In a related item, she also noted that the final report has been received from the Zero Waste consultants, so their work is completed. This document will be shared with the committee after review by DPW members, and before the next SWAC meeting.

Other business

Mr. Richmond reported on enforcement of the plastic packaging by-law, and that there will be a new position at the Department of Public Health to help with this. It was noted that Public Health and DPW need to work together on many of these issues. Also, supply chain issues have resulted in the issuance of waivers for compliance with the plastic packaging by-law, which is complicating enforcement. This is a current issue, but the new inspector is a step in the right direction.

The meeting adjourned at 7:45 PM.

SWAC Meetings/Minutes Rotation – Updated as of 1/24/22

John – 9/21

Mary – 11/21

Deane – 12/21

Susan – 1/22

Kathleen – 2/22

Clint – 3/22

Kaity – 4/22

John – 5/22

Mary – 6/22