

Brookline Solid Waste Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes for February 1, 2022

Minutes submitted by Kathleen O'Connell

Meeting came to order online via Zoom at 6:32 pm

Attendees:

SWAC Members: John Dempsey (chair), Deane Coady, Mary Litterst, Kathleen O'Connell, Clint Richmond, Susan Rittling, Kaity Robbins

DPW Staff: Kevin Johnson, Alexandra Vecchio, Ed Gilbert, Chaimaa Medhat

Members of the Public: Richard Day, Sasha Palmer (School Food Services), Dave Walker, Paul Hsieh, Brian Ly, Mary Sabolsi

Public Comment Section

John Dempsey opened the public comment section.

Richard Day noticed that the people who have larger trash totes pay less per bag based on the size of the tote versus the smaller totes. This doesn't really incentivize people to use smaller totes.

Kevin Johnson of DPW responded that the pricing was originally formulated by comparing the size of the larger totes with the smallest, but also factoring in that the town has to pick up all totes no matter what size, so staffing doesn't change because of size.

Richard Day pointed out that people with small totes are paying 13 cents a gallon, while people with large totes pay 8 cents a gallon. This doesn't seem equitable. He also observed that seniors would likely have smaller totes, so they are subsidizing families with more people and more trash. John Dempsey thought this was an excellent point and mentioned SWAC will look at this as we do want people to use smaller carts.

General Meeting

SWAC welcomed new member Kaity Robbins who is now on SWAC.

SWAC approved minutes from January 4, 2022, meeting.

School Food Service/Composting Update

Sasha Palmer from the School Food Service joined the meeting.

John Dempsey asked Sasha how SWAC can help with efforts to compost/recycle/divert waste.

Sasha shared that the School Food Service has been working hard to try to source reusable utensils, trays and even food. It has been very slow sourcing reusable material. The priority was for the new building on Tappan street to be set up with reusable items. Getting the staffing to handle washing these items at Tappan is also a challenge.

Sasha also shared that sourcing compostable materials has been challenging, so they are using what they have and what they can source when they can't get compostable materials. When Sasha ordered the compostable material, vendors responded that the order was too ambitious, so they had

to scale back. They were able to get a shipment of compostables recently, so they are trying to use up and filter out old materials now.

Deane Coady mentioned that it is hard for kids/teachers to compost if the materials are not consistent. This is especially true at the elementary schools including Lincoln School where they are eating in the classroom and not in the cafeteria. Sasha said the food service is working toward being more consistent with materials as more compostables are delivered.

Sasha indicated that they are also hoping to install dishwashers at Lincoln and Lawrence over Feb break, so the schools can start using trays.

John Dempsey asked about food rescue. Sasha mentioned that a Boston University intern did a feasibility study on a food rescue program, which she would share. She indicated that they would be going back to share tables at the high school, so some of the fruit and prepackaged items could be diverted, but a pick up/drop off program needs to be formalized, so the diverted food goes somewhere regularly. Right now, some of the compost volunteers are taking food and dropping off.

John Dempsey asked about the back of the house composting. Sasha indicated that the staff was very receptive at Lincoln, BHS and Tappan, but other schools are a work in progress.

Deane Coady was curious to know what the Black Earth compost tonnage is for the schools. Ed Gilbert said they can't calculate tonnage because they don't have a scale to weigh it on, but they can give volume numbers. He also said we can look at the solid waste tonnage for the schools and see if it's going down. Alexandra Vecchio said she and Chaimaa Medhat met with Justin from Black Earth and he said the school contamination is very low and they haven't been forced to turn anything away so far.

Kathleen O'Connell mentioned that it would be helpful if there was signage for composting/recycling/trash and asked about the progress on signage for the schools, especially BHS. Chaima Medhat shared the visuals she is developing as to what goes in compost, recycling and trash. She will share these visuals with SWAC, get feedback and then update them.

Recycling Dividends Program Update

John Dempsey asked Ed Gilbert to provide an update on the Recycling Dividends Program. Ed Gilbert indicated we get points from the state based on the programs we have. For example, we get points for hazardous waste, PAYT, Single Stream, etc.

Then based on the points, we get a check from the state to be used on recycling, composting, or waste management. Our grant is about \$46,000. The state is trying to help the smaller towns implement programs. In the past, we have used the money for carts, hazardous waste and education programs.

John Dempsey then asked if there was a plan to replace carts. Ed Gilbert said that the carts have an 8-10 year life expectancy. Residents may request new carts if their carts are damaged. DPW replaces them the day of their pickup. Quite a few recycling bins are being replaced now. Broken ones are put in a dumpster and they get recycled by Casella and made back into rigid plastic – ostensibly carts.

BHS Waste Audit Presentation

Presenter: Brian Ly - member of the BHS Environmental Action Club

- EAC did a waste audit at BHS on 11/18/21
- The trash from 3 bins was sorted and reweighed based on category
- Found that 60% of the material in the trash could be put in compost or recycling
- Lots of uneaten fruit (wasted food) that could be diverted
- There was a great deal of contamination in the recycling bin (30%), so the whole batch might end up being rejected.

Suggested Improvements

- Better signage and curriculum around what goes in what bin
- Food rescue corner
- More accessible waste bins e.g. need more bins outside for when kids are eating outside in the nice weather

Deane Coady asked Brian: Could advisory be a way to get information to all students? Brian mentioned it would work somewhat, but kids don't currently really pay attention in advisory, so he wasn't confident that was the right place.

Kaity Robbins mentioned doing a trash audit in Brookline. This was tried years ago, but can't do it at houses because some residents objected to people looking through their garbage. It was suggested that this could probably be done at the transfer station. Kaity Robbins also recommended doing another audit at BHS after improvements have been put in place at BHS to see the difference the improvements make.

Brian Ly will share the presentation slides with John Dempsey.

Compost Taskforce Discussion

John Dempsey mentioned that the end result of the task force is to have a report that lays out different ways to expand the compost program. The report should lay out all the options.

Kathleen O'Connell mentioned that the Zero Waste Plan lays out a plan, and was concerned about how these plans would work together. John indicated that the goal of the warrant article was to look at ways to speed up the composting timeframes in the Zero Waste plan.

Kaity Robbins added that the report should discuss what are the obstacles to various options and what can be done to overcome those obstacles. She suggested breaking it down into buckets that various small groups can work on. She also indicated that it can be important to work in increments and get buy-in. BU tried to put in place mandatory composting in 4 dorms at BU, but contamination was over 90%. Even after some education, it only went down to about 70%, so it's a work in progress and they had to step back and make it voluntary for now.

Susan Rittling said that the way she read the warrant article was that the report should include ways to increase composting including the option of making it mandatory.

Kathleen O'Connell said that composting numbers have been increasing without a big effort on the part of the town, so part of future efforts could include a lot more marketing and incentives on the part of the town.

Deane Coady added that Mothers Out Front has done a big push in several schools and Black Earth Compost has seen an increase as a result of these efforts.

Several community members mentioned on the chat that it is hard to push voluntary numbers as high as we want, therefore mandatory composting may be necessary to really increase participation.

The discussion then shifted to how many people should be on the task force. Alexandra Vecchio suggested keeping it smaller given the tight timeframes to get the report done.

John Dempsey contributed that 4 SWAC members and 5 members of the community had volunteered to be on the task force. Deane Coady suggested we accept all members as the more members the better. Kathleen O'Connell worried that too large a group would be hard to coordinate. Kevin Johnson suggested coming up with set meeting times at the start of the task force.

The group then discussed that Open Meeting Laws would apply if there were 4 SWAC members on the taskforce rather than 3 as this would be a quorum of SWAC members. The group felt this would make it a bit more cumbersome for the task force to meet quickly or with less notice if they had to publish all meetings and make them open to the public.

Given the short timeframes to complete a report, it was agreed to have 3 SWAC members and 4 members of the community, so the group wouldn't be too large. Since two of the applicants were from the same family, it was agreed that they could have one person serve and keep the other family member in the loop.

Task force members were nominated and include: Susan Rittling and Kathleen O'Connell of SWAC (co-chairs), Deane Coady of SWAC, Karen Kraut, Cheryl DeSanctis, Pamela Allara and Mary Sabolsi.

Chaimma Medhat will be the liaison for DPW and will share the taskforce members' emails with Susan and Kathleen.

Zero Waste Framework Update

Alexandra Vecchio sent out the updated Zero Waste Framework. She said to think of it as a living document that will be updated. DPW is currently in the process of hiring a Zero Waste manager who will be heavily involved with planning the implementation of the plan. Kathleen asked if some of the timeframes need to be adjusted for the first phase as we are already halfway done FY22. Alexandra Vecchio said she would look into this with the consultants.

DPW Report

- Recycling down 9.61%
- Trash down 1.38%
- Did 25 tons of textiles with Simple Recycling last year. Big Brother/Big Sister took out 15 tons of textile
- Black Earth has 1546 customers
- Clint Richmond asked how many customers are on municipal trash service = 13,038, but not all of Black Earth customers are on municipal
- Deane Coady requested we include Black Earth's commercial numbers (Black Earth estimates tonnage)

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM.

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

Kathleen – 2/22

Clint– 3/22

Kaity – 4/22

John– 5/22

Mary – 6/22

Deane – 7/22

Susan – 8/22