

Newton Sustainable Materials Management Commission (SMMC)
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, April 28, 2022, 7:00 p.m.
Zoom Online Meeting

Members in Attendance: Sunwoo Kahng, Chair, Marian Rambelle, Vice Chair, Carl Valente, Secretary, Steve Ferrey (joined the meeting at 7:45 p.m.), Miles Smith, Karen Slote, Robin Maltz, Alan Gordon, Meryl Kessler (joined the meeting at 7:07 p.m.) and John Lewis (joined the meeting at 7:07 p.m.).

Members Absent: Jim McGonagle, Commissioner, DPW, Ex-Officio.

Other Participants: Alison Leary, City Council (joined the meeting at 7:50 p.m.), Waneta Trabert, Director, DPW Sustainable Materials Management Division, Susan Legere, Newton Recycling Committee, Evan Michaeli, Shara Urtel and Sonja McKnight.

Approval of March 24, 2022 Meeting Minutes:

On the motion by Miles Smith, seconded by Sunwoo Kahng, the Meeting Minutes of March 24, 2022 were approved 6-0-1 on a roll call vote. Sunwoo Kahng, Marian Rambelle, Carl Valente, Miles Smith, Robin Maltz and Alan Gordon voting yes and Karen Slote abstaining.

Promoting Customer Supplied Take Out Containers at Food Establishments:

Susan Legere, Newton Recycling Committee discussed the following concept for takeout containers:

- The Newton Recycling Committee is investigating a program whereby local restaurants and other food establishments would be able to allow patrons to bring their own reusable containers to fill their take-out orders and/or bring home left-over (i.e., doggie bag) food from an order-in meal.
- In 2019 the Health and Human Services department sent a letter to all Newton food establishments that it was not against health codes for customers to provide their own reusable containers. However, with concerns around COVID-19 over the last two years and a change in the HHS commissioner, it is unclear whether the HHS position has changed and whether the department will allow customer provided take-out containers. Ms. Legere has already contacted the Department of Health and Human Services for guidance on this matter but has yet to receive a response.
- A variation on this approach would be to allow food establishments to provide reusable containers (for a deposit), owned by the food establishment, and which would then be returned by customers for cleaning and reuse.
- Ms. Legere reported on a small survey sample of food establishments and received a mixed response to this idea. A more extensive survey may be helpful.
- Ms. Kahng offered to contact City Councilor Leary for help obtaining from the Health and Human Services Department any existing rules and regulations on this matter.

Food Establishments Survey Results:

Evan Michaeli, a student at Brimmer and May and a member of the Newton Plastics Reduction Working Group, presented the results of a survey of food establishments conducted by the Newton Plastic Reduction Working Group. He reported the following results:

- There were 81 responses to the survey. The median number of meals served per week by each respondent is 4115 (the survey respondents included cafeteria style establishments likely contributing to the large number of meals served).
- 24 percent of the respondents do not provide a takeout/doggie bag option.
- The high number of take-out orders at food establishments appears to be related to the Covid pandemic.
- The predominant items provided for takeout are cutlery and food containers.
- Cost was the biggest factor identified for the type of takeout container provided; with servicing of the containers also a factor.
- 20% of the respondents reported using a food waste collection service.
- The primary barriers identified to using a food waste collection service is cost and adequate space.
- The primary barriers identified to undertaking general recycling is cost and adequate space.

SMMC Report Update

- Ms. Kahng reported that the Mayor's FY23 budget does not include funding for additional SMMD staffing. The Mayor has also not allocated any ARPA funds for a zero waste plan, as requested by the SMMC.
- Ms. Kahng suggested to the Commission members that the SMMC work on other ways to promote the recommendations in the SMMC Report, such as:
 1. Request that the City Council approve a Resolution of the SMMC solid waste reduction goals. Mr. Gordon and Ms. Kessler offered to assist Ms. Kahng with drafting such a resolution. After a draft is ready it would be sent to City Councilor Leary for review. It was suggested that such a resolution be ready for when the SMMD/MassDEP report is ready, sometime later this year.
 2. Ms. Slote drafted a two-page flyer summarizing the SMMC report, including its 6 recommendations. Councilor Alicia Bowman had suggested that a brief 2-page summary might help some councilors who are short for time to become familiar with the contents of the full report. Based on comments from Commission members, Ms. Slote will update this flyer.
 3. Consider a regular e-newsletter to the City Council and Mayor highlighting disposal/recycling trends and recommendations in the SMMC Report. Commission members are encouraged to submit suggestions to include. Ms. Kahng will work on this.
 4. Inviting the Mayor to a future in-person meeting of the SMMC, to review the recommendation in the upcoming SMMD/MassDEP report. This may be done at an upcoming in-person meeting of the SMMC, with a date to be determined based on completion of the SMMD/MassDEP report and availability of public meeting spaces.

SMMD Update:

The following monthly report was presented by Ms. Trabert:

- The yard waste program began on April 11, using City staff and vehicles and experienced only limited collection delays. Ms. Trabert is in the process of hiring permanent staff for this program.
- The Mayor's FY23 budget calls for moving the City's on-street trash/recycling receptacle program (e.g., Big Belly) to the SMMD from the Parks, Recreation & Culture Department. This should provide more operational flexibility with collection equipment.
- There is a spring promotion for the organics/food waste partnership program with a good response to the ½ off offer for the starter kit from Black Earth Compost. The offer lasts through May 7.
- There appears to be progress at the State level for paint Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) legislation, though the packaging and mattress EPR bills did not make it out of committee. Along with other municipalities, Newton will sign a letter in support of the paint EPR bill.
- Ms. Trabert is still working on a plan for a new mattress collection program which, once set up, will require a City Ordinance change. She noted that a new state waste ban for mattresses will begin on November 1, 2022.
- In March and April, the City received rebates for its recyclables.
- Ms. Trabert has hired a Waste Diversion Coordinator, but is waiting for the HR Department to finish the onboarding process. She will be re-advertising for the Administrative Assistant position in her department.
- The sticker placement project for curbside recycling carts is expected to continue this summer.
- The SMMD/MassDEP Technical Assistance Grant Report will be delayed to later in the calendar year rather than the previous target of June 2022.

Public Comments/Open Announcements:

There were no public comments or other announcements.

Meeting adjourned at 9:06 p.m.

Next Meeting: The next meeting of the SMMC is scheduled for Thursday, May 26, 2022 at 7 p.m. via Zoom.

Documents Provided/Discussed at Meeting:

1. *March 24, 2022 Meeting Minutes*
2. *Draft flyer of SMMC Report Recommendation, prepared by Ms. Slote*
3. *Undated (2019) letter from the Health and Human Services Department to food establishments providing guidance on the use of single use plastics and Styrofoam containers, including reference to 3-304.17 of the FDA Food Code*

4. *PAYT video from MassDEP conference*
5. *Bring Your Own (food container) sticker for food establishments, from Silicon Valley Reduces*