

Newton Solid Waste Commission Meeting Minutes
Thursday, May 28, 2020, 7:00-8:45 pm
Zoom Online Conference

Members in attendance: Marian Rambelle (Chair), Sunwoo Kahng, Meryl Kessler, Brita Lundberg, Robin Maltz, Seth Parker (through approximately 8:30 pm), Karen Slote, Miles Smith, Carl Valente

Members absent: Steve Ferrey

Others in attendance: Marcia Cooper, Harry Sanders

Approval of February 27, 2020 Meeting Minutes:

Vote taken to approve the meeting minutes and passed by all members present, except for one abstention (Maltz).

SWC By-laws/Ordinance Update:

The Docket Request for the ordinance change was submitted to the City Clerk's office on February 10. The City Clerk's office reported it has not been sent yet to the City Council and will check on its status.

Sustainable Materials Management (SMM) Division Update:

SMM Division Director Waneta Trabert could not attend and submitted a written report (attached).

Summary discussion:

Public Comments: Inquiries/requests regarding: increased curbside trash/recycling pickups (not possible due to cost and truck availability); remove bulky waste fee (no suspension, per Mayor); availability of overflow bags/temporary suspension of overflow bag fee (no change to overflow bag fee. Customer Service called all stores to update the list of overflow bags availability); when will the Resource Recovery Center (RRC) reopen? (to be determined).

COVID Impacts: From March 18 to May 18, DPW was operating only essential functions. Resource Recovery Center (RRC) was closed as it was not essential to public health/safety or sanitation. In early April, Waneta was partially reassigned to help coordinate the City's response to food insecurity with Dana Hanson, Director of Community Engagement & Inclusion. Waneta's role started as 70% time, now approximately 20% time and will likely last at least through September, and will limit the SMM program to a certain extent. Question for Waneta: how will her other role affect or limit the SMM program in the coming months?

Bulky Waste Program: Significant reduction in curbside pickup requests since fee took effect (2/1). Concurrent uptick in illegal dumping in community (<30 incidents per month). Tracking by DPW is ongoing.

Resource Recovery Center: RRC will reopen June 2. To maintain social distancing, drop off is by appointment only. Currently scheduling 10 appointments per 15-minute time slot. 302 appointments scheduled so far.

C. Valente: Concern that 15 minutes is not adequate time when using the cardboard compactor (takes a long time to use).

RRC this summer (June 2 - Sept 25): Open to residents Tues - Fri 7 am - 3:45 pm. Mondays closed. Saturdays will remain closed until further notice (appointment system requires staff with overtime pay, which is currently not authorized). Goodwill (trailer at RRC) has shut down statewide; unknown when they will re-open.

Swap Shop/Book Shed and Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) at RRC: All are currently closed; reopening unknown (July at the earliest). HHW is 1st reopening priority. Reuse operations globally have been hard hit due to safety concerns. M. Smith: Swap Shop maybe reopen in Sept. Swap Shop volunteer staff safety concerns: ages of volunteers, limited indoor space, how to limit handling of items by volunteer staff, staff dealing with public. Maybe have only outdoors 'shopping' at Swap Shop. Various ideas for the Swap Shop are being considered by DPW.

Suggestions discussed:

Nextdoor Newton or a similar online platform can be used for giving away items to interested residents during the Swap Shop closure (or, Swap Shop could transition to online pickups while closed). A NH town has been seen implementing online reuse strategies. Could publicize these resources along with the Swap Shop info on DPW webpage. Mayor can be asked to promote the alternate resources in her emails to residents. M. Smith will discuss suggestions with Waneta. K. Slote will prepare a list of resources for Waneta and SWC to review.

M. Smith: Maybe volunteers could open the Swap Shop on Saturdays, as during a prior administration. But union rules may not allow.

Curbside compliance: Program on hold due to staffing and logistical challenges during the State of Emergency. Plan to pursue curbside cart inspections and begin issuing compliance letters again in late summer.

Curbside Organics Subscription Program: Currently 1,755 subscriptions (noted 1534 households were signed up as of February 27). Spring marketing push now on hold due to State of Emergency, but DPW and Mayor have pitched the program several times in their newsletters. Proposed RRC organics drop-off program on hold due to State of Emergency.

Cost impacts to SMM due to COVID-19: Curbside collection services were not disrupted by COVID-19 State of Emergency. During March and April:

- Trash tonnage increased 8.3% year-over-year (increase of 231 tons), resulting in a cost increase of approximately \$16,000.
- Recycling tonnage increased 3.4% year-over-year (increase of 53 tons), resulting in a cost increase of approximately \$3,100.

- School dumpsters not needing service for approximately 7 weeks due to school building closures, saving approximately \$37,000.
- Continued savings due to weekly service (rather than daily) at the two high schools.
- Material not collected at RRC - cost avoidance of approximately \$9,000.

2020-21 Budget Changes: The planned addition of a full-time Northeastern co-op student to SMM was cut. All part-time staff cut from the city's FY21 budget, including a proposed part-time position. However, the DPW's presentation to the Public Facilities Committee on 5/27 noted that the DPW FY21 budget added about \$800k, presumably for increased costs due to the new hauling contract (starts 7/1/2020) - to be confirmed with Waneta.

New Hauler Contract: Not yet signed, but language has been finalized, and signatures are expected in the first week of June. Contract to take effect July 1.

Extended Producer Responsibility update: On the state level, Waneta likely will be elected to the Massachusetts Product Stewardship Council Chair in September 2020. Starting in May, Waneta is attending monthly regional EPR calls held by NERC (Northeast Recycling Council) and NEWMOA (Northeast Waste Management Officials Association - state agency officials).

Polystyrene/plastic bags ban suspension in State of Emergency: Discussion of basis/implications of polystyrene/plastic bags ban/deposit bottle suspensions by the state. Main concern is that suspensions will become permanent (for ex, plastic bag industry has been promoting the idea that single-use bags are safer). Is there a scientific basis for suspensions to prevent virus transmission on bags (plastic, cloth, paper, etc)? Are plastic bags safer than paper bags? Evolving data on these issues as more is learned over time - it's difficult to know how careful we should be. The State made suspension decision based on info known at the time. Store workers may not feel safe handling reusable bags at this time. (B. Lundberg: as an infectious disease specialist, there is no known transmission of virus on reusable bags.) Possible option: allow customers to bag own groceries in reusable bags.

Discussion of the idea to advocate to the mayor or State (MassDEP) about rescinding the ban on reusable bags. Some felt the mayor cannot override the State's suspension. S. Kahng brought up a draft Conservation Law Foundation (CLF) letter to the State requesting lifting of the ban, based on a detailed review and discussion of technical and other information. CLF is seeking organizations to be signatories to the letter, to be sent very soon to the State. Discussion of support for the letter's goals and whether the SWC has the authority to independently sign the letter or would need mayoral or city council approval. M. Smith moved (and was seconded) that the Commission provisionally endorse the CLF letter as presented by S. Kahng and the Chair will be tasked with ascertaining the permissibility of doing this from the City's perspective. Vote was taken (after Parker had left the meeting): 7 yes votes and 1 no vote (Valente). The Chair will contact the Legal Dept (Marie Lawlor) and then sign the letter on behalf of the SWC, if approved.

Other Announcements:

The City Council recently approved the Mayor's appointment of Meryl Kessler and Carl Valente to the Commission.

M. Kessler suggestion: Schedule the goals discussion early in next meeting's agenda to allow adequate time for discussion.

Next meeting - Thursday, June 25, 2020, 700-8:45 pm, Zoom Online Conference

Meeting adjourned at approximately 9 pm.