

Newton Sustainable Materials Management Commission (SMMC)
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, December 15, 2022, 7:00 p.m.
Zoom Online Meeting

Members in Attendance: Sunwoo Kahng, Chair, Marian Rambelle, Vice Chair, Carl Valente, Secretary, Steven Ferrey, Meryl Kessler, Alan Gordon, Karen Slote, Miles Smith and Robin Maltz.

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

Other Participants: Alison Leary, City Council, Waneta Trabert, Director, DPW Sustainable Materials Management Division, Shara Ertel, Sonya McKnight, MaryLee Belleville, Teresa Sauro and Sandy Jones.

Approval of November 17, 2022 Meeting Minutes:

Ms. Slote moved to amend the November 17 minutes by adding at the end of the fourth bullet of the agenda item: **Pay as You Throw Recommendations in Light of the Override and Debt Exclusion:** *The commission discussed the delayed release of the report and some members expressed frustration at another delay.* Seconded by Ms. Kessler. On a roll call vote Ms. Kahng, Ms. Rambelle, Ms. Kessler, Mr. Gordon, Ms. Slote, Mr. Smith and Ms. Maltz voting yes. Mr. Ferry and Mr. Valente abstaining. Approved 7-0-2.

On the motion by Mr. Smith, seconded by Ms. Kahng, the Meeting Minutes of November 17, 2022, as amended, were approved 9-0 on a roll call vote. Ms. Kahng, Ms. Rambelle, Mr. Valente, Ms. Kessler, Mr. Gordon, Mr. Ferrey, Ms. Slote, Mr. Smith and Ms. Maltz voting yes.

January Officer Election: Ms. Maltz will manage the upcoming elections of SMMC Officers. Members interested in being nominated should email her. If any position has no nominations Ms. Maltz will notify Ms. Kahng. Ms. Maltz and Ms. Rambelle will determine how the voting of Officers should take place during a virtual meeting (i.e., Zoom) given that the SMMC bylaws call for a written ballot.

Discussion of Recyclability of Plastics: Ms. Trabert commented on the recent NPR news story regarding the Greenpeace Report on the limited recycling of plastics in this country, despite the evidence showing otherwise. Her feeling is that the Greenpeace Report and NPR reporting follows a trend in sensational journalism and believes that Greenpeace ‘cherry picked’ data to fit the particular narrative they want to advance.

It was the general consensus of the SMMC that its role is to discuss issues regarding solid waste and recycling, and to advise the Mayor and City Council on these issues, including on any proposed State legislation the City is recommended to support.

On a related note, Ms. Kahng advised the SMMC of a December 20 (1 p.m.) meeting sponsored by Mass Recycling in which the Product Stewardship Council will provide a legislative recap on EPR and proposed legislation it will be supporting in the upcoming legislative session. SMMC members who wish to attend may do so without charge.

Recycling Sticker Project Update: Ms. Trabert provided the following update to the effort to add recycling stickers and to survey curbside recycling containers:

- Project has taken place over the past two summers, over a 15-week period.
- In 2021, 40 volunteers assisted.
- In 2022, 20 volunteers assisted.
- 5000 carts were serviced in 2021 and 8000 in 2022, out of a total of approximately 29,500 carts. Ms. Trabert hopes the project will be completed in 2023 with the assistance of seasonal staff.
- A Professor at Boston College and a team of students undertook a ‘before and after’ observational study of cart contents.
- The survey of carts identified an approximate 11% contamination rate (i.e., 11% of surveyed carts).
- When contamination was found, a tag was placed on the cart and a follow up letter was sent to the household.
- Contamination consisted of: plastic bags/wraps and bagged recyclables; items that are recyclable only at the Rumford recycling facility; black plastic; and items that aren’t recyclable.
- The volunteer teams taking on this project generally received positive feedback from residents.
- Ms. Trabert will share with the SMMC the data from the Boston College effort once it is available.
- Ms. Kahng asked about the data collected on the amount of trash and recycling seen in the carts. Ms. Trabert replied that she did not know those figures but would check and report at the next meeting. Ms. Kahng stressed that those numbers would be impactful in pressing the Commission’s recommendation to incentivize smaller trash carts.

Scope of a Comprehensive Zero Waste Plan: This agenda item was deferred to a future meeting.

SMMD Update:

Ms. Trabert reviewed the December SMMD update, dated December 12, 2022, responding to a number of questions and comments from Commission members, including:

- The new Yard Waste collection program provided by DPW staff was generally successful and went smoothly, compared to prior years when it was provided as part of the by WM (previously known as Waste Management) contract.
- A new Superintendent position has been added to the SMMD, that will be responsible for running the yard waste program, street sweeping program and the Rumford Avenue facility. This position will report to Ms. Trabert. It has just been posted.

- The first candidate for the part-time Administrative Assistant position withdrew. Ms. Trabert is now undertaking a reference check for a new candidate.

Public Comments/Open Announcements:

- Ms. Rambelle noted that the SMMC needs to start work on its 2022 annual report.
- Ms. Kessler noted that the Village 14 website has a posting called, “How Not to Fill the World with Garbage.” Ms. Kessler posted a link to the SMMC Report (November 2021) to provide readers with the Commission’s recommendations regarding reducing solid waste.
- Ms. Kahng provided a brief update on the proposed Sustainable Packaging Ordinance and efforts by food establishments and vendors to offer reusable/returnable take-out containers.

Meeting adjourned at 8:57 p.m.

Next Meetings: The next meeting of the SMMC will be Thursday, January 26, 2023 via Zoom.

Documents Provided/Discussed at Meeting:

1. *November 17, 2022 Meeting Minutes*
2. *December 2022 SMMC Update, dated December 12, 2022*