

Notes

RI Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP) Advisory Committee

March 4, 2014 @ RI RRC – Johnston, RI - 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

I. Debrief of the SWMP Survey Results

Mike O'Connell started the meeting with an agenda overview. He then turned it over to Paul Gonsalves of Statewide Planning for a summary of the Solid Waste Management Plan Survey results. The survey was given in conjunction with the regional workshops. The survey was also open to the general public through several newsletters and email lists. Members of the Advisory Committee also helped to spread the word to their groups/affiliations. A total of 164 respondents took the survey.

The summary of survey results by question included the following concerns:

- Question 1: Over 82% of respondents agreed that we should recycle as much as possible even if it adds to the cost of managing solid waste.
- Question 2: 89% of respondents agreed that we each have a personal responsibility to be less wasteful even if it costs more to deal with waste.
- Question3: About 38% of respondents felt that RI should not export waste to other states even if it costs less than managing it locally. 32% disagreed and 29% had no opinion.
- Question4: 52% of respondents believed that waste disposal costs should be high to encourage recycling and composting. 28% disagreed, while 20% had no opinion.
- Question 5: 75% of respondents felt that RI should implement programs to divert food waste from landfilling even if it will add to collection costs and require more effort by households.

- Question 6: 95% of respondents agreed that new waste management technologies should be used, as long as they are not bad for the environment. Only one respondent disagreed, and fewer than 5% had no opinion.
- Question 7: 94 people responded to this open ended question. When asked if there were anything in particular that is an important consideration in planning for the state's next 25+ years of waste management, 58 respondents mentioned composting. 26 people felt that food waste diversion was a key area to address. 21 said that increased education efforts need to be addressed. 16 respondents felt that reduced consumer packaging and plastic bags should be part of the solution.
- Question 8 asked if the information presented and on the website was found to be informative. 58 people responded. Overall, 52% had a generally positive view while 17% had a critical, or negative answer. About 31% of people who responded seemed to have a generally neutral response.
- Question : 38 respondents either had general questions, or listed their contact info in order to stay informed as the process moves forward.

The group then discussed several aspects of the survey. Dan Beardsley pointed out that commercial recycling was mentioned several times in the open ended questions (7-9), which supported the idea that private businesses should be more active in recycling. The same concern exists for school districts. The group discussed the possibility of the plan setting goals for statewide school district recycling rates. In wrapping up the discussion on the survey, Nancy suggested that we put together a short summary of how and why the survey was devised stating it's limited audience, but not discounting some of the valuable information obtained. Sarah also stated that RRC will be doing a broader survey for the general public in the future.

II. RIRRC Presentation- Section 3 Scenarios

Mike O'Connell began a presentation on the draft of the Solid Waste Management Plan to date. He started with some background information. Mike gave an overview of the draft

section 3 of the plan by first giving some background information. In 2008, the RIRRC saw a decline in waste accepted. The decline was approximately 200 thousand tons, which was largely attributed to the increase in the recycling rate. With such a significant reduction in waste, came a reduction in fees collected by the Corporation, which led to an inevitable cut in operating fees. Some of the soft costs of operating were taken care of rather quickly. Minor technology upgrades such as GPS devices on the compactors contributed to the cost cutting and efficiency measure. It is the hard costs though, that pose more of a challenge. At current practices the Landfill will close in 2038. In the long run, there are basically 4 options that can be pursued: (1) shipping waste out of state, (2) using new technologies to deal with waste, (3) pursue a “zero-waste” policy, and (4) pursue a major landfill expansion (on or off-site). In addressing the waste disposal problems though, there will be 2 time frames involved. Aside from the long-term option mentioned above, there will have to be short-term goals as well. The short-term options include: (1) maintaining the status quo, (2) investing in new programs and policies to reduce waste, and (3) become primarily a municipal waste facility.

The above options do not have to be independently chosen, as there can be a “hybrid” of options chosen. In fact, that will be a more likely scenario. Jim N. agreed by stating that section 3 should clearly contain an integrated discussion of the different options. Eugenia Hen stated that the messaging in this section should be strong by stating what has already been accomplished to reinforce the notion that we have to preserve this precious resource.

III. Draft Plan Section 4 (+ Discussion)

Mike O’Connell continued the discussion of the short and long term option with a transition into draft Section 4 of the plan. The group began to discuss the “Preliminary View of Final Recommendations”. The general approach is geared towards asking 2 key questions: (1) How do we as a state best utilize the landfill asset today?, and (2) How do we as a state maximize the landfill asset for the greatest long term benefit? A summary/outline of section 4 was presented as follows:

SHORT TERM STRATEGY PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATION:

Implement a Hybrid of Option 1 and Option 2:

- 1) Base plan is option 1 – Stay the Course
- 2) Pursue the following key elements of Option 2:
 - a) Improve paper and packaging recycling.
 - Commercial
 - Municipal/Residential
 - b) Expand producer responsibility:
 - Tires
 - Carpet
 - Unwanted Medications/Sharps
 - Batteries
 - CFLs
 - Paper & Packaging
 - c) Support food waste diversion
 - commercial sector through policies that encourage development of private processing;
 - residential sector through at-home and community food waste composting.
- 3) Implementation of programs in #2 that will significantly reduce existing RIRRC solid waste volumes will require disposal fee increases.

Short Term Policy & Action Recommendations:

- a) Convene a Tip Fee Commission to vet RIRRC costs and suggest a governance/pricing model that is fair, predictable and adaptable to changing markets, technologies and capital requirements.
- b) Waste Characterization study, beginning in 2014 and completed by late 2015.
- c) Review for implementation the recommendations made by the 2013 Senate Commission on Paper & Packaging, specifically the recommendation for statewide Pay as You Throw legislation.
- d) Continue to promote backyard composting by offering discounted compost bins to the public.

- e) Support organics/composting facility siting rules revisions, and supporting increased localized neighborhood or communal composting activities.
- f) Continue to provide public education services and assistance through a variety of means.
- g) Employ new and expand existing public outreach tools, such as social media outlets, to 'cast a broad net' and put recycling and waste reduction in the forefront of the public's mind.
- h) Support and publicize efforts like the EPA "Food to Good to Waste" program and efforts by the RI Food Policy Council to encourage food waste reduction.
- i) Identify underperforming municipal and school recycling programs and provide technical assistance to implement improved programs and systems.
- j) Using the results of the waste characterization study, implement a directed public education campaign to target the mistakenly disposed recyclables and educate the public on their proper disposition.

LONG TERM STRATEGY PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT:

Assumptions:

- 1) Timing is critical. While the existing landfill will close in 25 years, lead times to develop new disposal systems are long. Nevertheless and depending on the evaluation, there may be some advantage (or penalty) for tactical delay to optimize price, mitigate risk, allow for further technology advancements etc.
- 2) While technology advancements have been made and the rate of development in the evolving technologies is increasing, incineration remains the only proven process. However, the high level of capital investment for incineration requires a tip fee higher than landfilling and likely higher than transporting RI to out of state locations.
- 3) The Zero Waste/Zero Landfill option has appeal but given the limited landfill life remaining and the limited likelihood of fully engaging Rhode Islanders to embrace the cultural shift necessary to achieve these goals in that period, this strategy cannot be depended upon to be the long term disposal solution for RI. It could however, be a component of a longer term strategy to reduce waste if complimented by other infrastructure.

The above are assumptions and need to be confirmed as part of the due diligence study to be undertaken beginning in 2015.

The group discussion during and after the presentation of section 4 mainly focused on the issues of the proposed tip fee commission and the waste characterization study. Sarah mentioned that the waste characterization study had not been done since 1990 and that a new study will have to look at a span of at least 4 seasons. Dan B added comments related to the premise of section 4 being based on evaluating the landfill's utilization today and going forward. Dan recalled the previous tip fee commission where the financial reporting was seen to be a moving target and felt that the work of a new tip fee commission could be conducted by the committee. He felt that the "tip fee is not a sacred cow" but that the justification for simply raising the tip fee has to be convincing to a broader group of stakeholders. Mike O mentioned that a tip fee commission will not simply look to set a new tip fee, but it will identify the mechanism that needs to be implemented to make a pricing decision, but it will not actually set a price. Mike M suggested that it may not be named a "tip fee commission", as its mission and actions will differ from the previous version.

Bob V then made the point that we need to broadly think about other options other than just tip fees. Jim N suggested that the users with the highest volume should pay higher costs. Eugenia suggested that data from EPA and other states could be used in lieu of a waste characterization study in order to implement existing rules. She would rather spend the money on implementation activities. Sarah believes that RI needs its own baseline data in order to properly plan for the waste issue. Dan then mentioned that a report done many years ago by a Malcolm Pirnie laid out 16 major recommendations and that the majority of those recommendations should be looked at. Several people in the group expressed interest in viewing the report. Dan added that the strategies should be addressed simultaneously, but the long term strategies should be based on the short term strategies. Allison Rogers suggested that the stakeholders involved should have access to the data needed in order to embrace the shift in policy regarding the zero waste/zero landfill option.

Mike O then discussed some points related to the 15-20 year projections. Jim N suggested that future costs may be close to current costs if the tip fee goes up, then expected tonnage will go down. Eugenia concluded the discussion with an excerpt from the 1996 solid waste plan. The topic of the excerpt dealt with the projected landfill life.

IV. Next Steps

In concluding, Jared suggested that the committee regroup before the scheduled June (target mid/late April) meeting in order to hash out more details. A call for an April meeting date was promised to the committee in the very near future following the meeting. Nancy ended with a reminder to send any comments on sections 3 & 4 to Paul by March 17th.

Remaining meeting are:

April (TBD)

June 10

September 9

The Solid Waste Management Plan web page on the Division of Planning website can be found at:

<http://www.planning.ri.gov/statewideplanning/land/solidwaste.php>