

City seeks to lower costs, aid environment by recycling

by Lora Whelan

It may take a rising tide to lift all boats, but it will take the efforts of many more Eastporters to do their community proud when it comes to recycling. A core of about one percent of the population is taking advantage of the city's reopened recycling center, with the other 99% either not aware of the facility or reluctant to let go of old habits.

At stake is the city's ever increasing annual budget item for solid waste disposal costs, with \$175,000 being the amount for the last fiscal year. The cost translates to 9% of the municipal side of the budget, or about 1.5 mills paid by every taxpayer in the city, explains City Manager Larry Post.

The city's unsung recycling heroes are participating at a steadily increasing rate since the city's recycling facility reopened at the end of May, reports Post. While the state's goal is to have municipalities recycling 50% of their waste, Post will be happy if he sees the volume of recycling double by the end of next summer. Recycling committee member Marged Higginson says, "The greater the volume of solid waste recycled, the greater the savings to the taxpayer. We must find a way to help all members of the community understand that." She stresses that the fee paid by homeowners and businesses to have their garbage picked up only covers the cost of the hauling to Marion Transfer Station, not the cost of the actual disposal of the garbage. That cost is borne by the city and makes up the \$175,000 bill. Assistant City Manager Elaine Abbott likens the hauler to the taxi that gets the garbage to its destination.

Businesses and homeowners are getting into the act. Post notes that the container of recycled materials was being hauled to Lubec every four to five weeks when the program first started. Now it goes after every weekly collection. The city has an arrangement with Lubec to accept its recyclables. The cost to the city is in the employee time spent hauling, but the savings to the city is in the reduction in waste taken to Marion Transfer Station. The city is breaking even, he says, but the long-term goal is to have the recycling pay for itself and reduce property taxes. Many more need to participate for that to happen.

The city's volunteer recycling committee is pleased with the response but looking at ways to increase the rate through educational outreach and with long-term plans to add composting to the mix. Food scraps, because of their high water content, are heavy and add considerably to the municipal bill.

Part-time Eastporter and committee

member Lois Grossman recounts the story of one man who brought to the center, amongst many things, "a neatly piled stack eight inches thick of canned food labels. He was so grateful that we were open again. Optimist that he is, he had been saving his things for a year." Many others who came had been doing the same, saving their recyclable items in closets, garages and basements. She adds, "One man who was doing a large building project regularly brought huge loads of large cardboard cartons from his building supplies. Most people just throw them into their dumpsters, but this man believed in recycling and came every week till his project was done."

The recycling center is located on Route 190 at the public works garage area, and a sign is posted along the highway when it is open. Summer days and hours have been every Saturday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., with winter hours having begun in November; it is now open on the second and fourth Saturdays of the month from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. The facility accepts the sorted categories of: newspapers, magazines and catalogs; corrugated cardboard, flattened; clean and de-labeled cans and glass; office paper; and mixed paper, which includes card stock, envelopes, colored paper and cardboard such as the type used for cereal boxes and paper towel rolls. Post stresses that food contamination of cardboard boxes or cans and glass, such as grease from pizza or crud from cat food, can result in an entire load of recycling being returned. He asks that recyclers leave out an item if in doubt.

The center does not accept any plastic items or aerosol cans. Post regretfully says that Eastport cannot accept recyclables from other communities. "We're not equipped to handle it." He suggests that those who have been bringing their items to Eastport speak to their municipal officials and staff about the need. If enough town officials hear from their residents about recycling, Marion Transfer Station might get serious about creating a recycling facility for its member communities, Post states.

Finding the right recycling fit

The different recycling categories can be a lot to remember and deal with for the newbie, says Abbott. For those who feel overwhelmed, she advises starting with one or two categories that are easy, such as newspaper and corrugated cardboard. For the pet owner it might be cans and the cardboard boxes that hold kitty litter. Grossman says, "Many people came with



MANNING the Eastport recycling station on Saturday morning is City Manager Larry Post (left) with resident Elaine Abbott, who is dropping off her weekly load of recyclables. (Lora Whelan photo)

mixed bags of stuff. It helps if people sort it all first, of course, but that's why we have volunteers staffing the center, not only to help people unload their items but to see to it they're properly sorted. Once you explain to people how we sort things and why, they start sorting them at home."

There are rewards at the end of the road. Abbott notes that her recycling efforts have taken her from three to four bags of garbage to less than one a week that needs to be hauled out to the side of the road come downpours, sleet and snow.

Then there's the complaint heard by committee members that it's just too difficult to find the space at home. Creative solutions abound. Two couples who share an entryway use some of it for shared recycling space, larger standing plastic containers on the ground for the larger volume items like newspapers, and bags hanging on a peg rack that hold cans, glass and office paper. Another found the perfect slim-line recycling bin solution over in St. Stephen at Canadian Tire. The bins hang either side-to-side or with their flat side to the wall and have made a convenient home recycling center in the homeowner's laundry room.

Others use the cardboard boxes and

bags that hold pet supplies. Kept under the sink, by the back door, on a covered porch or in an attached shed or garage, they make for handy and recyclable containers themselves. The whole thing can go to the recycling center, with nothing on the return trip to worry about. Another homeowner found a bunch of heavy-weight canvas tote bags at Marden's that were perfect for her needs. They stand upright, hold a good amount without getting too cumbersome and are washable. Tucked under a countertop next to her kitchen sink, the totes keep recycling presentable and convenient. And then there are the good old cardboard boxes and paper bags found on one end of the spectrum to the aesthetically pleasing stainless steel recycling containers found in stores. Sorting recyclables becomes habit surprisingly quickly, says one homeowner.

For more information about Eastport's recycling program and facility, visit the city's website or call 853-2300. The committee is comprised of Chair Will Bradbury, Lois Grossman and Marged Higginson. Volunteers are always welcome to help man the station on Saturday mornings and to help with educational outreach.

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