

West Boylston Solid Waste Advisory Team
Minutes
July 8, 2008
Town Hall Offices, 127 Hartwell Street

Committee Members Present:

Judy Doherty, Chair
Janet Vignaly, Secretary
Craig Gonyea
Elise Wellington
Julianne DeRivera
John Westerling, DPW Director
Leon Gaumond, Town Administrator

Others Present:

Irene Congdon, Recycling Coordinator, DEP
Mary Ambrose, Town Resident
Doug Harris, Town Resident
Amy Corneliussen, Town Resident
Paul Hennessey, Town Resident
John DiPietro, Selectman

Ms. Doherty opened the meeting at 7:03 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

Ms. Wellington moved that the minutes of April 8, May 13 and June 3 be approved as written. Ms. DiRivera seconded the motion and members unanimously passed.

“Recycling City” Sculpture Project

Ms. Corneliussen described the “Recycling City” Sculpture Project at the West Boylston Arts Festival, where there would be a drop-in art project using recyclable materials—mostly paperboard products (no plastic). All age groups will be invited to participate to put together the “ideal city.” After it is done, the “city” will be displayed at the library, then taken apart and recycled. To help out, Ms. Corneliussen asked those present 1) to put aside recyclable paperboard products—no bigger than a cereal box and especially those that are interestingly shaped, to be used in the project, and 2) to volunteer ½ or 1 hour on September 20 at Goodale Park and the Football field, where the Arts Festival will be happening. Ms. Doherty and Ms. Ambrose volunteered one hour each, Mr. Westerling offered to put information on the recycling page of the Department of Public Works website, Mr. Gaumond offered to discuss the event in his blog, and Mr. Gonyea offered to donate 3-4 pieces of particle board on which the “city” would be created. Other potential volunteers could contact Ms. Corneliussen at 508-835-9777. Ms. Corneliussen also said that the SWAT could probably have a table at which to display the recycling brochure, poster, and other educational materials.

Q&A with Town Administrator

Mr. Gaumond advised the SWAT about the protocol for public meetings. As the SWAT is a municipal entity, he said, it must follow the following guidelines: 1) it is not required to post agendas, 2) it is

critical to post meeting times and places, and 3) meeting minutes must be submitted to the Town Clerk's Office upon approval.

Regarding emailed drafts and discussions, Mr. Gaumond advised the team that drafts are not always part of public record, while emails are public.

Ms. Doherty asked how the SWAT should handle new interest in the team. Mr. Gaumond replied that he was ready to expand the committee, if there was adequate interest. Valid appointments are appointed by the Administrator and sworn in by the Town Clerk. Or, subcommittees of SWAT can be created that include both members and non-members of the SWAT. Also, other boards (e.g. Zoning Board of Appeals) have Associate Members who attend all meetings but are not voting members.

Research on Holden's PAYT program

Ms. Wellington asked if the town has a Guaranteed Annual Tonnage (GAT) of trash that the town must deliver to Wheelabrator, as some towns do. Mr. Westerling answered that there is no GAT for West Boylston. Ms. Wellington reported that she spoke with Dennis Lipka, who is in charge of Holden's trash program. She learned that Holden pays only \$67/ton at Wheelabrator, while West Boylston is paying \$76/ton because our town did not participate in the Central Massachusetts Resource Recovery Council's negotiations with Wheelabrator. Ms. Wellington asked why this was the case. Mr. Westerling explained that Frank Confuloni at Wheelabrator said that West Boylston could not come on board. At that point, the town renegotiated from Fitchburg to Millbury and brought down the tipping fee it was paying at Fitchburg. Ms. Congdon said the problem for West Boylston was timing—that when the opportunity was there to sign onto the Central Mass. Resource Recovery Council's 20-year contract and guarantee lower cost, West Boylston was not a member of CMRRC, so was too late to come in and participate.

Ms. Congdon explained that Holden has a program of single stream recycling plus modified PAYT. Participants pay \$15/month (\$180/year) for a 65-gallon toter. Any trash bags that do not fit in the toter must be purchased for \$1/bag. Smaller toters can be used for \$11/month, though not many residents opt for this. July 1st marked the completion of the first year of the program, so the data are just beginning to come in about the results. Ms. Congdon further explained that the system reduced Holden's trash output, but it's not as good as a full PAYT program. Recycling has increased dramatically through the program. The program takes the trash off the tax base and treats it like other utilities, such as electricity and water, saving the town \$232,000 a year. Ms. Congdon circulated a graph to show Holden's progress. Ms. Congdon said the biggest obstacle to the program is the provision of toters to each household. The price of each toter is usually \$100, though Cassella charges \$50 per toter. The Town of Holden must replace any toters that are damaged or stolen. The cost of the toters that were bought in 2000 has been spaced out over 5 years so the town did not have to come up with the total of the upfront cost.

Ms. Wellington circulated a newspaper article about how Worcester, using Casella, started instituting single-stream gradually on July 1st and is continuing the city's PAYT program.

Report on 6/25 Ch. 11 Show

Ms. Wellington reported that the show went well, and she and Ms. Congdon answered all the questions. A question came up about SWAT's website, and she responded that it is still being developed. The show will be aired Saturdays and Sundays at 1:00pm, Mondays at 7:30 pm, and Wednesdays at 6:00 pm, all throughout July.

New PAYT Figures

Ms. Congdon introduced herself to new people at the meeting. She is the Recycling Coordinator for Central Massachusetts for the DEP. West Boylston was awarded a DEP grant to explore PAYT, in the

form of time and expertise from Ms. Congdon herself. She said that WB should reapply for the grant, as her time with the SWAT expired at the end of June. She also advised the team that if WB elected to go to PAYT, the town should apply for the Sustainability Grant, for which an informational Application Meeting would be held in Shrewsbury on July 15 from 2-4pm. Ms. Congdon said that 15 towns applied for the grant last year, and 6 were awarded for FY08. The DEP is continuing to review applications. Mr. Westerling said he would write the application to continue to get the money. Ms. Congdon said she can also be involved in promoting rain barrels and compost bins. Mr. Gaumond responded that the compost bin program still exists and bins are available. Ms. Wellington suggested that this program should be reintroduced if the town opts for PAYT, since residents would be looking for ways to cut their trash output. Mr. Westerling said that all the rain barrels that were available to residents had been sold. Ms. Congdon said the grant deadline was September 11.

Ms. Congdon recommended that members start referring to the PAYT program, which emphasizes “pay,” not as PAYT but rather as SMART—Saving Money and Reducing Trash. She advised that with the onset of a recession, one can expect that trash and recycling output would decrease slightly, as people consume less. She said that towns that have gone PAYT recently have decreased trash output at unprecedented levels: 58-60%. She suggested the reason might be the increasing prevalence of single stream recycling or the fact that there is more education in the mainstream media about environmental care.

Mr. Harris asked whether illegal dumping increases with PAYT, as he has noticed couches and trash bags on the streets in Worcester, and other trash on the streets in Holden. Ms. Congdon responded that of the 127 PAYT communities, only a handful of them say they have illegal dumping. This usually happens in cities and surrounding areas, she added, and bulky items are the biggest problems—especially where the communities do not have programs to pick these items up. Mr. Gaumond pointed out that under the current system, WB residents must pay to have bulky items picked up; this would not change under PAYT. Ms. Congdon said that illegal dumping is usually not a problem, that just the opposite happens. A SMART program would also eliminate the problem of having people come from PAYT communities (e.g. Worcester), as happens now, to have their trash removed in WB, where it’s free. Ms. Congdon said there are 16 communities in Massachusetts with no program, and all residents must rely on private haulers.

Ms. Congdon presented the financial analysis she had prepared. Ms. Doherty asked why it included the SMART program with no free bags, since the SWAT had voted for 50 free bags. Ms. Congdon said she saw this program as a transition program, where every year the town would be providing fewer free bags, until households purchased all bags. Ms. Doherty responded that the SWAT voted for 50 free bags, and hadn’t agreed to recommend providing fewer bags. A discussion ensued about the tag system. Mr. Hennessey said the bags rip easily. Ms. Doherty suggested the town save money on bag costs by using tags instead of buying bags. Ms. Congdon said that in other communities with tags, they have found that people try to get around the system by ripping or stealing tags or stickers. She said the companies are currently working on anti-fraud stickers and tags. Also, it is sometimes hard for the collectors to see the tags/stickers, and most communities move away from using them. Some communities, have decided to stay with the “50 free” model indefinitely (e.g. Longmeadow, Gardner) and allow households to put out one bag per week for free, after which they use purchased bags. Stickers or coupons could be mailed out with the tax bill, she said. Mr. Gaumond said he was leery about mailing out tags or stickers, as he anticipated that would lead to many residents saying they didn’t receive them or having their mail stolen. Mr. DiPietro said he has followed trash trucks and sees that the collectors pick up even items they should not be picking up, so they may not enforce a

tag/sticker/"free" system. Ms. Congdon said the town should then look into fining the collection company.

The simplest system, summarized Ms. Congdon, is where no bags are free, but in order to get people on board, it might be necessary to give out free bags in the beginning. Members noted the small savings the town would achieve (\$23,000) under the "50 free bag" system. Ms. Vignaly said that this was a conservative estimate, since the \$44,000 bag costs should provide for many extra bags, which could be carried into the next year. Also, Ms. Congdon pointed out that the savings included an assumption that 20% of households would opt out, as occurred in Northboro. Also, WB could achieve more than the assumed 30% reduction in solid waste, which would lead to more savings. She said that the \$23,000 reflected a minimum savings under the proposed system.

Mr. Gaumond asked if there were other costs for the DPW. Ms. Congdon said that the bag company would get a list of stores the town wanted to sell at, and it would do the printing, distributing, and working with the retailer, so that would not be on the shoulders of the town employees. There would need to be an electronic transfer with the town treasurer. Also, the \$2300 outreach estimate in the financial analysis gets the word out to residents. She cited one town that did this for less money as they enlisted the help of National Honor Society students at the high school, and gave them pizza one night at the Town Hall as the students called all the residents in town to talk about the program. Ms. Congdon displayed graphs about mandatory recycling showing that mandatory recycling towns do not have as high a recycling rate as PAYT towns have.

Mr. Hennessey asked if the stores receive a profit from selling bags. Ms. Congdon said they do not, but usually agree to sell bags because it increases foot traffic in their store.

Planning Remarks for Presentation to Board of Selectmen

Ms. Doherty agreed to speak for the group, following the presentation that Ms. Vignaly had drafted and emailed to the group. Ms. Congdon said she would also be there to explain the numbers that would be presented. Ms. Wellington, Mr. Gonyea and Ms. DeRivera also said they would be present. Ms. Congdon said the discussion of PAYT is about how to pay for trash—should the cost be hidden in the taxes or up-front? Also, she added that the projected savings of \$23,000 looks small but there are also environmental and economic benefits, and social implications are huge. Ms. Congdon offered to put together a PowerPoint presentation to accompany the presentation.

Mr. DiPietro said the SWAT should be prepared to answer questions such as how the proposed program would impact the tax override. Mr. Gaumond added that in his experience of working in communities that converted to PAYT, the program has been highly controversial. In East Longmeadow, for example, following the PAYT program 2 out of 3 selectmen did not get re-elected. He advised the SWAT that the recommendation to bring an article to October Town Meeting could be premature, and that there was a need to provide further political information to the community. He said that for other controversial issues (e.g. transfer station at Tivnan Drive, Budget problems) there were public meetings so anyone could come to air their concerns in a televised setting before Town Meeting. If the public hears about the proposal for the first time at Town Meeting, he advised, they will vote No. He recommended wording in the presentation, "We want to move forward with this idea, and we will take steps to provide education in the community so people will make an educated decision." He said the presentation could be written something like, "We think this is in the best interest of the Town, and wish to move forward to Town Meeting, perhaps as early as October. We are willing to cement this through education efforts..."

Ms. Congdon addressed the question of what timeframe we could anticipate for adopting PAYT. She said usually towns require 6 months to 1 year to educate the public, though a smaller, concentrated effort could also be effective. Ms. Ambrose suggested that a grass-roots effort would be appropriate—get the kids involved, host coffee hours, attend meetings of existing groups like the Women’s Club, get the senior citizens involved. Ms. DiRivera pointed out all the education efforts the SWAT has already engaged in, such as Banner articles, library programs and cable programs. Others responded that many residents do not get the Banner or watch cable, that efforts need to be made where they are already going.

Mr. DiPietro recommended the SWAT begin the presentation with what’s wrong with the present system. He said it is critical that listeners see no alternative but to go the way we are suggesting. Mr. Hennessey noted that he counted 18 houses on Prospect Street with no recycling bin out on trash day. Mr. DiPietro said years ago, the recycling rate dropped from 35% to 23%. He asked why this occurred. Ms. Congdon speculated that the DEP readjusted its method of calculating recycling rates, which may then have included yard waste, hazardous material, etc., and may not have included multi-family dwellings. She added that many drop-off towns have high recycling rates, but when calculations are adjusted to include the whole town (including residents who have private haulers and presumably less recycling) the rates go down. He added that the DEP has 4 alternative solutions, but we aren’t mentioning anything but curbside pickup. Members speculated he could be referring to 3 other models: drop-off trash, private haulers, Mr. DiPietro said that in the past, the only override the town has passed was for trash, and he asked, “Would it take an override to get it undone?” Mr. DiPietro continued that the school needs money; for example, the budget line item for substitute teachers is \$125,000, that it is kept low but the administrators hope it will not be used up. However, if a teacher goes on maternity leave, the school needs to give more money to a long term sub, who won’t stand for \$22/day, so the school takes money from somewhere else in the budget. Mr. DiPietro said the current spending on the school is the same as it was in 1999, so it’s really not too bad. Mr. DiPietro said he read a DEP article which recommended that if a town wants to stay in the trash business, it partner with neighboring towns to be more attractive to hauling companies (“regionalized trash”).

Mr. Gaumond said the presentation to the Board of Selectmen document would be appropriate for the Selectmen, but not for the public.

Ms. Doherty moved into a discussion of what “Phase II” should be for the SWAT, as the team had made great progress in “Phase I” (members educating themselves). Ms. DiRivera said members could divide up the constituencies and organized committees to get the word out, and host an informational meeting/forum. Ms. Doherty said she would also write a Banner article in August to discuss SWAT’s PAYT proposal.

The meeting at which SWAT will present its recommendation to the Board of Selectmen is scheduled for July 16 at the Library. The next SWAT meeting was set for August 12 at 7:00 pm. The Public Forum Meeting date was scheduled for September 9.

The meeting adjourned at 8:58 PM.

Submitted by,

Janet Vignaly, Secretary