

State of Vermont
Department of Environmental Conservation
Waste Management & Prevention Division
1 National Life Drive – Davis 1
Montpelier, VT 05620-3704

AGENCY OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Universal Recycling Stakeholders Group Minutes – July 13, 2017, 1-3pm

Group Members Present:

Patrick Austin	Austin's Rubbish and Roll Off Service
Michael Batchner	Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance
Kim Crosby	Casella Waste Systems
Michael Casella	Casella Waste Systems
Cathleen Gent	Central VT Solid Waste Mgmt. District
Sarah Reeves	Chittenden Solid Waste District
Michele Morris	Chittenden Solid Waste District
Ethan Hausman	Chittenden Solid Waste District
Jennifer Holliday	Chittenden Solid Waste District
Bob Sandberg	Cookeville Compost
Michael Simpson	DSM Environmental Services
Nathalie Starr	DSM Environmental Services
Tom Kennedy	Greater Upper Valley & So. Windsor/Windham County Solid Waste Mgmt. Districts
Kyle Lanzit	Grow Compost
Caroline Lee	Grow Compost
Susan Alexander	Lamoille Regional Solid Waste Mgmt. District
Doug Spates	Memphramagog Rentals
Vivian Spates	Memphramagog Rentals
Matt McMahan	MMR
Frank Stanley	Myers Container Service
Aaron Shepard	Northwest Solid Waste District
Norm Staunton	NRRA
Julia Gosschild	Rutland County Solid Waste District
Deane Wilson	Rutland County Solid Waste District
Tess Kennedy	Shouldice & Associates
Heather Shouldice	Shouldice & Associates
Bob Vahey	Town of Hartford
Kurt Ericksen	Vermont Compost Company
Mary Sullivan	Vermont State Representative
Joan Richmond-Hall	Vermont Technical College

By phone

Natasha Duarte	Composting Association of Vermont
Esther Fishman	Londonderry Group
Jim O'Gorman	Rutland County Solid Waste District
Pam Clapp	Solid Waste Alliance Communities
Tara Holt	Town of St. Johnsbury
Ham Gillett	Greater Upper Valley Solid Waste District
Allison Crowley DeMag	Morris and Demag, Inc.

ANR Staff Present:

Rebecca Ellis	DEC Deputy Commissioner
Chuck Schwer	Waste Management & Prevention Division Director
Cathy Jamieson	Solid Waste Program Manager
Mia Roethlein	Solid Waste Program

Josh Kelly	Solid Waste Program
John Fay	Solid Waste Program
Rebecca Webber	Solid Waste Program

Presenters:

Shannon Choquette	Northeast Kingdom Solid Waste Mgmt. District
Carolyn Grodinsky	Grow Compost
Teri Kuczynski	Addison County Solid Waste Mgmt. District
Jeff Myers	Myers Container Service

Minutes

- 1:05pm - Rebecca Ellis started meeting by explaining that the choice to discuss organics hauling at this meeting was due to legislative changes to Act 148, delaying hauler collection requirements from July 1, 2017 to July 1, 2018. This change to the law resulted from a proposal to strike the hauler collection and landfill ban requirements entirely from the law. Group introductions were made.
 - 1:10pm - Cathy Jamieson reviewed the purpose of the law to divert materials from disposal and provide convenient options by having recycling and composting options parallel to trash collection. Currently, haulers can charge separately for organics, can subcontract out, or seek exemption to the organics hauling requirement through the SWIP process. Residents don't have to accept service, can manage by home composting or facility drop off. The current hauler exemption requires an alternative service (drop-off) with capacity and "convenience" (convenience previously defined as a facility in town or w/in 5 miles, revised fall 2016 to in town, in adjacent town, or w/in 10 miles), with no exemption available for dense urban areas above 250 households per square mile. Goal is to make exemptions available to as much of the state as possible—alternate proposal discussed later in the meeting.
 - 1:15pm - Discussion of Organics Drop Off and Collection Services
 - Shannon Choquette of NEKSWMD presented on their transfer station organics drop-off progress.
 - Drop-offs started with 10 towns in 2006, up to 23 as of July 1, 2017.
 - They used Highfields materials for promotion.
 - Black Dirt and Cloud's Path farms both collect commercial food scraps in the region.
 - Outreach: attempting to make signage as visible as possible to make people aware of 2020 ban, providing free buckets (people really want these).
 - Survey of about 300 residents-160 reported they currently manage organics at home.
 - Capacity: NEK will need more capacity by 2020 or shortly after.
 - Carolyn Grodinsky of Grow Compost presented on their food scrap collection services.
 - They take all food scraps (no paper) – estimate that they are 1/3 of total waste stream. Scraps are delivered to farms, VT Tech's anaerobic digester, their Moretown facility (trying to move materials shortest possible distance).
 - They have had major growth since 2014, including taking over the CVSWMD hauling route July 1st, and have developed some really great partnerships. Opening new North Hartland compost facility and will increase service area extending south to Bellows Falls. Green jobs are being created, not just at Grow, but also at farms collecting food scraps.
 - Teri Kuczynski of Addison County Solid Waste Mgmt. District presented on their drop off options.
 - Began organics program with 1999 pilot: 20 regular customers, 188 tons/year. Now, 15 commercial/institutional are diverting to VNAP: 112 tons/year. They provide biobag liners, education and training. Haulers can also go to Blue Spruce or Vermont Compost Company.
 - Used ANR business outreach grant to hire outreach coordination, buy buckets, stickers and bins.
 - Most of their drop-offs are private fast-trash trucks (now not required to take organics until 2018), so they reached out to all towns to let them decide who would collect and how to pay for it. Only a couple towns have not responded. The majority of the towns are voluntarily
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- proceeding with food scrap collection and through their private fast trash haulers. Each town will have 2 totes for food scrap collection and signage paid for by High Meadows Fund.
- District not sure what to expect regarding volume collected. Currently, many home composters in their region.
 - Report that some residents are confused about the 2020 ban, think that they are required to begin composting now.
- Jeff Myers, Myers Container Service
 - Currently collecting organics only from commercial customers. No increase over the past year.
 - Businesses challenging the requirement to divert food scraps and often say: “prove that I’m doing that tonnage”. Also many businesses assume food scrap collection is free. Jeff has not seen any outreach saying that there’s a cost.
 - Residential sales: maybe have had 2 calls in past few months. 95% of people calling want drop-off, not curbside.
 - There’s no incentive with no enforcement (tough to turn customer in). Recycling took 20 years, and we’re trying to do compost in 3 years.
 - No clear information for staff or customers on who takes what kind of compost. i.e. some facilities will accept paper and compostables while others will only accept food scraps.
 - Personally, thinks they need a strong letter from the state that they can share with customers saying that “you have to compost or else”. (ANR staff said that they could provide that.)
 - Carolyn Grodinsky noted that Grow does subcontract with both Casella and Myers.

Discussion

- Pat Austin questioned why ANR didn’t start enforcing, if people were ready to start hauling? In his opinion, if haulers can just price out of having to actually collect, the discussion should be on how to implement without haulers. He suggested that most of NEK’s organics facilities have gone out of business because of lack of materials, and NEK has already met and exceeded diversion/generation rates. He thinks that the contamination rate, and dumping, will increase when all are required to divert food scraps.
 - Esther Fishman responded to the exclusion of urban areas from the option of hauler exemption by noting that transportation is a major issue in rural areas as well.
 - Mike Casella reported on their pilot with CSWD of a residential organics pick-up: only had 10% sign-ups even though it was free (120 of 1200), collected only 500 lbs from 116 customers on first trip. When priced out at \$9.95 for every other week service, dropped to 34 customers. Material was very clean. They are getting calls about the service, but they’re so spread out geographically that there’s no possible route. He wonders what the end product is going to be, thinks focus needs to be what’s happening on sites. He thinks Vermont is too small to have different rules and processes, and thinks that we need to get there slowly, rather than collecting all this material from the waste stream and not knowing “how to do it”.
 - Michael Simpson suggested that the need for carbon is a bigger issue in Vermont.
 - Cathy noted that some haulers were disappointed about delay in the hauler requirement.
 - Pat Austin asked, if there are haulers that do want to haul organics, why are we forcing competition? Could let those haulers handle organics.
- 1:45pm - Proposal for new organics collection exemption & suggestions for improvements
 - Josh Kelly of DEC explained that the Department recently looked at the hauling exemption in statute and believes that both drop-offs as well as other haulers could be considered “alternative services” eligible for the hauler exemption. In this example, if another food scrap hauler is willing to service an area and has capacity, that hauler could be the “alternative services” that exempt all other haulers from having to offer food scrap collection services.

Discussion

- Pat Austin: This isn’t really a change, since Districts, Alliances, Towns still have to request an exemption via the SWIP process. Haulers should be able to request their own exemptions, as they often service
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multiple municipalities, and independent towns in particular don't have capacity/initiative to do this on top of other ANR reporting requirements. Reports that people don't recognize organics as a problem/agree the costs (financial and GHG for processing) are worthwhile—which means that this will lead to dumping, contamination of streams, etc.

- Bob Sandberg: centralization (through transfer station drop-offs) might work—it seems to be working in his case.
 - Carolyn Grodinsky: people do care about being a green business and she has had success signing up new customers.
 - Someone asked about what this would mean for towns that use fast trash drop-offs. Will the hauler exemption mean that they would not have food scrap collection service?
 - Bruce Wescott: CVSWMD ask all haulers about whether they wanted exemption, no one said yes. Now 2 haulers are requesting it, so they have to go back to their board. According to his analysis, 98 percent of VT residents have transfer stations in their town or adjacent town. He would like to consider a discussion about distance and density. Casella's pilot was starting from 0% public awareness; dense areas at 50% awareness should allow viable food scrap collection. If that leaves rural areas out, that's where Districts come in.
 - Norm Staunton: NRRRA has been looking at VT/NH organics last 9 months. Based on their data, exemptions create a decreasing incentive to participate (no service provider and no permitted facility in 20 miles). Also, why are transfer stations not included in the "certified facility" definition. Concerned that there is not sufficient capacity for 2020.
 - Josh Kelly: if transfer station doesn't accept commercial waste, it can't be required to accept commercial food scraps. Law spelled out certified compost facility willing to accept.
 - Joan Richmond-Hall: Weekly pick-up is not enough to avoid black mold, maggots, and general grossness (for the haulers/facilities).
 - Shannon Choquette and Aaron Shepard: both of their food scrap hauling programs are on weekly pick-up schedules with no problems.
 - Patrick Austin: Knows people who've gotten compost systems set up, then opted out because of this.
 - Susan Alexander: it's not clear what these exemptions will look like (though she's cautiously considering it). Early adopters, including several haulers, seem to have figured this out. If District considers exemptions, that puts burden/costs on transfer stations.
 - Sarah Reeves, CSWD: no haulers came forward to request exemptions during consecutive board meetings focused on this topic. After July 1st, several haulers have requested exemption. Had they heard more interest sooner, that would have changed things. More options in the exemption are better than less, but she's a little concerned that this new potential option will make the SWIP process messy—they already had trouble explaining the current version of the exemption, and this seems more involved.
 - Bob Sandberg, Cookeville Compost: Is there any advertising going on about organics? If people can see how important it is, want to do it, maybe that would be helpful?
 - Josh Kelly: we've aired two ads (general Act 148 in Jan/Feb and organics around Earth Day/Green Up Day).
 - Aaron Shepard: These things take time. Questions have moved from "what is Act 148?" to "how do I compost?"
 - Bruce Wescott: CVSWMD has been advertising about drop-off options for food scraps and will continue to do that. They want to continue to offer strong outreach and education.
 - Kurt Erickson, VT Compost Company: Want to keep focused on the end goal, around how composters can add value. Need to consider soil health and benefits to agriculture.
 - Michael Simpson, DSM: Recycling is driven by market specifications (end use of material has to drive system). Compost facilities drive quality. Need a middle entity to decrease contamination.
 - Jeff Myers: What is the penalty if a business is supposed to divert food scraps and doesn't? (Notes that he isn't going to "turn in" customers.)
 - Cathy Jamieson: when ANR hears of commercial generator that isn't composting, they go through steps: call, letter, give time for compliance (perhaps 30-60 days), verification
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- Jeff Myers: Why can't haulers have letter to give to customers.
 - Cathy Jamieson: We're happy to do that, so ANR serves as backstop for haulers. ANR did send letters to generators in 2014 and postcards in 2016, so they should have been informed.
 - Vivian Spates: Not sure what to do when picking up trash and recycling from tenants as they are all not necessarily interested in doing the right thing.
 - Patrick Austin: Unfortunate that haulers and Districts have been pitted against each other. If hauler requirement is removed, they can work together to educate, etc.
 - Frank Stanley, Myers: Do generators have any incentive? Has the state considered creative ways to encourage participation? Consider partnering with VT Businesses for Social Responsibility, awards for participation.
 - Josh Kelly: New "We Compost" stickers available and other outreach materials and campaigns. Not much funding available, but we have tried to leverage some for outreach.
 - Susan Alexander: Economic development/money is needed, since organics aren't lucrative in and of itself.
 - Rutland Solid Waste District started a community garden compost site with food scrap collection open to community. Composting can be intimidating for those unfamiliar, so education now will make 2020 less intimidating.
 - Kurt Erickson: Has there been outreach to small farms? If concerned about how to manage extent of this, going to need to bring them into the fold (as most appropriate place to manage most organics).
 - Josh Kelly: Solid Waste Program in touch with them initially via NOFA. Small compost facility registration process will help with this. There's also a compost operator training this fall.
 - Kim Crosby, Casella: Districts are saying they didn't hear from haulers about exemption, but the criteria required that there be a transfer station accepting, and no one was there yet.
 - Mike Casella: Composting is going to happen in Vermont, and nationally. ANR should take a breath and not chase tons, but look at product/sequestrations. Going quickly will lead to damage and problems.
 - Kim Crosby: Need to do this in a way that makes sense.
 - A request from multiple attendees to Solid Waste Program staff for a write-up of the proposed changes to the exemption for clarity, with some scenarios of what one might look like.
 - Josh Kelly: Yes, will send out to attendees.
 - Patrick Austin: Lobbyist for District Managers doesn't really represent the member towns of all districts. How have these exemptions been helpful? NEKWMD has a hauler exemption for recycling, but individual towns don't (and don't care because they're not the ones being burdened), and haulers typically cross boundaries.
 - 2:50pm – Wrap Up and Next Steps
 - Josh Kelly introduced ANR's draft regional gap analysis, including a map of proposed regions. This initial analysis shows estimated amounts of food scraps that might be generated in each region and the estimated available capacity of existing facilities to process those food scraps. Corrections and feedback are appreciated, and will be shared at next quarter's meeting.
 - Cathy Jamieson provided the following summary of themes addressed in today's discussion:
 - Some haulers would prefer not to be mandated to collect food scraps.
 - Some haulers are collecting already.
 - Density could be used as part of statewide approach.
 - Offering of exemption options is helpful, but not if too complicated.
 - Contamination of food scraps is concern.
 - Outreach comes up as a need at multiple levels (generators, farmers, etc.).
 - Capacity is a concern, and we're working on targeted infrastructure development.
 - We need to do more to reach/enforce those already supposed to be enforced.
 - It's important to communicate why, how, and end goal.
 - 3:00pm - Adjourn
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Next Steps:

- Provide feedback on map and organics gap analysis spreadsheet to john.fay@vermont.gov.
 - Next quarterly meeting will be held this fall TBD (September or October).
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