



## SPU Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC)

November 5, 2014 Meeting notes  
Seattle Municipal Tower, 700 Fifth Avenue  
Room 5965  
5:30 pm – 7:30 pm  
Chair: Heather Levy

Committee Members & CAC Staff	Present?	SPU Staff & Guests	Role
Dan Corum	Y	Brett Stav	SPU Presenter
David Della	N	Veronica Fincher	SPU Presenter
Katie Kennedy	Y	Ben Grace	Prospective Committee Member
Heather Levy	Y	Eberley Wedlake	Prospective Committee Member
Erika Melroy	N		
Rodney Proctor	N		
Joseph Ringold	Y		
Stephanie Schwenger	N		
Chris Toman	Y		
Wendy Walker	N		
Heidi Fischer, CAC Program Support	Y		
Dick Lilly, Policy Liaison	Y		
Sheryl Shapiro, Program Manager	Y		

**PLEASE NOTE ACTION ITEMS ARE ✓ MARKED AND HIGHLIGHTED IN YELLOW**

### 1) Regular Business

- Committee members and guests went around the table and introduced themselves.
- The committee briefly discussed the notes from October's meeting.
  - Two questions included on Page 2 are from an earlier meeting and were mistakenly included. Heidi will delete them.
  - One committee member noted that a bit more context might be helpful in future notes for comments addressing controversial issues.
  - The committee voted to approve the October meeting notes, with one abstaining and none opposed.

### 2) Presentation: Food Waste Disposal Ban: Media & Community Outreach, Bret Stav and Veronica Fincher, SPU

- The presenters discussed plans to inform the public about the new requirement to compost food waste. Multiple audiences need to be addressed in a short period of time.
  - The main strategy in the first phase, which is happening now until January 1, is to include information along with existing notices.
    - Homeowners in Seattle will receive a flurry of notices in December, and there will also be a few radio and online ads before January.
    - Collection calendars will also have information about the new requirement.
  - Phase 2 will be January 1, 2015 – July, when SPU will be in a new budget cycle.
    - Testing and refining of initial advertising will occur. Several contractors will be hired to do more outreach.
    - Just prior to July, there will be new ads and messages with information about fines and how the requirement to compost food waste will impact customers.
    - Outreach is being informed by and implemented in a community based approach, with a particular focus on small food service business and minority and immigrant and refugee-owned restaurants and grocery stores.
- \$100,000 of the public education budget is dedicated for ethnic business outreach.
  - Numerous stakeholders were consulted to come up with an appropriate plan, including more than 40 restaurants and grocery stores, community organizations, the Office of Economic Development, and the Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs.
  - The plan includes door to door outreach and printed materials in appropriate languages.
  - A multi-lingual direct mailing will be done in December and again in May
  - The plan for Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, Hispanic, Ethiopian, and Somali food businesses also includes up to five hours per business of in-language assessment, education, and hands on technical assistance, spread out over 2-5 visits, conducted by community liaisons and organizations with whom SPU will contract.
  - In-depth assistance will also be provided to African-American, Indian, Pakistani, Arab or Middle Eastern, Japanese, Thai, Filipino, and Eastern European-owned businesses on an as needed basis.
  - Outreach to the Hispanic Community food businesses will be done through the Seattle Green Business Program.
  - Outreach efforts include identifying existing community meetings and events and having SPU attend to spread the word.
  - Outreach materials are being customized for different communities using “transcreation:” more than just translation of language, transcreation incorporates appropriate cultural approaches to express a message.
  - Outreach is also being done to community and faith based organizations because they also often serve food, and can be models for composting food waste.
  - The program is also working with community partners to identify appropriate venues for recognizing businesses that are doing great work with their food waste collection.

#### Questions and Comments from the Committee

- Comment: I appreciate the 5 hours of technical assistance per business provided for the ethnic businesses.
- Question: Is messaging about composting required in the front house of restaurants [where customers dispose of their own food waste]?

- Restaurants won't be fined if front of house garbage is contaminated with food waste, but we will work with them to encourage improving their front of house collection.
- Question: What feedback on signage for the ethnic food businesses have you received?
  - They have requested clearer pictures.
- Comment from the SPU policy liaison: The budget for outreach is impressive especially when compared to past budgets.
  - The presenter added that while \$70k will be spent on media at the end of 2014, in 2015, to make sure that people are well informed about the new food waste requirement, the overall budget is half a million.
- Question: How are apartment residents being informed?
  - We'll be mailing notices to apartment managers that they can post.
- Comment: I like that information about the new composting requirement is going to be on SPU's customers' bills.
- Question: Since people in apartments don't see the bills, will they know if the property manager is getting fined and just passing the fee on to residents?
  - While we encourage them to follow the new law, property managers will be fined if they violate the ban.
- Question: How many owners of multi-family properties take you up on offers to provide posters about the new requirement?
  - Every spring we send information to property managers that includes a self-addressed post card and an order form with everything that's offered.
  - This past year, we sent 300-400 packets, and approximately 10-15% used the order form.
- Question: Do you have messaging prepared for the apartment manager to deliver to tenants?
  - From Jan 1 – July 1 until the fines take place, the manager will receive a warning tag and a letter with information that s/he can use to educate tenants. This will probably continue beyond July 1.
- Question: How is enforcement handled? Is it left to haulers?
  - For single family homes, it's left to the garbage truck driver (hauler). For multiple family and commercial structures, SPU staff will handle it. Haulers are already doing tags for recycling violations, and have agreed to leave tags for the violations of the new food waste requirement.
- Comment: Maybe add more incentives to comply, like a free bag of compost. Sometimes there's a lot of disconnection to the social good that composting does.
  - We do plan to send a letter to customers who receive warning tags that will include a coupon for compost bags.
- Question: After they receive a warning tag, what education about the food waste requirement is available to property managers of multi-family buildings?
  - We provide a \$100 rebate off of their bill if they meet with us and let us educate them. We also provide kitchen compost kits.
    - There is a threshold for the number of units that a building must have to qualify.
    - We are also trying to accommodate the unique challenges that high rise buildings have in meeting the new requirement.
- Question: What happens when there's too much garbage in the compost?
  - Enforcement is handled by the driver. Any improper materials in any bin (garbage, recycling, compost) can be tagged. There may be a fine, and/or it may not be collected. If it's garbage, a business would have to pay to have it dumped as garbage.

- Question: How often is compost tagged for being contaminated?
  - Several committee members noted that they had been tagged for various things, including sawdust in the compost.
  - Haulers pick up garbage from 150,000 residents a week and leave maybe 1,500 tags a year, so it's a very small percentage.
- Question: What is the acceptable rate of contamination in compost materials?
  - Lots of contamination is removed by the compost processor before it becomes compost; the remaining contamination rate is less than 1%.
  - The presenter noted that he had seen the contents of hundreds of carts, and approximately 15% of them have something in there that shouldn't be; however, usually it's just one thing.
  - We hear that the commercial customers of compost processors have higher levels of contamination. The challenge to enforcement is the competing incentive not to inconvenience the customer
- Question: How will the city know if closed garbage bags contain food waste?
  - We do get a lot of questions about this. We can't have haulers opening up garbage bags because they don't have time. They will do a visual inspection based on what's visible as they empty the containers.
- Question: What about using the garbage disposal?
  - The policy liaison advised against the use of the garbage disposal.
  - SPU can't keep people from using garbage disposal. Though we are not highlighting this now, we are preparing education on it – how it cost money to remove that food waste in the water treatment process, and how food waste has value if it's composted.
  - Overall, city and regional utilities don't have a significant policy on what should go down the pipe. Lots of issues have not been worked out, including nutrients in the treatment plant and anaerobic digestion.
  - Further, fixing garbage disposals in multi-family buildings is something property managers would likely prefer to avoid.
- Question: For consistency's sake, should we be emphasizing that we already have a similar separation requirement for recycling?
  - Yes, we will be saying that. Lots of people moved to Seattle since we implemented the recycling requirement, so they didn't have the experience of things changing this way.
- Question: There seems to be some confusion about terms, like yard waste, food waste, and compost. Could we call it food recycling?
  - The SPU policy liaison explained that Cedar Grove tried that at one time and it seemed to cause more confusion. We are going to use compost as a verb, food and yard waste as nouns.
- Comment: I'm impressed by the goal metric of having 70% of customers not confused by the July 2015 survey.
- Comment: I'd like to affirm SPU's commitment to reduce waste. I'm very on board. I encourage you to keep offering incentives, maybe supporting gardens in schools, so that more people can see the connection that compost grows food.
  - Another member commented that SPU does sponsor Washington Green Schools, and does provide some of that.
- Question: How do we message to avoid criticism that suggests the food waste requirement might have a negative economic impact on small business?

- We've met with the Economic Development Office of Restaurants and are providing a lot of resources to make compliance convenient and cost effective. The exact messaging on this topic is still in the works.
- Comment: The SPU policy liaison noted that the outreach plan to ethnic restaurants is very detailed and impressive.

### 3) Discussion: 2015 Workplan

The committee chair passed out a handout and facilitated a discussion. Among other things, committee members suggested that the committee:

- May want to focus on causes of contamination to compost and recycling materials and contamination reduction strategies.
- May want to be involved in the MRF RFP.
- May want to spend the first half of 2015 getting more information on contamination, and then consider appropriate actions in the second half.
- May want to consider whether they are activists or bureaucrats or something in between?
- May want to review and update the committee charter.
  - The CAC Program Manager noted that the charter is held by all three community advisory committees and that updating is in progress.
- May want to affirm the many things that SPU does right.
- May want to function as an informed focus group for SPU policies.
- May want to engage in more formalized outreach to their communities:
  - Be neighborhood contacts.
  - Receive training on effective methods of public engagement.
  - Identify specific topics for members to gather input from the community.
- May want to visit other SWACs.
- The committee would like to know more about C & D material bans.
  - ✓ The SPU Policy Liaison may be able to arrange this for the December SWAC meeting.
- ✓ The CAC Program Manager will be creating an end of year survey for members to gather their thoughts about the past year's experiences and requests for skills development in 2015.

The White Board Notes from 2015 Work Plan Discussion are as follows:

#### A) SPU Policy-Related Initiatives

- C&D material bans
- New SWAC proposed initiatives
  - May be informed by education and development

#### B) SWAC Admin & Governance

- Charter
  - How proactive do we want to be?
  - Look at other SWAC Charters
- Attend other SWAC meetings

#### C) SWAC Education & Development

- How to Engage with Community
  - Forums
  - Messaging
  - Topic of the Month
- Contamination
  - Drivers
  - Financial implications
  - Items
  - Problem areas
  - “Symptom of confusion and convenience”
  - Related to Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) Request for Proposal (RFP)?

#### D) SWAC Outreach and engagement

- Be an “Informed focus group”
- Connect with communities
  - Supportive of SPU
  - Represent their questions
  - Use of technology
  - e.g. district council meetings

#### 4) Changes to Food Service Packaging Ordinance, Dick Lilly, SPU Policy Liaison

The SPU Policy Liaison reported on plans for the food service packaging ordinance.

- The process is proceeding on schedule.
  - SPU is planning to write a director’s rule listing exemptions to the ordinance by January, then meet with stakeholders, and following that send the ordinance to council.
  - SPU has been talking to the Restaurant Association and to big food service providers (like Starbucks) to gather input in writing a clear and effective rule.
    - We want to be considerate of the relationships food service businesses have with their customers.
- Food service businesses are interested in what exceptions are going to exist to the rule requiring packing to be compostable.
  - Plastic will be allowed for “take-out” soups because nothing else works.
  - Other “take-out” items will likely also be exceptions. However, discerning what qualifies as “to go” is complex.
  - Food courts are all defined as eat in, and will be required to have compostable packaging.
- We don’t have current data on compostable price difference, but it’s not bad. Some compostable material was cheaper than rigid plastic.

- We are not going to consider price an issue except in extreme circumstances. We didn't before, and the products are very mature now.
- In San Francisco, customers could apply for an exemption if the compostable material was 25% more than the non-compostable, but few did.

#### Questions and Comments from the Committee:

- Comment: We should make sure that compostable packaging is readily available not only at big restaurant supply stores, but smaller ones like Cash and Carry and Restaurant Depot, because smaller restaurants tend to shop there.
- Question: Are Cedar Grove's Zilchables available commercially?
  - Cedar Grove works with Zilchables to create certified compostable serve ware. It's just been put on Amazon by the case, and they are working on having smaller quantities available. They're marketing 100% compostable setups for events.
- Question: Will the rule be ready for the committee to see soon?
  - The SPU Policy Liaison will aim to have it for the January SWAC meeting. The Committee Chair noted that the plan is to discuss the food packaging ordinance in February.
- Question: How is the director's rule different from the ordinance?
  - The ordinance is the law passed by council, and the rule contains more detailed information about how the law will be implemented by the government agency (SPU).
  - ✓ The SPU Policy Liaison will share the list at the January SWAC meeting. He appreciates the committee's interest and support, and notes that Seattle is the leading city in the country on the food waste composting requirement.

#### 5) Cedar Grove & Waste Management Field Trip

- Cedar Grove composting process uses few inputs; mostly just oxygen plus natural processes, including the heat of organisms.
- They have had some issues with odors.
  - The neighbors at one time employed a paid public relations campaign about odor. But Cedar Grove has done lots of outreach about this, and urges their neighbors to call them if they smell something bad. They will document the complaint and work with the community to minimize bad odors.
  - Their message on odor is "we make it smell better."
    - The beginning of the process, when materials are raw, is not pleasant smelling (especially grass clippings), but down the chain, the smell is more sweet and non-offensive.
- The more contamination there is in the compost material, the more the "shaker" machine has to sift through it, which increases the processing costs
- One member reported that the Waste Management Tour was her first of a materials recovery facility (MRF), and it was very high speed. The process is dizzying and complex, and there's so much stuff to sort, and numerous technologies used to sort it. Humans are hand sorting at several points in the process, and it's still a challenge to sort everything appropriately and remove all the contaminants. There are huge bales of materials at the end, going all the way to the ceiling.

- Plastic bags are such a problem for the MRFs because there's no market for the dirty plastic that results from handling. Plastic bags are also caught up and mixed with other items such as paper, reducing the quality of paper bales.
  - The guideline for putting plastic bags into the recycling bin is to place them all in one clear plastic bag so that sorters can see them and pull them out before processing. But a better way to recycle plastic bags is to take them all in clean condition to a collection bin at a grocery store. A much better market exists for these clean plastic bags.

## 6) Around the Table

- The SPU policy liaison reiterated that the main contaminate at MRFs and composting facilities is plastic bags.
  - Seattle has banned plastic bags, but this hasn't made much of a difference in contamination levels so far, and we don't have any additional regulations to address plastic bags at this time.
  - One member asked whether there was interest in getting rid of plastic produce bags, and using something reusable instead.
  - Another member commented that some African nations have banned plastic bags.
- The Case for a Corporate Recycling Program, a webinar hosted by Ecova, will take place Thursday, November 6 (tomorrow).
- The Washington Organic Recycling Council's annual conference will be November 18th and 19th at the Semiahmoo Conference Center in Blaine. Nora Goldstein, editor of BioCycle Magazine will be speaking on emerging trends in organics.
  - ✓ Dan Corum will be attending and will give a debrief at the SWAC meeting in December.
- ✓ There will be media soon on getting the word out about "flushable" wipes (that they're not actually flushable), and the CAC Program Manager will send out a link to the videos.
  - Flushable wipes are made from a thin version of the same plastic that is used to make reusable shopping bags.
  - SPU is trying to work with manufactures on this issue with all three community advisory committees.
- Sheryl Shapiro reported that one of her poems was selected for Poetry on the Buses. There will be a launch party for the program Monday, November 10 at 6:30pm, which will include performances of poetry and music at the Moore Theater in various languages.

## 7) Wrap-Up

- ✓ The July meeting date may need to be changed due to the Independence Day holiday. The CAC Program Support will follow up with the Committee Chair.