



SPU Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC)

May 2, 2018 Meeting Notes
Seattle Municipal Tower, 700 Fifth Avenue
Room 4901
5:30 pm – 7:30 pm
Chair: Holly Griffith
Vice-Chair: Quinn Apuzzo
Secretary: Adam Maurer

Committee Members	Present?	SPU Staff	Role
Quinn Apuzzo	N	Sheryl Shapiro	CAC Program Manager
Holly Griffith	Y	Natasha Walker	CAC Program Coordinator
Emily Newcomer	Y	Sego Jackson	SW LOB Policy Liaison
Colin Groark	Y	Dave Hare	Planning Strategic Advisor, Solid Waste Planning and Program Management
James Subocz	Y		
Alan Garvey	Y		
Amelia Fujikawa	P	Guests	Affiliation
Adam Maurer	Y	Heather Trim	Guest
Rachtha Dahn	Y	Lindsey Engh	Guest
Alessandra Pistoia	Y	Lisa Blumenroth	Guest
Dirk Wassink	Y		

ACTION ITEMS:

1. Regular Business

SWAC Chair, Holly Griffith called the meeting to order at 5:36 PM

- Members and guests introduced themselves.
- Meeting notes from April were reviewed and approved.
- Sheryl indicated emergency exits and exit procedures.

2. Solid Waste LOB Updates & Quarterly Report

SWAC Policy Liaison, Sego Jackson, provided a few Solid Waste Line of Business and legislative updates.

- **Washington State Recycling Association (WSRA) 2018 Recycler of the Year Award recipients:**
WSRA Recycler of the Year – Public Agency: Seattle Public Utilities
WSRA Recycler of the Year – Multicultural Engagement: Waste Management, for rethinking language and structure as they create outreach programs targeting Latino customers.
- **Plastic Straw and Utensil Ban and Director’s Rule:** Sego reviewed the continued exemptions list:
 - disposable, thick handled soda spoons
 - disposable flexible drinking straws for medical purposes
 - metal foil face papers and composite papers used on hot foods
 - 2oz and under portion cups

- No exemption: Bubble tea; some use compostable straws, heat-sealed plastic vs typical lid changes the kind of straw, some places promoting reusable cup options. Only issue is the places using heat-sealed plastic / sharp straws. We will not be conducting any enforcement on Bubble tea businesses with heat-sealed cups and sharp plastic straws, but will be working with them and other small businesses on compliance.
- **Bag Update Report to Council:** Segó said the memo will be delivered to Council on July 1. Students from UW’s Evans School of Business have been conducting survey to evaluate local compliance with the bag ban. Preliminary results show:
 - Almost 100% compliance with regards to not providing green-tinted non-compostable bags;
 - Only 20% of convenience stores surveyed showed non-compliance;
 - Still have cultural competence work to do in outreach and education;
 - There is an opportunity to begin communicating the benefits of making these changes
 - SPU reusable bags only feature “Where does it go?” messaging; opportunity to talk about waste prevention and about washing reusable bags and about contamination.
- **2019 Solid Waste Comprehensive Plan Update:** The contract is not yet signed; until then the consultant team cannot be discussed. It may be announced to SWAC members via email if it finalizes between meeting dates.
- **“Recycling Right”** Segó shared about the proposed communication plan in response to China’s ban on certain recyclable materials. Communication materials would focus on reducing contamination by keeping recyclables “clean, dry and empty” with a focus on dry, especially in the commercial sector. Segó said that paper is going to India, where they are having issues with moisture content of paper and molding due to the longer trip. Also, wet cardboard can cause conveyor belts to slip.
- **2019 Solid Waste Collections Contracts: Segó shared the slides presented to City Council Committee by Solid Waste Contracts Manager, Hans Van Dusen, on April 10.**
 - A member inquired about the source of the \$5million savings, and staff said they would send the CRUEDA meeting video link, which could provide more detail.

3. Responsible Recycling Discussion

Segó Jackson continued the conversation from the March and April SWAC meeting regarding China's customs inspection program, subsequent scrap ban and associated geographic-specific impacts of the ban. China has launched Blue Sky 2018, renaming China’s 2017 National Sword program. It focuses on restricting the import of certain types of solid waste, in an effort to increase environmental protection for the Country.

A meeting was held in January to discuss domestic processing of mixed plastics. Segó explained that out of that discussion came a commitment for SPU and King County to collaborate. King County’s Solid Waste Advisory Committee and the Metropolitan Solid Waste Advisory Committee have asked to convene a task force on these issues, called “Responsible Recycling Task Force.” Segó shared a sampling of slides, including some borrowed from Lisa Sepanski from their first meeting. He reviewed the timeline and agenda for upcoming meetings, with a goal of a final report in October. SWAC members were invited to participate in a discussion on the following questions:

What do you think the characteristics of Responsible Recycling are that we should consider and how important are they?

- We should begin with defining what is “responsible recycling”

- After seeing that 82% of ocean leakage comes from Asia, a Committee member said they feel that it is harder to encourage their US tenants to recycle. Later in the meeting, a staff member reminded them that this statistic does not mean that 82% of exported recyclables end up in the ocean, but rather that 82% of the plastic found in the ocean is sourced from Asia.
- A CAC member shared their concerns on when “policy and the truth don’t match”, bringing up an example of University policies around recycling coffee cups and plastic bags conflicting with the reality that these items are not recyclable.
- Responsible Recycling = honesty.
- Responsible recycling should mean an alignment with what the MRFs can process, and “limiting it to what we know can be recycled.”
- A CAC member shared that they felt Solid Waste has always been a behind the scenes service, and how cities operate in general is completely hidden. Recycling has always been pitched as a free service. They felt that we need to become more transparent about what recycling really is; that recycled materials don’t just disappear, and that they only have a value if there is a market. That there is a lifecycle to a product. Using the term “free” incentivizes good recycling behavior, but it’s not actually a free service. Responsible recycling is the reset of being transparent about what recycling really is. It will be very uncomfortable for people to question it for the first time.
- A CAC member shared that they felt that those setting policy have had a mindset of pushing for things to be recyclable, and then figuring out later where the markets are. “It’s not innovative if those items being added to the list are not actually getting recycled.”
- We’ve taken these concerns, and awareness of this issue, away from consumers. We need to change that.
- SPU needs to provide education around “the system” – the markets, etc. “Unfortunately, it’s not a very sexy story.”
- A CAC member felt that citizens are very aware that where items are eventually going is not fully decided right now. They warned that citizens are taking all news with a bit of skepticism, and are looking for absolute answers, and consistency.
- A CAC member shared that their family member has noticed an increase in plastic waste-related videos and pictures in social media, indicating that awareness of the issue is increasing. They felt that if people are educated about what is not recyclable, they will not buy it.

What do you think the expectations of our customers are?

- There are “recycling acolytes” peppered throughout the population. Once they know what to do, they will spread the word. But it’s a challenge explaining the right process in the first place.
- The way that recycling culture developed, we have gotten everyone to the point where we push for everything to be recyclable. Maybe that’s the wrong approach.
- There is “green guilt.”
- “Responsible” and “Recycling” – it’s not responsible unless it gets recycled. If it’s going in the bin, consumers assume it is being properly recycled.
- They don’t care or think about how/where. They think they’re doing their part by putting it in the correct can.
- Most people assume it’s not ending up in a landfill, or even going overseas.
- People don’t think about what happens next.
- There should be an expectation that grocery stores, etc. would accept back the products they “produce” or “sold” – such as grocery stores taking back bags, or stores taking back electronics.

What are your thoughts about taking plastic bags out of curbside collection?

- Agreement among SWAC that taking plastic bags out of curbside collection would be good.

- “How is it benefiting us?” (to recycle plastic bags). Also, it sends the message that all plastic is recyclable.
- Plastic film, if collected separately and dry, can be recycled but what are the chances of that?
- Would there be a buy-back for plastic bags at grocery stores?
- Need to examine cost vs benefit. Cost of bags contaminating recyclables vs benefit of being recycled and not going to landfill
- Having too much of a product depresses the price for recyclable materials. If more plastic goes to the landfill, you’ll just be left with commercial plastics. Is that enough of a market?
- Is there any discussion about sales tax on particular products; i.e. packaging with high plastic content?

4. Annual Recycling Rate Report & Discussion

Dave Hare joined via the phone to provide an update on the status of the 2017 Annual Recycling Report and walked Committee members through the changes and highlights of the new report layout. The report covers “where we’ve been, where are currently, highlights success stories” and can hopefully be used to “guide our vision and serve as a roadmap” for SPU Solid Waste LOB. He then reviewed the schedule for the Annual Recycling Report and the dates relevant to SWAC. Final numbers were not yet ready for review, but Dave said they would be distributed in the next week or so. He said he would send an updated draft, in time to review before the June 1 SWAC meeting. SWAC Chair, Holly Griffith, shared the SWAC letter timeline.

- A CAC member inquired into whether the report will highlight the growth in the Multi-Family sector. They said the report currently shows an even distribution in the City between Multi-Family and Single-Family, but they understood Multi-Family to be “creeping up” on Single-Family. They felt it would be a compelling story with the renewed focus on Multi-Family diversion. Staff responded by saying they could add a section to talk about growth, but that they did not see an impact on the recycling rate from a shift to more Multi-Family units.
- A CAC member inquired about the inclusion of Operation Blue Skies / China National Sword in this report and including the possible impacts of that ban. Staff responded that they felt the ban could impact recycling rates in 2018 and so would be better discussed in next years report, but that they might include a note at the end of the report.
- A CAC member inquired about whether the re-use station at the North Transfer Station would be included in the 2017 or 2018 report. Staff member responded that while they had received data from the vendors providing the re-use collection services, they are still confirming their reports. They may also provide more guidance to re-use collection partners in 2018 on reporting/measurement methods. Sego added that they had hoped to have the North Transfer Station reuse service in place earlier and to use it to weigh donations and determine an average weight per donation. But the delay in contracting did not provide that info for 2017. Another member added that it would be good to consider how we factor in re-use materials captured in informal networks, such as Buy Nothing or Consignment Stores.
- A CAC member asked if there could be confusion over what a “recycling rate” means to the public; i.e. is it anything that is diverted from the landfill, or is it more specific? Staff noted that as they change the format of the report, the audience may change and with it we may need to discuss language/terminology in the report. They said SPU would like to see this report be digestible to the general public. If Committee members have suggestions for how to reframe / other terminology to use, staff encouraged them to email those ideas. Sego also added that there is a social benefit for charitable contributions of re-use materials that could be part of the story captured / told. It is more than just capturing tonnage.

- A CAC member noted that in 2017 there was a requirement added in new waste contracts to host Neighborhood recycling events in partnership with Goodwill and other re-use vendors. They noted that this touches on the SW equity component, and should be included in the report. **Staff responded that it was included, but could be highlighted more.**
- A CAC member shared that in the measurement symposium, a speaker talked about defining reuse. For example, if you get a stack of national geographic magazines and store them in your home, and it doesn't stop you from buying more magazines, then the environmental benefits of reuse haven't really be attained. It's not reuse. **They recommended that re-use be defined.**
- A CAC member shared that a clearer way to compare recent data to historical data would be to compare the current year to an average of a set of past years. They explained this knocks out anomaly years. **Staff responded that they could possibly look at using this with comparing per capita waste generation.**
- A CAC member shared that they felt the report format was user friendly. They added that **on the Multi-Family, Single-Family and Commercial pages, it says "Up .8%" on sidebar. SPU should identify from what year it is up from.**

SWAC Members then brainstormed topics/themes they wanted to highlight in their letter

- Idea: SWAC could comment on each major section of the new report
- Product Stewardship, especially as it relates to Blue Sky / China Sword.
 - Possibly a paragraph on Sustainable Recycling and Contamination Reduction?
- Continue to emphasize Multi-Family
- Contamination in the Commercial sector
- Self Haul or Construction & Demolition
- Highlight SPU's leadership role in this area for Council
- Plastic straw / bag ban is moving us in the right direction. Exciting stuff
- Data about how waste generation has decreased while population has increased. An exploration about why that is happening; salvage markets? Reuse around the city? Things we're not capturing in our data?
- Are people moving into the City generating as much waste?
- Possibly separate generation data by sector (noting changes by sector)
- A CAC member asked if we would encourage responsible recycling "if it meant a negative impact to diversion rate." Is there a way we want to address it? Staff responded that as we explore what happens to materials after recovery, and consider adjusting what materials we accept, that could mean a temporary drop in the recycling rate. Members expressed that they would support legislation or ordinances that help prevent problematic materials from entering the waste stream in the first place. Members also took this opportunity to discuss the diversion of food from the waste stream, and noted the difference between "wasted food" and "food waste," saying there needs to be more education on that topic.

5. Around the Table & Community Insights

SWAC members were encouraged to attend the May 16 All-CAC, featuring Mami Hara. Each Committee will present highlights of their accomplishments

Adjourned 7:32PM