

## **Regional Composting Working Group Meeting Minutes**

### **February 9, 2021 2pm**

#### **I. Call to Order 2:01 pm**

**Members present:** Maggie Morrison (ORCSD), Jen Andrews (UNH Sustainability Institute), Nell Neal (Durham Integrated Waste Management Advisory Committee), Mary Caulfield (Durham Integrated Waste Management Advisory Committee), Dean Rubine (Lee Sustainability Advisory Committee), Chuck Cox (Lee Sustainability Advisory Committee)

**Members absent:** N/A

**Public Present:** N/A

#### **II. Welcome and introductions**

Dean Rubine (LSC)

I'm on the Lee Sustainability Committee and was on the Lee Solid Waste Committee. We got our Mr. Fox compost pilot off the ground a year or two ago now. We would rather compost locally. Mr. Fox actually costs more than just MSW; not too much more, but I'm worried the Lee Select Board may cut it if it is a cost center.

Maggie Morrison (ORCSD)

I've worked with ORCSD for the past seven or eight years. Compost as an issue became clearer after a waste audit of the school district (a bit truncated due to the pandemic). We realized food waste was a major component to our waste stream. We also produced our first ever greenhouse gas report for the district, which indicates food waste is a major contributor. We also use Mr. Fox in ORCSD but think a regional approach is best.

Jen Andrews (UNH Sustainability Institute)

I'm a Project Director at the institute, a two time UNH alum, 8 years at the institute, 13 years working on climate issues. UNH has been working on organics management solutions for the last two decades. We have a fairly workable solution for dining waste currently. But there remains an appetite for farther reaching solutions. UNH wants to respond to student demand. There's a tradeoff -- less waste to Turnkey/Rochester is less landfill gas to power the campus.

Nell Neal (Durham Integrated Waste Management Advisory Committee)

We've been dreaming about compost for years. We do Mr. Fox for folks who want to bring their waste to the transfer station, but we want to expand.

Mary Caulfield (Durham Integrated Waste Management Advisory Committee)

Durham just completed a Compost Challenge. 22 families, six weeks, provided buckets, bags and compost education. We're repeating it again in the winter. Results so far: 11.2 pounds of compost per family per week.

I've worked with Maggie on a Green Team in ORCSD.

Chuck Cox (Lee Sustainability Advisory Committee)

Owner/Farmer at Tuckaway Farm, Lee, 3 miles from UNH, been organic farming here for 40 years. I'm on the Lee Ag Commission and Lee Sustainability Committee. On the farm we've long done composting, including animal composting, as well as reusing and recycling materials. I have a basic knowledge of the compost process. I'm interested in getting something going on a regional basis. Let's get Riverwoods, other institutions involved.

### **III. Meeting structure**

Maggie: When Jen, Mary and I first met, we agreed UNH would take a role facilitating these meetings. The name of this meeting is the Regional Composting Working Group. "Working Group" is the language used by Durham and Oyster River when they need to study an issue and make recommendations. This working group will be making recommendations which will go up our respective leadership chains.

Durham IWMAC recommended that a student be part of this group. The invitation is out there. I have to call someone. This meeting time may be a deterrent for a student -- we may have to reconsider.

#### **A. Right to Know**

Maggie: These are posted meetings of the Lee Sustainability Committee. The public will be notified of these meetings through the town of Lee website. Jen will handle Zoom through her UNH account. Minutes and Agendas will be posted on [www.leenh.org](http://www.leenh.org), fully available to the public.

Dean: Governor's emergency order announcement?

Maggie: I don't think that's necessary.

#### **B. Minutes and minute taker**

Dean has agreed to do minutes.

Dean: I've set up a Google doc. I'm going to try to take minutes as we speak.

#### **C. Agenda builder(s)**

Maggie: In general we should build the agenda for the next meeting at the current meeting.

### **IV. Discussion: Defining and developing the scope of our work**

Jen: Let's get super clear on what we are trying to accomplish. I've already heard multiple goals: increase efficiency, reduce waste, ... Let's get down what we are trying to do and why, what we see as the benefits, what are we trying to solve. That's phase one, a couple of meetings.

In phase 2 we collect the information we want to pull together; local numbers: volumes and types of waste. What are the current adverse impacts we're trying to mitigate? Let's identify the stakeholders ... Mr. Fox. What are the options? What have other communities done?

Maggie: What's our time frame? What's our spatial component? Why not Dover? Newmarket? Portsmouth?

Dean: Madbury? Barrington?

Jen: Let's try to get our initial progression down on paper. What tasks need to be done, a first shot at a timeline. I volunteer to do the first draft.

Jen: From a UNH perspective, thanks Maggie for getting everything moving. UNH wants to be involved but there are competing priorities. Colleagues won't have much time until the end of the semester. I will be busy until March or April.

Maggie: COVID has done a lot to slow everything down. As far as I know this conversation has never happened. Let's do it well, with great thought and great depth.

Jen: A year?

Dean: Someone, was it Maggie, suggested six months to produce a draft of a plan.

Mary: Six months maybe.

Maggie: Jen, we recognize your bandwidth is short at the moment. Other people have different availabilities. We want UNH as a big partner.

Jen: I foresee two rounds: the first round narrows the choice down to say two options. In the second round we choose and flesh out detailed plans.

Chuck: It will be many months before we have anything. We are looking at a long term program; one we hope lasts a long time.

Dean: I recommend the book by James McSweeney, Community Scale Composting Systems - A Comprehensive Practical Guide for Closing the Food System Loop and Solving Our Waste Crisis. Let's get it in the libraries.

Chuck: Let's get students to take on the project as an undergraduate or graduate task.

Jen: I agree, that's feasible. Now that students are here, I can circulate a call for interested students and faculty. There's a good chance we'll get some great ones.

Jen: I will send a rough plan by close of business Monday.

Dean: I want to try to add Madbury to the group.

Chuck: I know the Madbury Town Administrator, Eric Feigenbaum. He's active in the Oyster River Watershed Association.

Jen: I know Jen Wilhelm, Fat Peach Farm in Madbury.

Dean: We need someone blessed by the town.

Maggie: It's the consensus to try to include Madbury. Chuck will reach out to the Madbury Town Administrator. The person needs to be approved by the town and authorized to report back to the town as needed.

Mary: How about Barrington? They have lots of space out there.

MM: Barrington is part of the school district but I worry the group is slipping.

Mary: I missed the first meeting. Is there anything that can be delegated to me?

Dean: This is the first meeting. The Lee Sustainability Committee had a meeting in December with Mike Nork of NHDES that Jen, Maggie and Durham IWMAC attended.

MM: At this point we need to get Jen's timeline; Jen can consider tasks to delegate as she makes it.

Jen: I reached out to the Great Bay Rotary Club -- they reached out to me in September. I'm waiting to hear back. They are in transition to a new chair who wants to be in touch. Someone else can talk to them besides me.

Mary: I'll do it.

Jen: Great. What I heard from Will Lenharth was that National Rotary has grants in the neighborhood in the \$50K range; Great Bay was thinking about applying for one to support local composting. That was three months ago.

I belatedly reached out to the Strafford Regional Planning Commission; seems like they may have relevant expertise and it could be good to have them as part of conversation. I'm waiting to hear back.

Chuck: We need to be good stewards. It's best if people reuse things, and compost at home. In the McSweeney book, he talks about a lot of volunteers doing the actual work, rather than put it on the municipality's budget, hiring staff. The reliability of volunteers is dealt with in the book. We can be more relevant if we can set up a small system that works as a model. That's preferable to hauling waste from Portsmouth. There's an educational component to our work.

Jen: Composting is more than just an investment of infrastructure and staff.

Maggie: Dover recycling was first done by volunteers. Starting with volunteers is not a bad idea.

Nell: I will volunteer to follow up with the Strafford Regional Planning Commission. Alaina Rogers, Environmental Planner, is my contact.

Jen: I sent an email this morning. I reached out to Kyle Pimental asking for who the right contact was. I'll pass on the reply (or lack thereof) to you and you can follow up.

Nell: OK.

Jen: I'm scheduled to meet (about something else) with my boss's former colleague -- he has relevant expertise. He's Eric Meyers, Director of Organic Recycling for Waste Management, Inc. He has perspective from composting at scale. It may be antithetical to Chuck's "small first" view.

Mary: One of our members got a bunch of material, composting statistics, from Eric Meyers. He was very helpful.

Dean reported on his exchange with Steve Bullek, Lee Public Works Manager, who also manages the Lee transfer station.

Lee currently accepts 850 pounds of food waste per week (destined for Mr. Fox) and an unknown amount of yard waste that's slowly composting on site. Lee accepts 90 tons per month of MSW (landfill trash), which works out to 21 tons a week; if we accept 22% of MSW is food waste, that's around 4.6 tons of food waste being discarded per week. So, back of the envelope, Lee is composting around 9% of its food waste. That doesn't count any composting at home.

Here's Manager Bullek's Feb 4 email about a compost site at the Lee Transfer Station:

Dean there are a few comments I have on this.

First of all it's a great idea.

The transfer station would be a tough site because of the space difficulties we already have being surrounded by conservation land. What you see inside the fence line is about all the space I have with the exception of where we compost yard waste now.

The other problem we have is the manpower and equipment to turn these piles over and do the groundwork to make it work. It would almost without a doubt make me need more people and a new loader to keep up.

We do however have the space to do a program like you're talking about with just our town. And we can send someone to the Maine composting school to learn how to do it.

There is a woman named Joan Cudworth. She is the Public Works Director in Hollis and she has a composting program that wouldn't be a bad one to mirror.

My best recommendation on space though would be to use the Kingman Farm or talk to Madbury about bringing them in and maybe using their transfer station on Pudding Hill road.

My other thought would be, if it happens in Lee, we are doing all the work. Is there any compensation from the other participants? How would the material get split up when it's ready for use?

Steve Bullek  
Public Works Manager  
Lee, NH

## **V. Next steps**

### **A. Meeting schedule**

Maggie: Once a month?

Mary: I don't know if we'll get it done if we do once a month.

Maggie: Maybe some research could fall on a student.

Jen: Let's meet again in 3 weeks. Then we'll choose between meeting every two weeks or every month. There is stuff in between we could all be doing.

## **VI. Closing Actions**

### **A. Future Meeting Dates:**

Maggie: Does afternoon work for everyone? Chuck?

Chuck: Until things get more active outside.

Jen: There's a concern about the high school student's schedule.

Maggie: Let me try to find one and see.

Next meeting: Monday March 1, 2pm, Zoom

## **B. Agenda Planning for Next Meeting**

List of tasks:

Mary will talk to the Great Bay Rotary Club.

Nell will talk to the Strafford Regional Planning Commission.

Maggie will search for an Oyster River student to join.

Jen will do a rough schedule; the group will try to fill it out into a working outline.

Jen will try to recruit a UNH student, other faculty, Eric Meyers.

Chuck will talk to the Madbury Town Administrator about getting a Madbury member.

Next meeting proposed agenda:

Updates

Agree to final version of timeline

Defining our vision

Decision on Meeting Schedule

Expanded membership Roster, new introductions

Maggie: I'll get an agenda to Lee a week ahead of time. The Zoom link will always be embedded in the agenda.

Dean: I will leave that link out of the minutes.

## **VII. Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 2:59pm.

Respectfully Submitted, Dean Rubine