

**Regional Composting Working Group Meeting Minutes**  
**April 1, 2021 4 pm**

**I. Call to Order 4:02 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. Approval of minutes from March 1 & March 15, 2021**

March 1 Roll call vote, 5-0 approved

March 15 Roll call vote, 4-0-1, Dean abstains, approved

**II. Introductions**

Evy Ashburner is a busy junior at ORHS; hopefully she'll join soon.

**III. Public comment** N/A

**IV. Updates**

**a. Madbury rep?**

Chuck: I talked to (Madbury town administrator) Eric Fiegenbaum, and a farmer on Rt. 108 in Madbury who sounded interested. Madbury hasn't made an official appointment yet. I'm still working on finding someone, probably a farmer.

**b. Other?**

Maggie: I was talking to Durham IWMAC and there's been no look at what the business in Durham or Lee has been doing. [Jenn: true to the best of my knowledge] I was thinking of hiring a high school intern to survey businesses in Durham, if they are composting, if they sell composted products, and their company policies.

Dean: I suggest we broaden to surveying waste / recycling practices in general.

Jenn: In the Energy Committee, there was a conversation about whether it makes sense to survey businesses about their energy practices. Waste and energy are both sustainability issues; we could do a sustainability survey of Durham business. Data could be useful.

Maggie: Lee doesn't have a sustainability fellow.

Jenn: If there was a high school person available we could get started. Chloe Gross (a UNH student who just applied for REAP funding to do a summer research project with RCWG) would be great for this if she gets funded this summer.

Maggie: It's less important who does it than it gets done.

Jenn: That's an item implied in our proposal, though it doesn't specifically say a commercial sector survey. I'll add that to as a category after residential.

Maggie: How do we organize a survey?

[Chuck joins 4:13pm]

Jenn: Qualtrics is a survey program, like Survey Monkey, that we use.

Maggie: Durham has a business association. Does Lee have anything? Do we have to inform them?

Dean: Lee doesn't have a business development person. The LSC is working on a directory of Cottage Industries and Artisans in town.

Nell: The more folks we inform the better.

Maggie: I'll talk to Todd Selig and I'll ask him.

Nell: Has anyone briefed Todd about our group?

Maggie: Todd knows about RTK issues, maybe not more than that. Let's point him to our agendas and minutes that the Town of Lee is hosting.

Nell: How do Sally and Al know about us? Should they know what we're working on right now? I think that's healthy.

Maggie: I thought there was a dotted line to each of our town committees; Durham has a council rep on our committee. Sally reports to the council.

Nell: I always report about this meeting at the Durham IWMAC meeting.

Dean: We report similarly. We haven't had a selectperson on the Lee Sustainability Committee but newly elected selectperson Katrin Kasper has said she'd attend going forward.

Maggie: Let's make sure we have that roadmap of communication back to Lee.

Dean: We'll make sure what's happening makes its way up to the select board.

Maggie: I have an Oyster River board meeting; maybe Al will attend. There's a slightly broken link in Oyster River and Durham because Al is spread so thin.

Nell: Maggie will follow up with Todd Selig to make sure the Durham Business Association is contacted.

Jenn: Durham did a Greenhouse Gas Inventory, we (UNH Sust Inst.) worked with a group including Todd Selig. A key data point was that waste is a small part of the carbon footprint in Durham, both compared to other communities and to the town's total carbon footprint. It's a good problem to have; Durham is doing better than a lot of communities overall. How do we then make the argument for continued progress and intervention when the data looks so good? I'm letting you know in case conversations come up about this in town.

It's a graduate student named Emily Mello, who's finished a masters and is a new PhD candidate, who is doing the Greenhouse Gas Inventory of Durham. The project came about through a UNH Sust. Inst. Fellows program, a summer or full year project. The inventory is a requirement of the global covenant of mayors that has Durham signed on to.

Nell: Did this come from Todd?

Maggie: Todd had to write a proposal to the Sust. Inst; Oyster River is getting another sustainability fellow this summer, as is Durham. Durham is doing their Climate Action Plan. Oyster River is doing their Sustainability Management Plan. These should be nested dolls.

Maggie: Jenn amended the work of the summer intern to include businesses, develop a survey instrument.

Dean: We'll figure out how to contact businesses in Lee.

Nell: Let's go beyond composting, ask about recycling.

Jenn: Re REAP. Chloe submitted her proposal Monday, thanks for everyone's comments. She'll hear in 2 weeks if she gets funded. That program needed a particular thing. It was useful for me to walk through and define a research question. There are dozens of research questions. By the way, I didn't mean to imply Chloe would work on all the research questions over the course of the summer. The intention is to work on one research question from each of the two categories.

For example, if Evy is interested in working together to produce a survey instrument beforehand, that's possible; there's plenty of work to do. Chloe is interested in sustainability policy, social and human side, surveys along those lines would be interesting to her.

I wanted to be clear I didn't think this list of research questions was the work plan for Chloe or this committee. But it could be.

## **V. Continuing to clarify our purpose - Jennifer Andrews**

Jenn: What problem are we trying to solve and how will we do it? It would be great to pick out threads for each of our entities.

Mary: We could develop a history of Oyster River district and what the towns Durham and Lee have done so far, along the lines of the history of UNH waste managements you gave in the proposal.

Jenn: What has the journey been; how has it led to the current hopes, needs, and priorities.

Mary: IWMAC is doing winter composting. Julie (Kelley) heard back from two families that they really enjoyed learning about composting, they'd love to do it year round, but the transfer station option is not ideal for them. They ask: Is there a place in town where we can bring our compost? People are excited about it once they get going.

I found the whole operation of composting, how important aeration is to cooking compost, fascinating. That would be really interesting for people to know about. Getting back to the microlevel of composting. They do talk about worm bins.

Maggie: It is an interesting topic to educate people on. Jenn, would you suggest that we go through with our respective organizations that we go through those answers as a template on how do we move forward?

Jenn: Let me ask a big picture question, about our process. Is our plan: Identity the problem, do some research, then make a recommendation? To that end, I put a link to a Jamboard, a virtual white board with sticky notes. We can see if it's helpful for our process.

## **VI. Development of problem and goal statement – Jennifer Andrews**

Jenn: Broadly I thought of three possible problems the committee could address:

Problem 1: We need to reduce the amount of organic waste we produce

Problem 2: Need on-site, smaller scale solutions for keeping organic waste from landfill

Problem 3: Need a cost-effective place to send consumers' mixed organic waste

Dean: My preference is not problem 1, which is important but not our focus. I think we're after some combination of problems 2 & 3 combined. I don't want to prejudge our committee's recommendation for or against multiple local sites versus a central site.

Nell: Problem 1 is elusive; trying to get folks to reduce waste by changing buying habits, cooking habits -- that's a lot to take on. It will bog us down. Our goal is to deal in a better way with the waste created. Problem 1 is a great goal but not the right goal for this committee.

Maggie: For Oyster River I'm beginning to see the educational institutions are contained to some degree and able to control things a little differently than the town could be. Oyster River would be interested in problem number two.

Jenn?: Multiple site specific solutions or central -- they lead to a different set of recommendations.

Nell: Can we offer more solutions than Mr. Fox and backyard compost piles?

Jenn: To me the two problems seem not totally separate but pretty different. This committee could work on both, but we'd end up with multiple and different recommendations. What would we need for problem 2, small scale infrastructure, problem solving, and space. For problem 3 we would need big infrastructure, more land. There are different barriers.

On the Jamboard, I used green stickies for what we would need to acquire, resources, capacity. Orange stickies are barriers. Blue are notes relative to either.

Dean: If I had to choose, I suppose I'd rather we address problem 2 than problem 3. My vision was one of starting small and scaling up. Is there a middle ground?

Mary: I'm also at problem 2. Durham is already composting; we could offer more options for folks with no backyard composting. Could they bring food waste weekly? Could there be a drop-off at the farmers market? Could we partner with farms? I think problem 2 is more where Durham is. I don't know if that could be supported financially.

Maggie: I agree. Problem 2 seems more realistic to solve. Though I'd love to dream big, there are so many different variables. It would be different in Seattle or San Francisco. Given stresses on our budget, we should start small.

Nell: I have a different viewpoint. I think problem 2 is what we're working with on, a very small scale. Continuing to focus on problem 2 doesn't give the results that my vision was hoping I got on this Working Group because I wanted to think big; the way to go is problem 3. We could pick up compost curbside and capture a lot more food waste than we're capturing now.

UNH is the powerhouse in this group of ours. UNH has more wherewithal, has land, has worked with Agricycle, and is in a better position to go at this on a bigger level. If they would allow the towns to contribute

Right now we're collecting dribs and drabs. We hope they take their food waste to their yard, to the transfer station, to the farmers market. The majority of people aren't doing that; it would take a lot of motivation. Comments Julie Kelly got said it would be nice to have residential pick up of compost along with the trash.

Maggie: I want to think big but I want to be a realist. I wonder if there are steps. There's Lee, Durham, UNH, Oyster River; this lineup has never happened before. I see UNH has power but

we have agency as well. I wonder if they're not mutually exclusive. Maybe it's a step one and step two.

Chuck: It comes down to who we can find who has the energy for particular parts of this, doing the legwork to figure this out. Durham has curbside pickup, see whether they could pick up kitchen waste. Lee doesn't have pickup so needs a different solution.

Nell: Where are we going to put it if we have a truck to collect it? That's where I see the UNH important here.

Jenn: Definitely related, probably not mutually exclusive. If we focus on problem 3 there's a whole lot of process with UNH and land that will be long; probably the summer before can even start the conversation. I think it's worthwhile. I think we can be doing a feasibility assessment, getting the data we'd need to embark. How much food waste, where would it be coming from, other sources of compostable waste, how would be dealing with it. It's long and abstract; it would be more gratifying for all of us if there were some more tangible thing. It sounds like there's some consensus around both. We set ourselves up to do problem 3 as a bigger, longer process, for problem 2 things let's find the energy and the champions to be more demonstrative.

Chuck: One thing mentioned was, find out if there are farmers willing to be involved; talking with them. What do they need, what do they have available. It's going to be an organic process; I don't think we know what's going to show up, who's interested in doing what.

Dean: My vision was we find a spot, we start collecting waste and making compost, and we scale it up.

Mary: If we are able to make compost in a central place, are we selling the compost? What are we doing with the compost?

Jenn: We'd have to figure it out. Is it more centralized? Who's operating it, whose contributing waste, what does everyone want.

Nell: I've been reading the Community Scale Composting book. Four components: generating food waste, collecting food waste, organics recycler/digerster, end user. Those are all things we all have to think about. I really like the last thing Jenn said, keeping our eye on the prize, number 3, but working through number 2 to get there. Composting systems and networks take boots on the ground making things happen; there are roles for policy makers, educational programs. Regional composting networks can be developed and sustained.

Maggie: In order for us to feel we have a beginning and end, we focus on problem 2 but consider what we need in order to get to problem 3. We need data on farms. Who are the partners that we can use to build to numbers? We need to keep businesses informed, keep the Ag commissions informed. We have to build social structure to get to number three. We need to figure out the bridge piece so we don't lose sight of number 3 while working on number 2.

Jenn: number 3 is a feasibility study, research; we can be doing that as part of number 2.

Dean: Doing it in a way that could scale up.

Jenn: Focus equally on land/infrastructure as well as # 2 stuff; we're going to number 3, how?

Maggie: We all have to build our own set of partnerships to make this work. I think it would be smart to realize that from the outset.

Jenn: Great work; we should try to write it down.

Maggie: We had a productive conversation here.

Chuck: I could talk to the different farmers around to see if there's any interest.

Maggie: It's 5:07; let's pick this up at our next meeting.

Jenn: If Evy is interested in brainstorming the survey, we could do it next meeting or offline.

Mary: Are we trying to collapse problem 2 & 3 together? We could come to the meeting with what we think that statement could read like. Are we going to have one problem?

Jenn: Write it up as one thing but think about how to put it together. Put your thoughts in JamBoard.

Reflect on those things. I'm going to look at the research topics with respect to the three problems.

Mary: It would be good for us to add to that list you're creating so that when we come to the meeting next time we have the list of what folks are thinking.

Maggie: That's our homework. Dean will send a link. In between now and the 15th put your thoughts on Jamboard or email/paper. If you have a recommendation on how to reword the problem how it shows how we're sticking with 2 and evolving to 3.

Jenn: I wasn't thinking it had to be one problem but we do want to ultimately articulate our goals.

**VII. Next meeting date: Thursday, April 15, 4:00 pm**

**VIII. New Business**

**IX. Adjourn**

Meeting adjourned at 5:13pm

Respectfully Submitted, Dean Rubine