Regional Composting Working Group Minutes
April 15, 2021 4 pm

I. Call to Order 4:02 pm

Members present: Maggie Morrison (ORCSD), Jenn 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

0. Amend agenda

Updates: Rotary update, Mary

Durham economic development directory update, Maggie

Conversation re survey of business, Nell

Update about UNH student, Jenn

Committee concurs

I. Approval of minutes from April 1, 2021

Dean move, Maggie 2nd, 5-0, approved as amended

II. Introductions

III. Public comment

IV. Updates

a. Madbury rep?

Dean: As of Tuesday Chuck reported progress, still no person named.

Chuck: Couple of contacts, nothing confirmed yet.

Mary: Great Bay Rotary Update

They sent an email last week; their fiscal year is July 1 to June 30. This July there will be a new Rotary International president from India. There are 1,200,000 members internationally.

The upcoming year their theme is **The Year of Our Environment**. Call to action. We could apply for a global grant, under this environmental theme. In order to apply we need a plan of action, budget, milestones, start to finish dates. It might be the cart before the horse for us. We would submit this through Will who would apply from the Great Bay Rotary. David Hadley

foundation chair, Russ Smith deputy, taking over July 1. A grant submission needs membership approval. I thanked them, said I would bring it up with our group. It's very generous of them for us to be reaching out. Application date unclear.

https://my.rotary.org/en/take-action/apply-grants/global-grants

Maggie: See if you can find out the grant deadlines, if they're rolling.

Maggie: Durham economic development directory update

I left a message for Chris, Durham economic development director. She only works two days per week. I'll have more to report by the next meeting.

[Chuck arrives 4:15]

Nell: Durham IWMAC was discussing whether to ban Polystyrene like Portsmouth. We decided that we should survey restaurants in Durham for carry out containers. Dunkin Donuts switched to heavy paper cups from polystyrene. The plan is one of us would walk around town, survey restaurants about containers, recycling practices. Can we combine this with an RCWG survey. We wanted to do it quickly, next week or so. We need a short list of restaurants.

Maggie: It makes sense to combine if you're already going to survey. Ask questions about recycling. I originally wanted a high school student but if you're going to do it before the next meeting, great.

Nell: We want to keep it short, winnow down the questions.

Dean: There seem like lots of overlap, ask if they compost, how they recycle, if they use compostable packaging.

Jen: Ask if they're willing to participate in a waste audit in the future. Try to assess volume.

Nell: Why I'm asking?

Dean: Tell them about what we're doing in RCWG.

Maggie: Do they compost kitchen produced waste? Do they provide compostable products for consumers? Do they have compostable containers / lids?

Jenn: Ask why not? Originally I was thinking about a student project that bundled energy questions along with waste practices.

Chuck: Tell them we'll probably come back in the future.

Maggie: Maybe we should do a survey using the tool, who should the survey go to?

Nell: You don't have to piggyback on us?

Jenn: I'm thinking about how to leave the door open for follow-up questions.

Nell: We just say that. There may be future visits.

Jenn: Are they open to providing an email address for follow-up?

Maggie: Let's start the dialog and keep the door open. What kind of containers do you use for carry out? Do you use plastic forks and spoons?

Maggie: We'll send Nell questions. Committee members send questions to me; I'll edit, forward to Nell.

Nell: Our inroad is as a Durham Committee. I can also mention RCGW.

Jenn, Student Apprentice Update:

Jenn: Our student was funded. 10 week apprenticeship. Starts at semester end officially. Chloe Gross will join meetings soon. She has Thursday 4pm conflicts for the next three weeks. I sent everyone her student statement from the application.

Dean: It's only one meeting; let's keep the date.

Chuck: We're meeting at this time to get the high school student.

Maggie: I don't want to be a mother. I'll remind her.

Jenn: I could follow up; I have no personal connection if that helps.

b. Other? N/A

V. Continuing to clarify our purpose - Jennifer Andrews

a. Jam Board and review of everyone's ideas and "sticky notes"

Maggie: I want to rephrase the questions before we get going on the Sticky Notes

Question number 2 reads:

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

Rewrote as:

Problem 2: We need to increase the diversion of food waste from entering the landfill.

Rewrote problem 3:

Problem 3: Need a cost effective and efficient place to send consumer mixed organic waste.

I said efficient. Mr. Fox driving down every road. Not efficient from my point of view.

Dean: My only note asked about the word “consumer.”

Jenn: The word “consumer” is very UNH centric. We’re challenged with consumer public-facing mixed waste. For UNH that’s our problem; we can’t control contamination in those streams. I don’t know if that’s true for the other contexts. The problem is exacerbated because that good, uncontaminated waste already goes to Kingman. Public stuff is a problem.

Maggie: So all the food from the dining hall kitchens is taken care of at Kingman?

Jenn: Yes. That’s taken care of. In retail locations, student union, dairy bar, football games, there’s food waste, compostable serving ware that Agricycle Energy in Maine picks that up. Similar mechanisms for catering.

Mary: Is that because it’s more than Kigman can handle?

Jenn: We can’t send contaminated things to Kingman. At retail we don’t have control. Compostable serving ware is harder to compost, slower to break down. They don’t want that at Kingman.

Nell: It sounds like everything’s covered.

Jenn: It’s only three of seven retail locations. We pay Agricycle extra to take it. We want composting in residence halls, academic buildings, all across campus. Can’t afford Agricycle for all that. Can’t afford the investments for compost bins, training. Dining hall is easy.

Nell: The compostable you can’t send to Kingman. It sounds like we need to process those.

Jenn: If we had the staff to turn the piles at Kingman and weren’t worried about contamination, then we could send it there. A big part of it is we have all this material that won’t break down and is contaminated.

Nell: Are those things suitable for #2, small scale composting?

Jenn: Probably not, that’s a big part of the challenge. It would be more efficient to message to say we can send it to an industrial facility that can weed out contaminants and can handle everything. That’s Agricycle, but that costs too much. Kingman takes the bulk of the material. Students want composting in the residence halls. We expect the volume to have a relatively low impact. It’s more about education and visibility, less about what gets diverted.

Dean: Is it just compost theater?

Jenn: No, we’d be training the students how to do it when they have their own household.

Mary: Do the residence halls do any compost challenges?

Jenn: Yes. Every year we have a few students who try to put composting in place in a residence hall, Volunteers pick out contamination. It generally never continues long term.

Jenn: The dining pays students to drive compost to Kingman three times per week.

Nell: On your rewording of goal three I think there needs to be words about transporting and collecting compost.

Jenn: I agree. That's why I've been thinking about small scale versus big scale features. It might be a different system for collecting and transporting one rather than the other. It's a different loop if we're thinking about it not centralized than pretty centralized.

Nell: I was thinking about transportation today. What if we find farmers willing to receive material -- how do we get it there?

Maggie: It's been really helpful to listen to Jen. I don't know if the Oyster River kitchen staff is preparing clean food waste. We have the same issues of contamination when food is brought from home. The issue of contamination is huge. Do we try to start to work with contaminant free kitchen stuff? Consumer stuff is the sticky wicket for all of us.

Mary: Restaurants in Durham can control in their kitchen; they can't control what's going into the cans. Kitchen waste could go to Kingman without being examined again. Family stuff needs more processing.

Jenn: Kigman might possibly have more capacity. Waiting till semester ends to engage COLSA. Their staff at Kingman farm has been cut. We would need to fund a half time FTE to manage the composting. We proposed that last year but COVID stopped that. The limiting factors are contamination and staff to manage. For years it worked fine; there are seagull problems now that the piles aren't composting fast enough due to staff reduction.

Nell: I was walking my lab out there. Off in the center of one row was one section of fresh vegetables that my dog ate.

Jenn: Must be a fresh delivery. Hopefully with COLSA involved we might revisit those questions. There's a great new Dean there. There was some research indicating some compostable service ware might have PFAS chemicals in it, that's a concern. There's a lot of caution about accepting things not straight up kitchen or farm waste for Kingman?

Mary: Is compost a single stream? With all the different products in there?

Maggie: It seems to me that problem 3 has a part A and a part B. Part A for Oyster River is needing that cost effective and efficient place for compost from the kitchen waste. Part B is where to send the consumer mixed waste.

Dean: We're all going to have a contamination problem; we have to figure out how to deal with it.

Jenn: There definitely are feedstock streams that are less apt to be contaminated. Is there value in tackling those separately? Carving out a specific solution for those? Do we want a solution that works for both?

Mary: There is value. Volume is a lot higher coming out of kitchens. That's where most of the waste is.

Jenn: One research question is to explore that. It's an anecdotal story. Let's do some of these waste audits and see what the volume of compostable waste in various contexts is. How much more could Kingman take? I don't know these numbers.

Maggie: What would happen if Durham agreed to take Oyster River and kitchen food to Kingman? We're all struggling with consumer contamination. It's such a drain to decontaminate.

Nell: I've been volunteering at Durham Transfer Station to reduce contamination -- it's a never ending problem. People throw whatever into the plastic recycling, entire toys.

Dean: Wishful recycling is a big problem.

Jenn: That's why I started with problem 1. We could try to reduce the contamination by getting people to compost perfectly. If we were spending that energy anyway, we can have more impact teaching people to use reusable containers. That's part of why at UNH we keep coming back to problem 1. It seems difficult to get people to comply enough to get an uncontaminated stream.

Nell: Folks are already oriented to think about composting on one level.

Maggie: It's 5pm. I find this fascinating. It's a really good exercise to talk this out, to get clear on what the problems are. We're learning about each other and the problems from all our perspectives.

Nell: I had a meeting with Richard Reine, Durham DPW director and Sam Hewitt, Buildings & Grounds Foreman. They asked: Is this something Durham residents are asking for or is this something we're trying to convince them to do? We don't have a big outcry in the town for composting, not an overwhelming demand. That's a contrast to UNH students.

Mary: That's why I was more biased to problem 2. I'm worried we don't have the volume. Could Durham or restaurant kitchens work with UNH to provide other residents who want to compost? Do residents want to have containers in their sink, to collect waste in winter? They don't have time.

Nell: If we reword the problems this comment might not apply. We thought goal 2 and 3 were both worthwhile; we could make them short term goals and long term goals of a single problem.

Maggie: We should continue to articulate these problems so we all feel comfortable with the wording before we do the Sticky Note exercise. If you find yourself waking up in the middle of the night and want to be a compost nerd, feel free to work on the wording.

Nell: Maggie will send me survey questions, too.

Maggie: There are more questions we could ask; let's start building a relationship.

Dean: Contamination is addressed in the book (Community Scale Composting Systems)

Maggie: Dean will give a report on contamination next meeting.

Chuck: I have been talking to different farms, asking how they might be involved in the whole composting thing. At LSC last Tuesday we discussed trying to get Lee back onto the Strafford Regional Planning Commission. RCWG mentioned we could work with them. We're working on getting Lee back in.

VI. Next meeting date

Maggie can't be here next week. Mary can't either.

Jenn: I can't make May 6.

Next meeting: **Tuesday, May 4, 4:00 pm**

Maggie: Check on UNH intern, Evy.

Jenn: Chloe can't make it then.

VII. New Business N/A

VIII. Adjourn 5:12 pm

Respectively submitted,

Dean Rubine