

Regional Composting Working Group Meeting Minutes
Thursday May 20, 2021 3 PM

I. Call to Order 3:03 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), Evy Ashburner (ORCSD), Chloe Gross (UNH Sustainability Institute)

Members absent: Chuck Cox (Lee Sustainability Advisory Committee)

Public Present: N/A

I. Approval of minutes from May 4, 2021

Jen move Dean 2nd, roll call vote 5-0

II. Introductions

Chloe Gross introduced herself.

Chloe: I am a UNH student working with Jenn Andrews on the organic composting part of the Working Group, doing research. I will be a sophomore in the fall, an Environmental Conservation and Sustainability major.

Evy Ashburner introduced herself.

Evy: I'm Evy Ashburner, junior at Oyster River High School. I've worked with Maggie many years, in the ORHS Sustainability Club. I'm excited to be part of this project as part of the youth community.

Maggie: Evy's been working on the launch of the Sustainability Club's compost initiative.

Other committee members introduced themselves.

III. Public comment N/A

IV. Updates

a. Madbury rep? N/A

b. Nell Neal, restaurant survey

Nell: Just to catch Chloe and Evy up, the IWMAC in Durham was looking at possible goals. We thought about trying to have some sort of ordinance, maybe no Styrofoam containers in town. We were going to ask restaurants what they use. Simultaneously this committee was going to also focus more in-depth about how restaurants handle the food waste, who does the

waste hauling, do you compost? The committee (IWMAC) was thinking of asking a single introductory question, but decided they would not; we will let you do it. We may use the information that's collected down the road in a try to introduce the Styrofoam ban.

Maggie: We want these questions to be designed for restaurants and the questions be the same in Durham and Lee. Even though Lee's restaurant population is not as varied, both towns have grocery stores as Dean pointed out. In terms of process, the questions have to be designed and the LSC wants to see and approve those.

Dean: They were wary about sending it up the chain without seeing it first. I had agreed to make the Lee Town Administrator aware of the coming survey at our last RCWG meeting. At our LSC meeting they said I shouldn't have done that, I should have brought it to them.

Maggie: Will Durham IWMAC send it up the flagpole?

Nell: If its Chloe's work it's not going to be a Durham survey, it will be a UNH survey.

Maggie: Will the LSC still need to recommend that to the board if it is a UNH study?

Dean: They wanted to see the questions before deciding if and how to run it up the flagpole.

Nell: We should run it by Durham Town Administrator Selig and Durham Public Works, not for permission but for awareness.

Jenn: There might be more participation if it was framed as something the town was encouraging local businesses to do. I'm working with Todd Selig on other things; there've been conversations about surveying businesses about energy, conservation, so maybe include some energy questions as well. I'm also in conversation with Todd. I don't know if you prefer it to come through your committee or UNH, what's better.

Nell: I'm happy to have an appointment with Todd and run it by him and ask for his guidance.

Jenn: We're slated to have a meeting on the energy side of things next Monday afternoon. I could mention it, see if Todd wants a meeting or just email review.

Maggie: Are you asking for the town to endorse it? Support it?

Jenn: It's a conversation. Is either possible, is one way better? Even if it's as simple as putting it in the weekly newsletter or chamber of commerce / business development person to share it.

Nell: If any businesses are alarmed or concerned they'll call Todd so he needs to know about it.

Maggie: It would make more sense to come forth as a student project at UNH that is supported by the town. We need to ask whether Todd wants to see the questions ahead of time.

Jenn: It's fine for everyone to see the questions ahead of time. Questions have to be reviewed by UNH's Internal Review Board. Proper protocols. Need to have direct questions ASAP.

Maggie: Most of the restaurants in Lee are chains.

Dean: Yes; LSC suggested that besides a direct survey corporate websites might be another source of information on corporate waste practices.

Jenn: I'll bring it up with Todd on Monday and share an email with you all.

Dean: How do we make progress?

Jenn: It might make sense to map all the data points we need, which ones make sense to do via survey versus observations / web research. Could share docs. Have everybody throw everything they think might go in there and then refine.

Nell: Some of you have already sent questions to me,

Maggie: I don't have any more additional questions.

Jem: Let's send them around to everybody, and everyone can add one. Evy and Chloe too.

Dean: Can we add Evy and Chole to our email chain?

Committee: Yes

Jenn: I love the idea of looking at grocery stores (in addition to restaurants).

Maggie: Hannaford has a sustainability initiative.

Evy: I'm familiar with sustainability practices at Market Basket; there's none. As for produce, I have very little faith that there's a sustainability policy. It doesn't seem to be a top concern for the company. There have been management changes lately.

Evy: I was at ORHS Sustainability Club and we started giving out compost bins this year. Our goal was to create a compost system not centered only around the cafeteria. We know from our audit we found 700 pounds of organic waste disposed of in the classroom. Yesterday we handed out bins. Teachers are really excited. Some have bought liner bags. This is a test run; we'll revise our plan for next year based on the results.

Jenn: Is the report and data online?

Evy: I'll send a link.

Maggie: It is on the Oyster River School District website. That's Kendall Gray's report. The study was interrupted by the onset of the pandemic so there's some extrapolating in that number (700 pounds). Click on School Board / Board Appointed Committees / Sustainability /

[Greenhouse Gas Inventory Report](#) and [Kendall Gray's ORCSD Waste Management Audit and Survey Report](#).

Jenn: What's the plan for collecting the compost?

Evy: We have divided the school into zones; each zone has one or two big compost bins. Our school has project rooms between classrooms for student work; we're deciding if smaller compost bins will go in project rooms or in classrooms. The plan is for teachers to empty the small bin into the big zone bin as needed, then clean. Teachers volunteered. Janitors will be in charge of the large bins. The waste goes to Mr. Fox along with the cafeteria waste.

Dean: Liner bags? Our experience in Lee is they didn't help much with the mess.

Evy: It came up yesterday. One teacher said they're bringing their own compost bin from home, another talked about lining their bin with paper towels. We're discussing right now how we want to use our leftover money, thinking about bags. Next year it would be in the school budget. This is our test run.

Maggie: Classroom compost is mostly fruit.

Evy: Re fundraising, I wasn't a huge part; I mainly run the social media. They just sent out an announcement asking for donations. We sent out a newsletter. Some emails to families in the district.

Maggie: We got a lot of money raised that way.

Evy: Once the janitors take it it gets combined with the cafeteria compost and goes to Mr. Fox.

Jenn: Have there been conversations or concerns about contamination in the bins?

Evy: We're always worried about contamination with high school students, lots of lazy throwing things out without thinking about it. We spent a lot of time making posters and paper and stickers around compost bins, which are bright white with a secure lid, different from a trash can. We made it more effort for someone to put landfill waste into the compost bin than to put food waste into the trash. We're not super worried about major bins with closed lid and large signage. There are other landfill bins near the combined bins, with a clear difference between the two. We hope we solve the problem with conversations.

Jenn: Is it better to put all the bins next to each other or to put compost closer to where people might be eating?

Evy: Our school is divided into a T section, a core, and labs. The core area will hold the large bins. Home economics and cooking will have the biggest bin. Previously that waste had been landfilled. There's a landfill and recycling bin on the first floor; not sure about the third floor.

Maggie: Hats off to all of you and the work you're doing. In addition to trying to understand the eating habits of teachers and whether teachers allow eating in their classroom. It's all about human behavior. The Sustainability Club is trying to understand. It does a good job engaging the teachers.

c. Other? N/A

V. Mike Nork, NHDES- follow-up? Action points?

Dean: Per the WG's request last meeting I emailed Mike Nork at the NHDES Solid Waste Management Bureau to update him on our progress. The LSC met with Mike Nork in December 2020 and many of us here attended, which led to the formation of this working group. We promised Mike that we would keep him informed; I pointed him at the approved minutes. I'll include our correspondence at the end of the minutes.

He mentioned he was working on HB 413, which would among other things require the NHDES to finally rewrite the municipal compost rules, by September 2021, within our timeframe. At this point it's passed the house and seems likely to pass the senate. A similar bill was vetoed by Gov. Sununu last year as part of an omnibus veto, but Mike seems pretty hopeful about the prospect of passage this time.

http://gencourt.state.nh.us/bill_status/Results.aspx?q=1&txtbillnumber=hb413&txtsessionyear=2021

Jem: It can only help to have better, clearer standards that are consistent.

Maggie: Will the LSC write a letter of support for the bill?

Dean: We've haven't talked about it.

Jenn: I could ask UNH if they want to write letters as support.

Nell: IWMAC doesn't do anything like that.

Maggie: Thanks Dean, interesting email from Mike.

VI. Survey questions

VII. Data collection; what do we need? Who will collect it; timing of data collection

Wrapped these above.

VIII. Deadline for our recommendations

Maggie: I can put something together for our next meeting. Do we need more structure?

Dean: I like having a deadline so I know when I'm late.

Jenn: My hope is part of the work with Chloe this summer leads to recommends based on the data that we could put into a report that would be input to this group; based on that there may be preliminary recommendation, things to explore in this order; partnerships with vendors, opportunities at UNH, here are some models to learn from. All I'm trying to say is that Chloe's analysis will help us get to our question of what's our focus, what's second and third? Here's where this group or a bigger group should focus, more in-depth recommendations or projects.

Dean: It seems like we could produce something preliminary in September, with us or maybe an expanded group following up.

Jenn: There's a lot of stakeholders at UNH I'd like to bring into the conversations once we have that kind of base.

Maggie: Here's a good pamphlet called **The Dirt on Compost** from the Central Vermont Solid Waste District. For Lee and Durham in particular, from a consumer point of view it's really good. It's a pamphlet: What is compost, getting started, what goes in, what goes out, eight types of compost, managing your pile, how to use compost, what about animals, helpful advice.

Dean: Online?

Chloe: I'll share the link in chat.

https://www.cvswwmd.org/uploads/6/1/2/6/6126179/dirt_on_composting.pdf

Jenn: Maybe for next time, start thinking about data we need. Let's start taking an inventory of what already exists that Chloe can work from, so we know what gaps we need to fill. I put a link to a template of data points. There's a separate qualitative one maybe helpful for the survey. For next time, let's start walking through what data sources we already have, what we have for Durham and Lee and ORCSD. Evy / Kendall's report for Oyster River. Other data points that aren't in that report?

Evy: It's just going to cover the high school.

Jenn: Let's think about what data is already out there so we can figure out what we're trying to do this summer. Where we're succeeding and where we can improve.

Dean: Everyone can come to the meeting with the data they already have on waste practices in their organizations.

Jenn: Or send it ahead of time.

Dean: Are we talking about recycling too?

Jenn: It depends on what data's available.

Dean: I have plenty of Lee data.

Nell: The IWMAC decided to continue the compost challenge. We'll divide the school year into thirds and do it three times, not in the summer. Beef up advertising, PR work, explore possibility of putting compost collecting bins around town at places other than transfer station. Some folks said they didn't want to drive to the transfer station to compost. We found out Ray LaRoche owns a farm off Bennett Rd. and Durham takes all their leaf waste to his farm. Putting together farmers, leaves and compost.

Dean: Chuck has been talking to farmers about three roles; sources of input, users of the finished compost, and sites to compost.

Nell: Ray just retired from Durham Public Works after many years.

IX. Next meeting date:

Evy, Chloe is done with classes. Jenn: I have other commitments, Tuesday or Thursday afternoon. Evy: Thursdays are good for me. Jenn: Later than 3.

Next meeting Thursday June 3, 4pm.

X. New Business N/A

XI. Adjourn

4:09 pm

Respectively submitted,

Dean Rubine

Email exchange with Mike Nork, NHDES

Subject: Oyster River Regional Compost Update

From: Dean Rubine <dandbww@gmail.com>

Sent: May 9, 2021, 11:34 AM

To: Michael, Maggie

Hi Mike. It's Dean Rubine from the Lee Sustainability Committee here. Perhaps you remember we had a great meeting last December when you walked us and some nearby groups through the issues surrounding municipal compost in NH. We promised to keep you informed about what we were up to; that's the purpose of this email.

Since the December meeting the local groups have formed the Regional Compost Working Group, RCWG. We have members from the Lee Sustainability Committee, the Durham Integrated Waste Management Advisory Committee, the Oyster River (School District)

Sustainability Committee, and the UNH Sustainability Institute. We've been keeping detailed minutes here; they're intermingled with the LSC minutes; this committee's minutes are marked "Regional Compost Working Group."

We've been meeting once or twice a month, trying to come up with a process that ends with a recommendation to our respective governing bodies. We're currently about to survey large sources of food waste in the area, mostly restaurants, to get an idea of how much food waste we could reasonably expect.

It occurred to us it would be much easier to get restaurants to participate in composting if there was a commercial food waste disposal ban like in Massachusetts since I think 2014. We were dubious about the possibility of that sort of thing in New Hampshire, but we'd thought we'd ask what you thought about that. We also want to express to you our support for such a ban, in case any legislators ever ask you.

Thank you so much for your help getting us off the ground, Mike. We'll be in touch from time to time, hopefully eventually with an application for a permit and a waiver to compost here in Oyster River. Please feel free to monitor our minutes, and if you have any comments please share them with me and I'll relay them to the group. Thanks again.

Very truly yours,

Dean Rubine

Regional Compost Working Group

From: Nork, Michael

Sent: May 10, 2021, 10:20 AM

To: me, Maggie

Hi Dean, thank you for checking in. Glad you guys are continuing to move forward with your goals.

Lately, a lot of my time has been devoted to HB 413 (and anticipating its passage) – I don't think the bill had been introduced when I participated in the Lee Sustainability meeting last December, but HB 413 would establish a September 30th deadline for NHDES to adopt updated composting facility rules. This is a very aggressive deadline, but we will do our best to comply.

As for a disposal ban on food waste, I am not aware that NHDES has an official position. States like VT, MA, CT, RI, NY and NJ have adopted these sort of bans with the hope that banning disposal of food waste would spur development of alternative organics management infrastructure (e.g., composting facilities, anaerobic digesters, food rescue organizations, etc.). I believe that a ban can help incentivize infrastructure development. However, a ban combined

with other incentive programs can be much more effective. For example, MA has put a lot of effort into providing grants and low-interest loan programs targeted at development of organics management infrastructure. As a result, MA has seen a big increase in management capacity within recent years. Combine all of that with a robust education/outreach program, and you increase the impact even further. So, my point is that a ban by itself is one thing, but a multi-pronged approach is often far more effective. Of course, doing so in NH would require investment of state resources that do not currently exist.

I hope this perspective is helpful. I certainly encourage you to explore the topic further with your state representatives/senator.

Best regards,

Mike

Michael Nork
Environmental Analyst
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From: Dean Rubine <dandbww@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, May 9, 2021 11:34 AM
To: Nork, Michael <Michael.A.Nork@des.nh.gov>
Cc: Maggie Morrison <mmorrison@orcsd.org>
Subject: Oyster River Regional Compost Update

Thank you for your thoughtful reply, Mike. I will certainly share it with the group.

I was unaware of HB 413 -- that's good to know. I looked it up and was bemused by this strikeout, which I presume is current law.

The general court declares that the goal of the state, by the year 2000, is to achieve a 40 percent minimum weight diversion of solid waste landfilled or incinerated on a per capita basis. Diversion shall be measured with respect to changes in waste generated and subsequently landfilled or incinerated in New Hampshire. The goal of weight diversion may be achieved through source reduction, recycling, reuse, and composting, or any combination of such methods

We should have gotten this done twenty years ago. I guess that's when the recycling happened in a big way; the compost part was ignored.

- Dean

From: Nork, Michael

Sent: May 10, 2021, 11:37 AM

There's a lot more to that story. Roughly 20 years ago state budget cuts also began chipping away at NHDES's solid waste programs.

The strikeout you are referring to is part of a proposed amendment to HB 413, which adds language about updating the solid waste reduction goal in RSA 149-M.

Did you see the full text of the bill?

http://gencourt.state.nh.us/bill_status/billText.aspx?sy=2021&id=636&txtFormat=pdf&v=current
t See page 3, line 4 for part about composting rules