**Solid Waste Committee**

**January 6, 2021 Minutes**

**Present:** Bryan Benson, Susan Brown, Cathy Curtis, Lisa Wesel, Susan Drucker, Patrick McDonough, Tessa Kingsley, Michael Smith, Paul Denis, Martha Cushing, Betsy Steen, Craig Caffrey, David Berry, Peter Lewis, Ecomaine representative Lissa Bittermann, “KKW WD”, Seth Berry.

**Call to Order:** Cathy Curtis calls the meeting to order at 5:30.

**Amendments to the Agenda:** Cathy Curtis comments that she has reached out to the Select Board to clarify whether we should only be considering two sites for a recycling facility (as per their note in the town’s January Newsletter).

**Approval of the Minutes from 12/9/20:** Susan Drucker (secretary) notes that she will attach a copy of the recycling surveyas an Addendum in the final draft. Lisa Wesel motions to approve the minutes with the addition of the addendum; Patrick McDonough seconds; all approve.

**Old Business**

**- Ecomaine Presentation by Lissa Bittermann, Business Development Manager:**

Ecomaine is a non-profit quasi-municipal corporation that takes trash, recycling, and food waste from 69 towns and cities in Maine and New Hampshire. Ecomaine recycles 35,000 tons of recyclables a year, and provides educational resources and outreach to member communities. Ecomaine’s facilities include a single-sort recycling facility, a waste-to-energy power plant, and a 274 acre landfill/ashfill. Contracts with towns can range from 1 - 20 years and can cover trash and/or recycling streams. Contracts include a profit-sharing component for each member town. Ecomaine also accepts and markets pre-baled materials from member communities and communities receive a majority portion of the earned revenue. Ecomaine accepts glass. Ecomaine’s waste-to-energy incinerator reduces solid waste material by 90% and includes numerous safeguards for pollution control, both at the incinerator and at the ashfill. Penalties for a community’s materials’ contamination rates are tiered from 5% ($35 additional fee per load), up to 25% ($65 additional fee per load); after 25%, materials are charged as Solid Waste. Detailed contamination data is provided to each town each month and educational resources/outreach to communities is available anytime. Lissa Bittermann will put together a costs/revenue historical look-back for recyclable materials. (For more information on Ecomaine, see the additional file posted alongside the January 6th Minutes on the town’s Solid Waste Committee’’s website page.)

Patrick McDonough states (post-presentation) that he has contacts in North Haven and Vinalhaven (towns that use Ecomaine) whom he will get in touch with to learn additional details.

**- Review any information from Select Board Meeting as it pertains to committee:**

Cathy Curtis notes that the timing of our meetings has fallen out of synch with the Select Board’s meetings and asks if the Committee wants to revise our calendar to be able to go back to meeting during the same week as the Select Board; agreement that it is easier to keep communication timely if both groups meet the same week.

Cathy Curtis reiterates that she has sent a note to the Select Board for clarification about facility location considerations (see “Amendments to the Agenda” above).

Susan Drucker asks if anyone knows why the Times Record was able to print an article continaing specific information about the town’s negotiations with David Berry concerning the barn lease the day after the Select Board meeting at which Lisa Wesel had asked for the same information but had not been given an answer. Martha Cushing responds that she believes it had to do with privacy issues as the town had sent David Berry a certified letter with those specifics which he had not received yet. Lisa Wesel and Susan Brown believe that if the Board came out of executive session with a vote to send a letter, that that is when it becomes part of the public record, not after the letter is received. Michael Smith asks why the committee is even discussing this; he states that what the Select Board does has nothing to do with the Committee’s tasks. Susan Drucker asnwers that while she would like to move on, too, that communication between the Board and the Committee continues to be problemtic and that while some Select Board details will not be relevant to the Committee, some will be, and that we shouldn’t have to struggle to get relevant information. Cathy Curtis suggests that when we get to discussing costs and location, some Select Board information will become relevant, but that there are other parts in the process that we need to take care of first. Michael Smith reiterates that we’ve been tasked to create a program, not determine a site; he continues that once you determine the program, then you can determine what the size requirements are, but until you know what the program will look like, talking about other concerns is “ridiculous”. Tessa Kingsley agrees with Michael Smith, and looks forward to getting survey results.

**- Survey Update:**

Cathy Curtis updates that the survey has come out in the January town newsletter, and that it is live on the town website, and linked through Bowdoinham Friends and Family. Patrick McDonough noted that there didn’t seem to be a limit as to how many times a person could fill out the survey. Brief discussion about what could be done about that; no resolution.

**- Revisit Task of Committee and review our role in current affairs of the barn lease and the current town solid waste offerings:**

Cathy Curtis reviews tasks of the Committee (see Addendum 1).

Cathy Curtis asks Michael Smith to review what budget numbers the Committee might want to look at. Michael Smith states that we would want to know what equipment is available, if there’s any equipment we might need to improve the program. He continues that there are numbers we could be looking at now (e.g., power requirements) instead of waiting until we review the survey. He adds that “every time we have a two week meeting we talk about the freaking barn and the contract with the town and how everything’s unfair; it’s not why we’re here”.

Cathy Curtis clarifies that the Finance Committee will need our numbers by the third week in March, before the Select Board can review them in April.

David Berry asks whether the town will be able to get firm figures for a new building before March and the June town meeting, and adds that until those numbers are available, there won’t be a way to compare the actual costs of the two facilities. Cathy Curtis agrees that much of this process has been a moving target so far, but she hopes that staying in touch with Eli Rubin for financial information, and with the town for what decisions they have made about the two facilities, should help us move forward.

**- News Articles and Correspondence:**

Because much of this topic relates to the barn lease and information that has mostly already been covered, Cathy Curtis suggests we simply note that the Committee is aware of the news articles and correspindence.

Lisa Wesel asks that we discuss Michael Smith remark on Facebook that the article she and Susan Brown had written for The Cryer about the recycling program was not approved ot discussed by the committee. She said that although there was not enough time for Committee members to approve a final draft due to the need to meet the Cryer’s deadline, that we did discuss many details about the article in our last two meetings. She states that Michal Smith’s negative comments are working at cross-purposes to the committee’s work; she believes that it is fine to disagree about issues during meetings, but that members of the committee shouldn’t publicly critisize the work of other committee members, especially in a facebook forum where she could not reposnd due to our agreed policy in regard to FOAA rules that only one committee member should comment on any given post; she sees his public comments as unhelpful to the Committee’s work. Tessa Kingsley notes that we have spoken about this problem before and had agreed negative public comments were unhelpful. Cathy Curtis notes that she has communicated with Michael Smith about FOAA rules this week. Lisa Wesel responds that she was offended at his public implications that the article was written without Committee approval when he was at the last two meetings where we discussed the need for writing the article. Susan Brown adds that the point of the article was to encourage residents’ participation in the survey. Michael Smith states that his objection to the article was that it gave the impression that it was approved by the Committee, and then “other people used that article to spread their agenda”. He notes that the town has no social media protocols. Lisa Wesel responds that as a courtesy, committee members should not be undermining other member’s work, She adds that she attributed the authorship of the article to two members of the Committee as an effort at disclosure, that it would have been disingenuous to not state that they were members of the Committee. Tessa Kingsley adds that the Committee agreed that the article should be written. Michael Smith responds that “…we can agree to disagree, and I apologize if it offended you; next topic.”

Peter Lewis comments that he understands that there can be frustrations with a lot of things that are said on facebook, but that it’s been 45 minutes since the Ecomaine presentation and the committee hasn’t spoken about anything to do with recycling, “not to discredit to the work that you guys are doing, but it’s kind of part of the problem that Michael has been saying, that there is no focus on the recycling program — the focus has been ‘how do we get back in the barn’ since June’”. Lisa Wesel and Susan Brown object to Peter Lewis’s summary; Lisa Wesel states that it is “unfair and untrue to say that”. Lisa Wesel adds that one of the Committee’s first tasks was solving the problem of how to reopen the barn with Covid 19 restrictions (See Addendum 3), but that task changed when the engineer’s report mandated the barn be closed; she states that we have been trying to do the work but the nature of our task has changed almost monthly, and “that is what had been the problem”. Peter Lewis states that he gave a direction in the first meeting to look at the program, and “the last thing you would have heard from me is ‘look at how we get back into the barn’”; he goes on to say that there were Covid 19 issues but that he stated at the first meeting that those issues were resolved by Bryan Benson, and this Committee’s focus was supposed to just be the recycling program. Cathy Curtis states that we didn’t get any change in directives until September and that that is reflected in every agenda. Peter Lewis disagrees with that. He points out that we still haven’t talked about recycling in this meeting. Lisa Wesel points out that the Select Board’s note in the town newsletter has continued to re-set the Committee’s agenda: e.g., limiting the facility location to two specific options: the barn or a new facility, when we had previously been told any and all options were supposed to be open. Peter Lewis points out that he is only one member of a five member board and that he is no longer the chair of the Board, and if we have issues with the Board “please take them up with the Board as a whole…”.

Cathy Curtis asks if there are other items on the agenda that we want to prioritize before we close out for the night. Susan Drucker asks if we should talk about the timeframe of getting information ready for the Finance Committee by March; that there were previous concerns that there wouldn’t be enough time to put all the financial information together; she believes we could do it if we were able to get a handle on what information we actually need. She notes that she is still confused as to whether the Committee is fully responsible for providing numbers for building a new facility and repairing/improving the barn, and that she is confused how we are supposed to generate numbers for the barn if we are continually told to stop talking about always-changing barn details. Tessa Kingsley believes that the financial piece is more under the town and Select Board’s jurisdiction, not ours. Peter Lewis states that the reason the Board formed the Committee was to do all aspects of this work, including permitting costs, codes requirements, barn repair costs, new facility costs, what roadblocks there might be, etc. and then reporting that data back to the Board. Cathy Curtis says that that is conflicting information: to be told we need to create those financials but also being told we shouldn’t be spending time discussing the barn’s lease: “those financials directly relate to the kind of report you’re asking us to create.” Peter Lewis says that that is “completely different than the question that was asked”, that he was responding to the question about gathering financials and “those can be done as part of your work.” He continues that the three things the Committee needs to be covering is “what do we want to do, how much is it going to cost, and where can we do it”. Cathy Curtis responds that we are moving forward with that with the survey. Peter Lewis just wants to be clear that gathering financials is not something that the town will do for us. Susan Brown asks for clarification as to whether we are supposed to be contacting architects and contractors to get estimates; Peter Lewis answers that he thinks we should have another group discussion with the Board to determine how that process is going to happen, but “we aren’t even there yet”; he adds that the town can “help point you in the right direction”, but the town isn’t going to do the work for us. Continued discussion about the tight timeframe to get that much information to the Finance Committee before the third week in March. Susan Brown points out with the timeframe problem that we might need to add a third option: “in good conscience” we can’t recommend a permanent option if we don’t have enough data. Susan Drucker adds that the Select Board’s note in the January newsletter stating that details would be ready for a vote at the June town meeting puts the Committee in a no-win position. Peter Lewis says that the note was “optimistic”, but it can always be updated in the next newsletter, depending on where we are; he adds that maybe there can be some information ready for town meeting and that municipal undertakings always take time.

**New Business**

**- Determine what other information the committee needs and how to gather that information.**

Cathy Curtis says that we need a little more clarity from the Select Board. She suggests that what would be helpful to get some forward momentum at our next meeting would be to assign tasks around what financial and logistical information we will need to gather. She confirms that Patrick McDonough will be contacting Vinalhaven and North Haven about their costs with Ecomaine, and asks that Bryan Benson begin thinking about what it might look like if we were to sign up with Ecomaine, and/or if there were any other options. Bryan Benson believes that Ecomaine wouldn’t be that much different than Casella: it’s still a single-stream service and we’d certainly be looking at higher contamination fees; he notes that a good day for us right now falls under their highest rate. Cathy Curtis asks if Ecomaine and Casella numbers could be put side-by-side. Tessa Kingsley asks if there are any other recycling services in the state; Bryan Benson says that Ecomaine and Casella are the major players. Discussion about trash tags and the Solid Waste and Recycling budget; Michael Smith wants to make it clear that recycling isn’t free and is increasing ten to twenty percent every year.

**Public Comments:** No public comments.

**Next Agenda**: Continue addressing our stated tasks; update on the survey; ideally begin working on the financial pieces, including identifying what those pieces will be and assigning subcommittee tasks. Susan Drucker requests that members give some thought as to what those pieces might be before we meet again.

**Next Meeting:** Wednesday, January 13th at 5:30.

**Adjournment:** Cathy Curtis adjourns the meeting at 7:30.

**Addendum 1:**

Revised Task of Committee - 10/28/20:

Vision for Future of Solid Waste & Recycling Programs.

a. What services does the Town want?  
b. What is needed to offer these services

c. How can these services be offered?  
d. What is the cost to offer these services?

**Addendum 2:**

Original Task of Committee (6/30/20):

“Tony Lewis, Select Board Chair, tasks the Committee to the following:

a. Overseeing protocols for keeping the Recycling Barn open during the pandemic.

b. Containing expenses for the recycling program and problem-solving curbside pick-up contamination.

c. Addressing the condition of the barn after the Select Board has reviewed inspections and reports and discussed their findings with David Berry.”