Solid Waste Committee Meeting

May 5, 2021 Minutes

**Present:** Cathy Curtis, Bryan Benson, Lisa Wesel, Patrick McDonough, Michael Smith, Susan Drucker, Martha Cushing, PWorks, Paul Denis, Christine Egan, Bryanna Denis, David Berry, Betsy Steen, Erica Bayley

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

**Amendments to the Agenda:** No amendments to the agenda.

**Approval of the Minutes from April 21**: Patrick McDonough motions to approve the minutes; Lisa Wesel seconds; all approve.

**Old Business**

**Casella Presentation**: Erica Bayley, company representative, opens her report saying “Casella is really big into sustainability, and in moving the materials that people make; we are not the ones who make the material, we move that type of material.” Casella moves two-thirds of Maine’s materials, and in 2019 Casella listed “470 employees, 250 waste collection vehicles, 10 hauling companies, 15 transfer stations, 2 recycling facilities, 2 liquid waste collection facilities, 1 composting facility, 1 closed landfill with energy recovery, and 1 operating landfill.” (She notes that the state-owned Juniper Ridge Landfill no longer takes any household trash.) (Secretary’s note: this list implies that Casella own a landfill; they do not.) Casella hauls 1,897 tons of municipal waste, recycling, and construction debris each day, and subs out 2,479 additional tons to third-party haulers. They move 1,249 tons of ash, sludge and contaminated soils; they “manage” 1.46 million tons of material annually in Maine. They “respect the Hierarchy of Solid Waste in Maine” (e.g.,Waste Reduction, Reuse, Resource Recycling, Composting, Volume Reduction, landfilling). Casella keeps 95% of their recovered recyclable materials volume in North America. They work collaboratively with “various domestic end sites” to keep their “closed loop” sustainability model. They have “a fantastic reputation out there.” Casella recently established sustainability goals for 2030 that pivot on “advancing a new circular economy designed to prevent waste, keep materials in use, and regenerate natural systems.” Along with a focus on “growing recycling, organics, and resource management services”, this will also include pursuing “landfill gas to energy, renewable natural gas, and solar opportunities” as well as decreasing fleet emissions. By 2030, Casella plans to recover 2 million tons from the disposal stream and double their renewable energy production “from Casella owned and partner facilities.” Closer to home, Bowdoinham’s trash and recycling is hauled to the Casella-owned West Bath Transfer Station; trash then goes to PERC (an independently owned Waste-to-Energy incinerator in Orrington) and the recycling goes to MRF (the Casella-owned Materials Recycling Facility in Lewiston). The Lewiston MRF serves 40 municipalities and over 3000 businesses. Casella also owns a facility in Scarborough which buys (and re-sells) baled materials. Casella accepts e-waste and organics (biosolids from wastewater plants, paper fiber from mills, ash from incinerators, and algefiber). Casella “supports” its customers’ waste reduction goals and initiatives; they provide “baseline waste generation reports” to their customers (“We report to Bowdoinham all the time on their waste stream”), and they can provide comparative data reports on customers’ reduction initiatives.

Questions to Erica Bayley from Committee members:

Q: (from Cathy Curtis) Are there any opportunities to improve or add to the services Bowdoinham uses? A: She is not sure what services we are looking for, but she “could definitely re-evalute some stuff with Bryan and Nicole and see what we could come up with.” She notes that she would have to work with the “Department of Public Works” (sic) because they’re “my partner in all this kind of thing.” She asks Bryan what he thinks; Bryan Benson answers that he didn’t realize Casella handled e-waste and would like to speak more about that with her.

Q: (from Cathy Curtis) Does it make sense for us to process certain things right in town and have it hauled? And what could be baled that would be to our benefit? And how could we compare costs? A: “Bryan and I have a fantastic relationship; he has reached out to me as things shift over there I know we’ll be working collaboratively on all that stuff, and baling…again, once things are settled…” She notes that she is currently “learning the markets”.

Q: (from Susan Drucker) What materials would she recommend we take out of our single-stream process if we were going to source separate? A: High density plastic and low density plastic. She notes that all materials have weight or volume requirements. Q: Does Casella have a form listing those requirements? A: “That’s an industry I’m learning about…and there’s a lot to it.” She says she can look into it. She notes that “direct hauls to end sites” have firm requirements, but that self-hauling baled materials to their Scarborough facility is an option. She comments that deciding how to approach things all comes down to time (how long accumulating and hauling takes) and affordability (the amount paid for the material vs. the costs incurred).

Q: (from Cathy Curtis) What is Casella doing with glass? A: Because there are no end users for glass, it is being used to cover the Juniper Ridge landfill; they are actively looking for new buyers, but because glass is so heavy, the solution has to be sustainable and affordable. Discussion about Bowdoinham’s decision to stop collecting glass; question as to whether that was a town decision or a Casella decision: Bryan Benson answers that it was a “joint decision…three years ago” and there haven’t been any new end site options since then.

Q: (from Lisa Wesel) What outreach or educational programs are available for municipalities? A: There are educational outreach programs available to schools, as well as “friendly” on-site audits of what residents are dropping off. Maine Recycle Week (which was ended is 2010) is being re-launched next November which will help re-energise the process and offer updated relevant information.

Q: (from Lisa Wesel) If these outreach programs are successful, doesn’t the monetary benefit go to Casella and not the municipality (e.g., if a town is successful in decontaminating their recycling, and if Casella charges the same regardless of contamination, wouldn’t clean loads allow Casella to spend less sorting time as well as provide a greater percentage of sellable materials)? A: (from Bryan Benson) “ An immediate benefit is that we wouldn’t be shipping nearly as often because it frees up space for the items that should be in there.” Erica Bayley notes that most contamination comes from curbside programs, not staffed facilities.

Q: (from Lisa Wesel) in regard to Reuse, is there anything that Casella specifically does for or with municipalities? A: Casella has a “great partnership with Goodwill”, with drop boxes at some of their facilities “to make it easier”.

Q: (from Susan Drucker) Do you have a list of what materials Casella accepts? A: Yes, “I can send that to Bryan.”

Q: (from Susan Drucker) What does it mean that Casella has 16 hauling companies? A: “…there are six different operations along the southern Maine footprint that have trucks parked with drivers there ready to go; we have facilities peppered into the southern Maine market to move material.”

Q: (from Susan Drucker) Casella doesn’t own a landfill or a waste-to-energy plant, so when you say Casella’s goals to reduce emissions include improving landfills and incinerators, how does that go together ? A: “Through our trucks’ emissions, and there are landfills that produce methane gas, that reduces GHGs (greenhouse gases) vs. landfills that don’t do anything with it, but Juniper Ridge is up to date with state stuff, so that is a methane producing landfill so it captures that kind of gas and it does reduce GHGs.”

Q: (from Lisa Wesel) Was keeping 95% of recycled goods’ end sites within North America a philosophy before China stopped collecting materials, or is it because there’s no place left to ship it? A: Industries can still ship materials out, although not necessarily to China. She doesn’t know what the percentages of kept goods were before China’s decision. She can find out.

Cathy Curtis thanks Erica Bayley for the presentation and asks if she could please send a copy of the presentation to the Committee. Erica Bayley says she will send a copy to Bryan.

Discussion of the presentation: Cathy Curtis thought that there was an emphasis on selling the company. Lisa Wesel thought that there was a lack of actual information that was useful to the Committee — that we learned about the company itself but not, for example, what materials Casella accepts or how changing markets might affect their services. Michael Smith states that that’s because “they’re a transfer station, they’re a business.” Betsy Steen agrees with Lisa Wesel.

**Review Any Information from the April 27th, 2021 Select Board meeting as it Pertains to the Committee**: Lisa Wesel reports that she spoke to the Board and that they “were very supportive.” She explained to them that we are currently very focused on collecting information and that we are specifically not trying to have the interim report have a point of view since we haven’t started that part of the process yet. She confirmed to the Board hat the next phase of our work will be to “come up with an actual recommendation.” Lisa Wesel reports that Jeremy Cluchey suggested that the Committee allow dissenting points of view in the final report if there isn’t consensus for a specific recommendation. Betsy Steen adds that Tom Walling opened a discussion about the Gift Shop and whether it could be held inside the barn; she notes that “Tony Lewis was quite fierce that the building is dangerous and that we have to wait until Darren has a letter from Helen Watts (engineer) saying she had inspected each floor…and can certify that each area is safe.” Cathy Curtis agrees that the Board wants the building’s safety confirmed in writing before they make a decision. Michael Smith agrees, and says that it’s “between the Select Board” and we should move on. Cathy Curtis adds that the Select Board re-clarified that the Committee does not need to calculate any costs for the program.

David Berry reports that Helen Watts re-visited the barn earlier that day and documented all three floors and found no overloading on any of the floors; she is going to recommend that the apartment issue be a non-issue. He believes she will be sending a letter to the town “tomorrow.” Michael Smith says that this “has nothing to do with this Committee right now and could we move on with the agenda, this is not a public hearing about the use of the barn.” David Berry explains that he “just thought it would be nice to share this information with the Committee.” Michael Smith answers that “you can during the Public Comments.” Susan Drucker objects that “that isn’t how we run our meetings…we allow Public Comment along the way, but yes, let’s move forward.”

**Updates from Bryan Benson**: Bulky Waste Day Update: Fees collected: $763.00; Weight of load: 5,220 lbs.; Disposal fee: $88.00 per ton delivered; Transportation time: between 1 - 1.5 hours average depending on scale traffic.

Lisa Wesel asks Bryan Benson if any residents came to peruse what was dropped off: Bryan Benson answers that one chair was taken away. Betsy Steen expresses disappointment that even though she and the Town Manager had agreed that the Solid Waste staff would set aside any useable wooden furniture for the Historical Society Yard Sale, nothing was set aside. Bryan Benson answers that there was only one item worth setting aside and that that had been taken. Betsy Steen said that there was a dresser already loaded in the truck when she got there which she pulled out of the truck; Bryan Benson responds that he can’t answer to that, he hadn’t seen it. She asks that on future Bulky Waste Days some provision be made to sort out useable items. Patrick McDonough comments that asking staff to sort through content would be a burden. Betsy Steen reiterates that because she and Nicole Briand had agreed that it was something that could happen but it didn’t, she was dismayed about both the missed opportunity and the lack of concern for Reuse as an operational goal. Cathy Curtis suggests that aiming at better communication for the next collection day would be a good way to move forward.

**Revisit Committee’s and Member’s Expectations for Social Media posts**: Cathy Curtis reports that there was a request to re-visit the Committee’s protocol for social media posts. Her understanding was that if there was a post about Recycling, that only one Committee member would respond, that multiple members responding could be termed as a non-publicly available meeting, which we are not allowed to do. Cathy Curtis notes that there was additional concern about members posting personal opinions without clarifying that they were not speaking for the Committee. Lisa Wesel asks if anyone remembers if there was any reference to posting personal opinions during the FOAA training. She notes that we are citizens, too, but she wonders if there had been any guidance on how to toggle between citizenship and committee work. Michael Smith says that there is nothing in the town ordinances or town policy. Lisa Wesel says that it would not be town policy, but a state-wide policy regarding open meeting laws. No one remembers exactly what may or may not have been said at the FOAA training. Cathy Curtis suggests that at minimum, if you’re sharing personal opinions, it needs to be clear that you’re not speaking as a Committee member. Patrick McDonough asks if the online discussions are about the recycling program or more about purchasing the barn — he notes that they are two separate issues. Cathy Curtis answers that she think there’s been both. She summarizes that she thinks “we need to be mindful how we conduct ourselves as Committee members and remembering our goal is to put forth a program that we’re going to recommend to the town, and that if we’re making personal opinions, we don’t attribute them to the Committee.”

Patrick McDonough revisits the problem that many citizens think that what is being collected in the Silver Bullets is not being recycled, and that it is important that we redirect that misinformation. He asks if we could put together an informational post on Bowdoinham Friends and Family, but notes that the administrators for that page have banned any conversation about recycling or the barn. Bryan Benson believes that due to “division” around town recycling topics, any discussion about recycling or the barn is deleted by the page administrator. Lisa Wesel offers that she can reach out to the administrator and ask if it would be possible for the Committee to post a neutral informational paragraph with the comments option disabled. Patrick McDonough notes that there is also a Solid Waste page and it could be posted there. Michael Smith points out that what we did pre-covid and what we’re doing now is the same thing except for the different mode of transportation and “how we pay for it”. Lisa Wesel points out that it does look very different, that the Silver Bullets look like dumpsters.

**Interim Report Chapters**: Cathy Curtis hopes that we could have a version “pretty close to being done” by the end of our next meeting. Question from Lisa Wesel as to when the town report is being printed and whether there will be time to have it included; Cathy Curts assumes that we will not be in time but that it could still be included as an insert in the town warrant book.

Town-by-Town Comparison: Document completed (see Documents section .

Survey Results: Cathy Curtis will post Betsy Steen’s newest draft to the Committee’s Google Drive and members can look at it and give feedback there.

Material Requirements: Document completed other than plastic information: discussion that there is historical data on plastics collection from 2005 and 2006 before the program began the single-stream process. Lisa Wesel asks for a copy of that data. Michael Smith says that he thinks that there was a labor costs reduction in the 2006 budget because sorting had become too costly.

Financials: Michael Smith reports that he spoke with a member of the former Solid Waste Committee from “before 2006 to 2011” and “they did the exact same thing that we’re doing right now.” There’s no documentation, but he has asked Bryan Benson to look into it: Bryan Benson says that he has been able to track down minutes from 2009 - 2011 but he needs to get them scanned. Michael Smith adds that there was also a Special Task Force in 2011 that included the Town Manager, two Select Board members, and “a couple of other people”; he would also like to see documentation from that as well. He “finds it difficult that we have to reinvent the wheel and we’re a year into this and we really don’t have much…granted, ‘do this, go back and do this, and go back and do this’, but we need to get something moving and get going.” Betsy Steen says that she has some documents from the Task Force but points out that “the times have changed since then” and while single stream was previously less expensive, it has now gotten more expensive — so it’s comparing two different times. She adds that there was a town meeting in 2011 (she believes) in which the town wanted to stay with the program that we had. Cathy Curtis notes that the 2014 Comprehensive Plan also refers to the barn and the recycling program.

Lisa Wesel brings up the topic of trash tag costs and whether raising the costs of tags would be a hardship and a disincentive to some residents; she believes that there is a “sweet spot” between tag costs and participation, but she isn’t sure where that price point would be. Patrick McDonough comments that raising the tag cost to $3.00 is a straight correlation: people who want to service will use it at that price, and those who don’t will get dumpsters. Lisa Wesel comments that trash collection ought to be considered an essential municipal service and that covering disposal costs 100% through fees might not be the right model. Patrick McDonough sees her point, and Michael Smith agrees but notes that financial losses need to be watched in order to know when costs are becoming too expensive to sustain. Susan Drucker asks Bryan Benson what he thinks about tag fees: Bryan Benson answers that he personally believes the cost should be raised to $3.00, and that will still leave the town covering part of the service costs (it would take a jump to $3.50 to break even); he notes that the cost of tags hasn’t gone up since (he believes) 2006. Susan Drucker asks if the Committee is supposed to be looking at trash at all, or just recycling. Bryan Benson answers that we only need to focus on the recycling program, and he notes that he doesn’t think there’s any way to bring down the costs for disposing of trash. Michael Smith comments that if we took residents’ glass, it would reduce the weight of their trash.

Susan Drucker asks Michael Smith if he would explain the numbers about the cost for trash tags in his report: why tags are listed at $2 and not $2.50 in one equation. Time spent discussing how those fees work; specifically in answer to the question: $2 is what the town pays Mr. Plummer to collect each trash bag, and the remaining fifty cents goes towards off-setting the $88/ton tipping fee. Discussion as to what the tipping fee was when the Committee started meeting (report lists the price doubling): Bryan Benson “thinks” it was $57/ton.

Susan Drucker asks if Bryan Benson has had a chance to look over Michael’s numbers; he has not. Susan Drucker responds that she feels it’s important to have the one person “who actually understands this, to look at it.” Bryan Benson says he will read it “tonight”.

Bryan Benson reports that Richard Plummer is raising his rates 5 cents per bag: it will cost $2.05 to per trash bag, and if we went back to curbside recycling pick-up, it would be $.80 per bag.

Comparison of Service Modes: Susan Drucker asks Bryan Benson if he had a chance to look over the questions she emailed to him on Monday; he has not. She comments that it would go quickly enough to look through them in person right now. Discussion of average frequency of town hauling trips pre-covid (1.5 a week); discussion of gas mileage of the town’s F550 (estimate of 12 miles a gallon); discussion of labor hours for loading a truck (not more than half an hour); discussion of how much taking cardboard out of the Silver Bullets reduces the total volume (estimate that it takes a third out of the overall volume).

Susan Drucker informs the group she was surprised to learn that there is a market for used balers and that they can be bought for $3000 or so; she believes this is good news if the Committee concludes that the program could save costs through additional baling.

Summary of Committee’s Work: In progress.

Clarity Overview: Not relevant yet.

**New Business:**

Michael Smith has done some research into DEP requirements for different facilities, and asks for clarification about whether the town is running a Transfer Station, a Recycling Center, or a Solid Waste Disposal Facility; Bryan Benson answers that we are an unlicensed Recycling Center (under Municipalities); he knows we are not a Transfer Station, but he would need to look up whether we are a Solid Waste Facility or not. Michael Smith thinks that if we are not licensed, we are not allowed to store hazardous waste or tires. He wonders “if all this work we’re doing for the size of a building” will be affected since we “can’t store anything.” He notes that he was reading DEP chapter 402, although he is not completely through it. Bryan Benson clarifies that “everything that we’re doing right now (e.g., at the Public Works building) is what we are allowed to do as a Recycling Facility; we are also allowed to collect mixed recyclables and collect and store lightbulbs, paint, mercury thermostats, and batteries; anything beyond that requires permits and/or licensing through the state. Lisa Wesel says that we used to do a lot more and asks if we were allowed to do that; Bryan Benson says that he “doesn’t have an answer for that right now.” Lisa Wesel notes that it matters “only because that’s what we’re going to be considering when we talk about a new program, we’re going to be looking through everything we used to do and everything we could possibly do…so if there are things that we’re not allowed to do we need to know that.” Bryan Benson responds that “what we should do first is exactly what the Select Board has asked us to do and that’s design a program, and then we can start looking into the laws, the regulations, and determining what we can do, and then finally determine what facility we’ll need to do it in.” Michael Smith adds that if we want to do anything more than what we’re doing at the Public Works, the DEP will require an inspection of the facility; Bryan Benson is not sure that would be the case. Michael Smith summarizes that if we want to do what we did at the barn, we will need to update from a Recycling Center to a Solid Waste Disposal Facility and that people need to be aware of that. He notes that he went through the “New Facility Requirements, and all the hoops you have to jump through for a new facility is quite amazing.” Paul Denis adds a chat comment that “Title 24 SS 2133 defines what a Municipal Recycling Facility is.” Bryan Benson reads the state’s definition of a Solid Waste Disposal facility is and comments that “we would not qualify for that” and reaffirms that we are a Recycling Facility. Michael Smith says that if we can’t do anything more than what we do at Public Works, than we wouldn’t be able to collect bulky waste except once every six months. Lisa Wesel wonders if this means that “all these discussions we’ve been having about recycling…about how long does it takes to gather enough plastics for a load, how much time does it take to gather enough metal for a load…that was all supposed to come into our calculations of the square footage that we need…are you saying that we’re not allowed to store that stuff?” Bryan Benson states that he is waiting for clarification from DEP, and that while he has his own thoughts on it, he doesn’t want to comment until he hears back; he reiterates that the Committee should be focused on designing a program and “we’ll see where we go from there.” Betsy Steen comments that she has read the email Michael sent twice and she believes the problem he is referring to only involves the storage of hazardous waste. She doesn’t believe it refers to plastics and metal and other recyclables. Bryan Benson confirms that Betsy is correct; he reiterates that everything we are doing right now we are allowed to do as a Recycling Facility. Lisa Wesel points out that what we are doing now is not what we did in the barn. Bryan Benson agrees.

**Public Comments:** David Berry comments that he has most of the documents from the 2011 Task Force and he would be glad to share that and answer any questions Michael or the Committee might have. He goes on to ask if the additional five cents that Mr. Plummer is charging would also apply to curbside recycling pick-up if we went back to providing that service; Bryan Benson confirms that is true. David Berry notes that taking the cost of curbside recycling pick-up out of the overall costs calculations would change Michael Smith’s numbers.

David Berry comments on Patrick McDonough’s concern that residents don’t believe the items they drop off at the Silver Bullets are being recycled; he adds that residents also don’t know how much money Casella is making from the materials they collect from us: he notes that baled milk jugs were recently selling for $1000 - $1500 a ton; historically the town baled 4 tons of #2 plastic a year. If that were the current amount collected, at $1000/ton, we are providing Casella with $4000 worth of material a year in addition to the $1200 we would pay to have them haul it away (e.g., four Silver Bullet loads @$300 each), leaving the town out $5200.

As far as the Hazardous Waste issue, David Berry says that the DEP gave Bowdoinham a grant ten or twelve years ago to build a special area in the barn to hold household hazardous waste; he wonders if there is a new regulation. Bryan Benson answer that yes, that the DEP changed their regulations in 2015. David Berry asks why they didn’t tell us; Bryan Benson wonders that as well.

As far as bulky waste collection, David Berry comments that if we want to continue to be able to collect bulky waste more than two times a year, and the rules stay the same, we will have to apply for a Transfer Station license and build a Transfer Station. He explains that a Transfer Station is set up to mainly collect trash from the community and send it along to be burned or landfilled “which is an expensive proposition and would change the whole system and would no longer provide the services residents are used to.” He believes it comes down to if you want to have hazardous waste disposal and you want to be able to get rid of your larger items on a regular basis, you’re going to have to build not only a Recycling Facility but a Transfer Station as well. His also shares that Mike Parker at the DEP has told him that “there has been some interest from the town of Bowdoinnham” to do “something about a transfer station.” He doesn’t know what Mr. Parker’s information is or whether Bryan Benson knows anything about that, but it’s something that he thinks we should keep in mind as we go forward because “it would completely change the fabric of our Solid Waste and Recycling program.”

David Berry asks if Cathy Curtis could send him the link to the documents on the Google Drive; Betsy Steen would appreciate the link as well.

David Berry points out that when he was the Solid Waste manager, he doesn’t think trash ever went below $60 a ton; $44 sounds like a pretty low estimate to him, so the idea that the cost doubled in a year seems a lot. Bryan Benson says that “prices have been fluctuating a lot, especially over the last year and half or so.”

**Follow-Up items:** Cathy Curtis will post Report documents on the Committee’s Google Drive and members should edit/comment on those documents before our next meeting. Outstanding reports should be finalized.

**Next Agenda:** Final editing of the documents for the Town Report. (Susan Drucker asks if we will take the time to create consistent formats for all the documents; Cathy Curtis says we will. Cathy Curtis believes she has the most edited versions of each document up to this point, but if anyone sees that that is not true, please replace it with the most up to date copy. Cathy Curtis asks Bryan Benson if he has any updates on when we might be able to meet in person; he answers that they have been talking about it but they don’t have a date yet.)

**Next Meeting Date:** Wednesday, May 19th at 5:30pm.

**Adjournment:** Cathy Curtis adjourns the meeting at 7:50pm.