Solid Waste Committee

April 7, 2021 Minutes

**Present**: Cathy Curtis, Patrick McDonough, Lisa Wesel, Michael Smith, Susan Brown, Susan Drucker, Bryan Benson, Betsy Steen, David Berry, Tom Walling, pworks

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

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

**Approval of the Minutes from March 24th**: Patrick McDonough moves to accept the minutes; Lisa Wesel seconds. Susan Drucker (secretary) asks for advise on the problem she is having with attaching addendum spreadsheets to the minutes: she explains that spreadsheets reformat whenever she tries to add them into the main document. Decision to post them as separate documents on the Solid Waste Committee’s page on the town’s website. Lisa Wesel asks that the documents’ file names precisely match how they are referenced in the minutes to help keep things clear, and that going forward, she asks that all addendums be separate from the minutes so they are easier to find. Minutes are approved.

**Old Business**

**Review any Information from the Select Board as it Pertains to the Committee**: The Select Board has not met since the Committee’s last meeting.

**Update on Casella Presentation**: Bryan Benson has scheduled a meeting with Casella for Wednesday, May 5th during the Committee’s regular meeting.

**Bryan Benson’s Recycling and Solid Waste Updates**: Bryan Benson reports that 106 people came to the facility on Saturday, April 3rd, which was more than they’d expected considering it was the first day David Berry’s Pilot Program’s was open. He states that the baler is now hooked up and being tested, and that baling cardboard should begin on Thursday, April 8th. He notes that there are boxes for cardboard collection set up at the back end of the Silver Bullets. Reminder that Bulky Waste Collection Day is Saturday, April 17th, as is Roadside Clean-Up Day. Update that Brian Hobart will be open to accept brush on the 17th as well — it will be a test run to see whether it can work as an ongoing service. Susan Brown asks about composting; Bryan Benson says that he is planning to call Brian Hobart “tomorrow” (April 8th) and see if he is ready.

**Update on Recycling Drop-off at Barn and Public Works**: Cathy Curtis asks for an update on how David Berry’s Source-Separated Recycling Pilot Program’s opening day went. Betsy Steen reports that 60 people came to the barn to recycle materials and 20 people came to the Gift Shop. She felt that things went well. Overall, 10 cubic yards of materials were collected (see “Pilot Program Numbers for April 3” on the Solid Waste Committee’s page on the Town’s Website for further break down). She notes that there was very little contamination: “It was great because what was supposed to be put in was what was put in.” Cathy Curtis asks if Bryan Benson noticed any difference at the town’s facility; Bryan Benson reiterates that it was the opposite of what they’d expected — that they’d expected a light day but it was a busy day. He notes that what made the most difference in the day was not having to fit cardboard into the Silver Bullets. Betsy Steen notes that many residents were making stops at both facilities.

Susan Drucker asks Bryan Benson what the final cost was to hook up the baler; he answers that he hasn’t received a bill yet but the electrician had said that it came in under the $2400 estimate.

**Bryan Benson’s Answers to Michael Smith’s Operational/Financial Questions**: Michael Smith says that he is going to go back and look at all the questions he initially asked and re-send them, making note of the things that are still missing. He asks Bryan Benson to clarify if they actually got rid of an employee or if they just didn’t hire someone for an open position; Bryan Benson answers that they didn’t fill an open position. Michael Smith asks if taking the cardboard out of the single sort containers provides a savings on Casella’s collection fees; Bryan Benson confirms that it does, and notes that in the long run, it will also add revenue.

**Update on Chapters for Committee’s Report to the Select Board**: Cathy Curtis thanks Tom Walling (Select Board member) for coming to the meeting, and asks him for clarification on when the Board would want the “most current version of what we’ve done so far”. Tom Walling replies that he can’t give us an exact timeline, but “the sooner the better”; he believes that “everyone would be more comfortable” if they could have it by end of April, especially if there’s anything that should go on the town warrant. He adds if “you’re not ready to present at the time, then you’re not ready to present”, but if there are things that could affect the coming year’s budget, he urges that that information should be gotten to the Board as soon as possible. Cathy Curtis believes that we should have a “respectable draft” by the end of the month. She asks Tom Walling that “with the different reports going on related to the barn” if there’s anything that might happen in the interim that’s more of a long term solution”; Tom Walling says that he doesn’t know how to answer that question because “it’s been a moving target since the problems began at the barn” and that if “anybody asked me what the status of the barn was this afternoon, I’m not sure I could explain it.” He adds that as far as the budget is concerned, it will depend on Bryan Benson “articulating what’s going to be needed”.

Cathy Curtis asks Bryan Benson for an explanation of his budgeting process. Bryan Benson says that he had been prepared to do that tonight but that his budget has been “pulled back into the system and they’re going over it again.” Tom Walling notes that the initial budget from the Finance Committee reflected a 40% increase from last year which made it necessary to reevaluate all departments. Susan Brown asks what Bryan Benson’s initial budget proposal had been: Bryan Benson reports that it was a total of $190,813. Susan Brown asks where the savings had been realized (last year the budget was $235,000); Bryan Benson answers that the $45,000 savings was gained by dropping a position, lowering the vehicle maintenance line, having the barn lease out of the budget, using less fuel due to less driving, and general disposal costs going down. He reminds the Committee that all these numbers are subject to change. Patrick McDonough asks if the numbers are based on what’s been happening or on what is expected to happen; Bryan Benson answers that it’s based on both: he looked at the past along with where the industry is expected to go over the next year — with costs rising and cardboard back into the mix, for instance. Michael Smith asks if revenue is part of the $191,000 total; Bryan Benson says it is not; he notes that if revenue were taken out of the total, expenses would be closer to $110,000.

**Materials Requirements Spreadsheet** (See “Materials Requirements 2” on the Solid Waste Committee’s page on the Town’s Website): Betsy Steen comments on the baling information in the Metal Cans column in the spreadsheet, noting that her Metals research didn’t mention the need to bale cans. She asks Bryan Benson and David Berry how many pallet boxes would be needed to construct a bale of cans; because the program has never baled cans, neither knew the answer; David Berry says that he will call the St. Georges recycling facility (where they bale cans) to get more information. David Berry also notes that a call to Victor at Maine Resource Recovery Association would provide a current price per ton on steel cans. He comments that a roll-away container for cans in Bowdoinham would take a long time to fill and if it were moved before it were filled, it would “cost a lot of money to move a lot of air around”; he suggests that that’s probably why there’s been resistance to hauling the roll-away container that the town uses right now for metal, that they want to be able to “haul some weight when they haul those things”.

Lisa Wesel comments that Ecomaine had previously said that Bowdoinham’s bale size is different that Ecomaine’s bale size which would make Ecomaine unable to collect source separated materials from us. She notes that if we are thinking about moving towards a source separated program, it would most likely have to include adding a different size baler, assuming other companies have the same size criteria as Ecomaine.

Patrick McDonough reports that he didn’t add a column for materials’ current prices in the spreadsheet because market prices change so often; he notes that that he can add that in if people want it. He comments that he understands the baling process better now and that the numbers in that column don’t reflect the different requirements of each material (i.e., plastics vs. cardboard) and suggests that they ought to be changed. He mentions that he wants to add some text to explain that these numbers only reflect in-house source separating, not single-stream details; Lisa Wesel suggests that “Source Separating” could be added to the title of the document to cover that point; agreement to change the document title. Patrick McDonough clarifies that the square footage numbers are “flat out” and don’t include any stacking or shelving options. Patrick McDonough asks if Bryan Benson could look over the document for accuracy, especially regarding plastics. Bryan Benson says that we would need to find another town to get any numbers on plastics since Bowdoinham has no history to pull from; he also notes that plastic requires a great deal of storage space. David Berry thinks that he has records of how long it takes to bale various materials and will see if he “can dig that up”. Lisa Wesel asks where Patrick McDonough got the information on plastics since the town has single streamed it for so long; Patrick McDonough answers that it was somewhere in our Solid Waste documents. Betsy Steen notes that the Source Separated Pilot Program will add information about some plastics; Lisa Wesel comments that it will be informative, but only as an estimate since not everyone is bringing their recyclables to the barn; Betsy Steen points out that we know it will be “at least that much”; Lisa Wesel agrees, and adds that it will also be useful to see how many people are willing to separate their materials. Susan Drucker reiterates that it would be good if Bryan Benson could read over the document for accuracy since “he’s the expert.” Bryan Benson says that he will, and notes that there are some numbers that he wants to “bounce around.”

Susan Brown asks for clarification about what Grimmels is or isn’t doing as far as can collection; Betsy Steen says that Grimmels won’t take cans anymore. Discussion of which companies still might: Maine Resource Recovery Association and Ames are suggested.

**Ranked Services Report**: Susan Drucker reports that Michael Smith had asked her to re-do the Ranked Services numbers to reflect only the high and low ends of responses to see if it changed the outcomes at all. She reports that sorting information differently didn’t change the overall rankings.

**Comparative Towns Report** (see “Town by Town Comparison” and “Town by Town Comparison Spreadsheet” on the Solid Waste Committee’s page on the Town’s Website): Lisa Wesel notes that the details about each town is information the Committee has already reviewed, but she would like to review the budget line in the spreadsheet: she notes that towns don’t all do budgets the same way so the dollar amounts listed aren’t comparing “apples to apples” (i.e.,some include employee wages, some don’t; some reflect revenue off-sets, some don’t); she wonders whether it is useful to leave the budget amounts in the spreadsheet or not. Consensus decision to take out the budget line. Lisa Wesel asks Bryan Benson to look over the Bowdoinham details to make sure they’re correct; Bryan Benson says that he has already looked them over and that it looks good.

**Materials Research**: Plastics: Lisa Wesel reports that it has been hard to get anywhere on plastics because it has been single-streamed for so long, there’s no data available for it as a single commodity. Instead of looking into “standard plastics”, which is “kind of limited as to what you can do with those”, she would like to look into “things we could take out of the waste-stream which we can’t do now”. She explains that there is a company called Terracycle in New Jersey that takes all sorts of non-standard things (like juice boxes, toothpaste tubes, and bottle caps); she notes that it would be labor intensive to use a program like Terracycle, but she thinks it would be worth the effort.

Discussion about whether the Pilot Program accepts caps; general agreement that if caps have a triangle with a #1, #2 or #5, that they are allowed; Lisa Wesel notes that if that’s true, the barn should definitely take out the “No Caps” reference in their signage.

Cathy Curtis says that she will be sending out reminder notes that we need to have chapter drafts ready to go for the next meeting, and that we will need to be ready to discuss any recommendations we have for the town as far as the budget. She sees this as a short-term piece and that we’ll get to a longer-term piece in the next couple of months. Lisa Wesel notes that we haven’t talked about changes to the program yet and she feels that there’s no way we can get that information out yet; Cathy Curtis agrees that we don’t have enough information to make any long term proposals. Lisa Wesel asks if what Cathy Curtis is aiming towards is “short-term tweaks”; Cathy Curtis says yes, that if “anything can happen in the next year”, what would the town need to budget for it.

Susan Brown asks what role Bryan Benson has in the overall process: Bryan Benson says that he “takes what the residents say and tries to find a way to make that happen.” If it requires special financing, then he has to take that to the Town Manager. Susan Brown wonders what happens if Bryan Benson doesn’t like some of the recommendations; Bryan Benson answers that that’s never happened, but that he has no veto powers and whatever the residents vote on is what he’ll try and accomplish within the allotted budget.

**Current Tasks and Follow-Up Items**: Cathy Curtis will “pull together” the previous report she wrote for the Annual Report, as well as begin a Glossary of Terms; Lisa Wesel is done with the Town Comparison report and will start Alternative Plastics, Susan Brown will help her; Bryan Benson will look over the Materials Requirements spreadsheet with Patrick McDonough; Betsy Steen will work on explanatory text to go with the Survey analysis report (Susan Brown will provide the Fees Report from the Survey and send it to Betsy Steen); Michael Smith will work on the financial comparisons from two budget years and update his list of operational questions; Susan Drucker finished Ranked Services from the Survey results and will continue submitting the minutes.

Susan Drucker suggests that there ought to be a chapter in the report that explores and compares the different modes of services (i.e., Ecomaine, Casella, single sorting, source separating, and hauling options). She volunteers (reluctantly, as the minutes take so much time already) to put together what she can about that. Susan Drucker asks Bryan Benson if Casella has any other collection/hauling options than what they do for Bowdoinham; he answers yes, that they have their own fleet of trucks and often simply haul materials for towns and businesses. Lisa Wesel asks if it’s possible to have separate contracts for each different aspect of waste disposal (i.e., one for trash, one for recycling, separate haulers for each); Bryan Benson says that it is.

**New Business:** No new business.

**Public Comments**: No public comments.

**Next Meeting:** Wednesday, April 21 at 5:30.

**Next Agenda:** Reviewing “decent drafts” of the Town Report chapters. Lisa Wesel comments that until we meet with Casella, a Modes of Services chapter can’t be done in time; she reminds the Committee that our current goal is for an interim report and notes that Modes of Service is a complex topic. Cathy Curtis suggests that it could be added to the Materials Requirement spreadsheet as TBD.

**Adjournment:** Meeting is adjourned at 7:00pm**.**

**Addendum Items**

(All Addendum items are filed on the Solid Waste Committee’s page on the Town’s Website)

Addendum 1: “Pilot Program Numbers for April 3”

Addendum 2: “Materials Requirements 2”

Addendum 3: “Town by Town Comparison”

Addendum 4: “Town by Town Comparison Spreadsheet”