

**Montgomery County**  
**Integrated Waste System Strategic Plan Task Force<sup>1</sup>**  
Meeting Notes  
February 13, 2019

Attending: Chaz Miller, Caroline Tayler, Lauren Greenberger, Keith Levchenko, Ken Lavish, Sara Bixby, Robin Wiener, Peter Ettinger (by telephone)

Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)- Division of Solid Waste Services (SWS): Patty Bubar, Robin Ennis, Eileen Kao, Cat Lee, Ray Liou, Anthony Skinner, Willie Wainer

Guest speakers: Adam Ortiz – new head of DEP; Liza Skumatz, Skumatz Economic Research Associates; Kristin Brown – Waste Zero; Stacy Demers, SCS Engineers

Telephone: Chris Skaggs and Kitty McIlroy, Northeast Maryland Waste Disposal Authority (NMDWA), consultant Christine Roarke, HDR

- County Staff
  - Debbie Spielberg, County Executive Office
  - Lillian Cruz, Councilman Albunoz office
  - Trevor Lobaugh, Office of Management and Budget
  
- Solid Waste Advisory Committee: Kelly Doordan, Jamie Andrews, Mark Freedman
- Sierra Club: Deborah Cohn, Amy Maron
- Neil Seldman, ILSR
- Bailey Condrey, IWG, MCCF
- Mike Ewall
- Lilian Cruz
- Kathy Michaels, several groups

**Called to order by Chairman Miller at 5:30 p.m.**

**1. Approve minutes from January 9 meeting.**

Moved by Taylor, seconded by Lavish to approve as presented. Carried unanimously.

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<sup>1</sup> May 30, 2018 Memorandum from Isiah Leggett, County Executive, to Hans Riemer, President, Montgomery County Council

## 2. Comments from Adam Ortiz, new director of Montgomery County DEP.

Ortiz introduced himself and his background, then shared his perspective about communication, changing habits, challenges in the overall solid waste system and moving forward.

## 3. Presentations on Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT):

**3.1 Lisa Skumatz, SERA** – 30+ years of experience; statistician, data orientation.

Presentation can be found <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/sws/master-plan.html> and notes/Q&A shared here.

- Clarified that in her presentation, “embedded” means all costs are included in trash rates.
- Fundamentally, PAYT means that generators with more trash pay more.
- Based on her research and experience, PAYT programs are the single most effective way to increase recovery in residential programs, (not including multi-family)
- In the United States, more than 10,000 PAYT programs covering 25% of the population.
- PAYT leads to the reduction of 17% of additional material out of the trash bin above and beyond recycling program recovery through behavior change. Encourages behavior change toward source reduction – different decisions to generate less.
- Doesn’t require new trucks – a new way of filling existing trucks
- Political will is the biggest bottleneck; haulers get nervous at change and residents may be unhappy at first.
- PAYT doesn’t require contracting but there is an advantage in programs with contract, organized collection – more efficient collection, lower costs.
- Rewards all types of diversion activities
- PAYT can be its own funding source. Fees – either a base (to cover cost of running trucks) plus container fee for disposal or fees entirely built into container charges
- Best practices give best effect:
  - Convenient recycling availability with large container
  - Cost embedded in trash with no extra fee for recycling
  - Small trash containers available to reward good recyclers (32 gallon)
  - If provide a trash container should provide recycling container as well.
    - Trash carts are more cost-effective than bags in the long-term
  - Education and information can’t be emphasized enough. Bill to the generators must be clear to link their practices/efforts to the fees paid.
  - Should consider assistance programs for large families/low income families
- Ways to implement

- Pass an ordinance – anybody who wants to collect in our area, must provide PAYT system
- Contracting/districting/franchising
- Who has to be on board?
  - Politicians
  - Haulers and small haulers: Haulers should like it but they don't seem to get it. Skumatz listed the benefits to haulers from her perspective. Don't understand why they don't like it when it increases their business.
  - Residents

A major concern – illegal dumping. But history indicates small increases and it's about a three-month problem when the requirements are enforced.

A benefit: predictability in rate setting and design, and thus overall solid waste budgeting. Need to optimize PAYT rate differentials – 50 to 80% more cost for double the service.

Q: Concerns with increased contamination in recyclables because of a desire not to put it in the trash. A: not well enough studied to answer.

Q: Does the presentation later discuss enforcement in greater detail and how it works? Has to be in required container – visual identification if in a cart; harder if in a bag – depending on whether logo'd or not. With haulers, need to have inspection of books. Need to be able to verify that they're actually giving the option for different can sizes – not just signing everybody up for largest container.

Q: Effect of trash compactors? A: need to have a weight limit in place, as county already does.

Q: About 2/3 of communities that have gone to PAYT don't have a cost increase. What is different there than the other communities? A: Container purchase is a major driver.

Q: Is there a difference in participation and results for more affluent communities? Concerned that since Montgomery County is a very affluent County overall that cost increase would not greatly affect behavior change. A: Have that data in a study for Reason Foundation. Will look it up... No difference.

Q: how ensure that PAYT doesn't cause wild revenue fluctuations. A: if worried, have a program where everybody is signed up for at least the smallest size container. Have a base fee as well as a bag fee.

Q: Bulk waste set-outs? A: Set limits. 2 or 3 set-outs is too many. Have to do away with area clean-ups or people will hoard items from regular weekly set-outs to put out in the area clean-ups. Have a bag or tag option – make sure they are priced well so people don't have the incentive to overuse.

### **3.2 Kristin Brown – Waste Zero, Inc. PAYT in New Windsor, MD.**

Presentation can be found <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/sws/master-plan.html>

Basics, measurements, and New Windsor pilot progress, frequent objections.

Brown - solid waste background, in Europe for 5 years with paper recycler. Trying to find a magic bullet for recycling. Didn't even realize unit-based pricing was something special – it was just something they did. A lot of PAYT work in US has been in New England.

Most important thing in figuring out progress is to isolate the per capita waste amount – meaning the total curbside residential waste amount per year. Brown believes bag programs are more effective than carts in reducing waste per capita.

New England: PAYT communities throw about 432 pounds per capita per year; non-PAYT about 700 pounds per capita per year. CT – about 740 lbs/capita/year in non-PAYT program.

Most of New England uses bag-based PAYT. If using a bag-based system, generators always have the option to put out fewer bags. If they have a cart, they may just fill up extra space in the cart.

WasteZero's database shows an average waste reduction of 44% [per capita per year] from PAYT – includes diversion to recycling and source reduction changes. The price signal is important. 20% of the decrease roughly is due to source reduction, rather than increased recycling.

Q. Do contamination rates in recycling increase as a result of PAYT? A: few studies have been done, but not enough. Ecomaine reports suggest contamination may be a little less in PAYT programs, but it did not compare before and after introducing PAYT. This is something that could be checked with Kevin Roche or his staff.

Waste Zero recommends a three-bag system.

New Windsor – orange bag for waste, will only accept waste in the orange bag. Using about a bag a week for waste. Recycling increased by 80% in three months.

Frequent objections:

- There must a better way. Teach the kids in school. Change collection frequency.
- Ban plastic bags instead.
- Unfair to the good recyclers – especially when fees are covered in taxes.
- Illegal dumping will increase.
- People won't like it.

It was noted that the two discontinued programs were because of political reasons, not because they didn't work as intended. It was stated that Aberdeen did not realize how well its

program was functioning and discontinued it without studying the improvement. Also, in Falls River it was the cost aspect that residents were angry about, not program functionality.

Also was noted that having tablet and cameras that automatically register wrong color of bag, other bad behavior etc. tend to help the program succeed.

Q: decrease in generation – how much is less generation and how much is use of a garbage grinder, back yard composting, etc. A: part is donating more. We've asked communities about the garbage disposal issue – is it showing up somewhere else. The answer is no.

Skumatz: source reduction changes are also documented on the EPA website.

Q: have there been waste composition studies before and after to measure the effect of PAYT and what is being disposed of less? A: Not aware of any. Stacy Demers also not aware of such studies.

Public meetings, education to get citizen buy-in is critical. Have seen that there is more public anger before a PAYT program is implemented than afterwards, once people get used to it. Also keep in mind that residents want to know where the money is going, if there is increased revenue, etc. and how it is being spent on programs.

It was noted that more education, providing standardized carts, or increasing recycling frequency in a community does not make much of a dent in recycling rates compared to introducing PAYT.

It was also noted that GHG/lifecycle emissions must be considered with implementing PAYT, and how it can be incorporated into that type of model. Sometimes Zero Waste is at odds with GHG/lifecycle emission modeling.

Q: the large family issue or the low-income family. Is there a protection or subsidy? A: a lot of times.

Q: how does this work in multi-family? A: nobody in the US is doing it in multi-family. It is being done in Europe using protections like fenced in carts, etc. so it won't be abused.

Q that was really a statement: The County must still pay for waste and recycling collection, plus waste disposal and recycling processing. Maybe lose about 20% to source reduction. Concerned that we not set unrealistic expectation about reducing costs in a PAYT program.

Q: There is concern that this model has not incorporated the current recycling commodity crisis. A: Make sure that current commodity recycling pricing is incorporated in PAYT model ahead of time.

#### 4. Discussion of 2017 Montgomery County Waste Characterization Study

##### *Stacy Demers, SCS Engineers – waste characterizations studies for Montgomery County*

Waste characterization studies –

- Plastic is continually increasing, paper is decreasing, and organics are increasing over the past decades – by percent by weight.
- Material categories – some of the MoCo waste seem oddly characterized as organics such as diapers, sanitary products, textiles. But in the data, it's actually about 27% that is compostable.
- Yard trimmings, food waste, and compostable paper – about 30%.
- Seems like paper at 22% is a large percentage. Some that should have been recycled, but the rest appears to be non-recyclable mixed paper.
- 16% overall plastic – film plastic (other); other rigid plastic – CD case, hard composite plastic items, most weight coming from the plastic.

##### **Discussion:**

Bixby: Film plastic – higher “value” to use over other types of packaging if looking to reduce GHG impacts, tin cans – higher value if looking to maximize recycling. What is our measure going to be?

Wiener: the highest potential for diversion – the organics, the vegetative food waste.

Miller struck by how little yard waste showed up in the waste characterization. Noted that current Montgomery County's Yard Trim Facility already needs more grass and is struggling with current operations and material inputs.

Demers: yard waste is very low here. A lot of communities that have yard waste bans. The other thing in Montgomery County is the quantity of cardboard, it's very low here.

Wiener. That number seems low to me. Saw a lot of OCC in the waste at the transfer station so surprised the waste characterization number was so low. However, it was noted that by weight the measurement is different, then if someone is visually sorting because the volume of something, like cardboard, may be larger.

Greenberger: other plastics. Can we better categorize that? Highlight what that may be? A:

Demers: not really.

Demers described the sampling plan. Montgomery County prescribed how many samples seasonally and weighting across the five generating sectors. It is fully explained in the footnotes for the data tables.

Q: Are there wildly different results across various waste characterization studies? A: not really

Q: where does the compostable paper go? What about hemp as a replacement?

Q: what is other wood? A: anything made of wood. Fork, spatula, furniture but not lumber or a pallet. Treated wood and non-treated wood are categorized separately.

## **5. Discussion of data set for MSW generation, recycling and disposal**

Miller did some calculations using existing County data sets to determine how much recycling/composting would be needed in order to shut the RRF and landfill the same quantity overall. Need to increase recovery about 339,000 tons per year in order to achieve that. Propose that for the time being we use that number as the target for increased recovery.

## **6. Date for next meeting**

Propose March 13<sup>th</sup>. Review next HDR output. Look for bigger meeting room.

Wiener raised the idea of the Recycling Partnership as a resource. Do we want to invite them to visit? Also, do we want to talk about MRF-sheds?

## **7. Public input**

Condrey: As the county tries to increase composting, what resources/financing would be provided to communities for distributing composting bins, other equipment or training, etc. A: County staff – not prepared to discuss/respond to that, having just heard it.

Greenberger: has HDR been given the organics strategic plan? A: County staff. Yes. Since the beginning of the study.

Kathy Michaels: in terms of the waste, sometimes get big variations – eg synthetic turf replacement projects. A: wouldn't try to capture those as one-offs.

Q: Would the trucks be reconfigured for food scraps? A: Ennis – One option would be different truck, separate collection or could be combined with yard trim.

Q: Which communities currently do food scraps: A: Chevy Chase, Takoma Park, some businesses

Q: Mark Freedman: What's important – environmental impact (GHG/lifecycle emissions), recycling goal, etc. I think you should decide what is important. A: Chaz: we could talk with EPA about SMM.

Spielberg, County Executive's Office - one tool to close the incinerator; how do we get to zero waste?

Q: Miller who gets to decide that answer? Who gets to make the ultimate decision/options for the County?

Bixby: HDR will give us a list. We have to know who decides what is most important – maximize recycling, GHG emissions, close incinerator? human health?

Freedman: which criteria is most important, rank them. Important to divorce the what's important from what are we going to do.

Taylor: do research – other places have already set those policies.

Mike Ewall: one very clear takeaway from his research – landfilling is better than burning. Also mentioned not to worry about contamination in recycling stream—e.g. don't let it hinder moving a program forward.

Bixby: That's their decision based on their frame; we may have a different answer.

**8. Adjourn:** Motion by Wiener, seconded by Taylor at 7:45 p.m.