

DRAFT

City of Cambridge Recycling Advisory Committee, Council Chambers, 795 Mass Ave

May 11, 2016 - Minutes Taken by Janet Mosley

Members present: Keith Cialino, Debby Galef, Rob Gogan, Debby Knight, Janet Mosley, Laura Nichols, Meera Singh, Joanna Vanden

Members absent: Susy Jones and Mary Verhage

Staff present: Meryl Brott, John Fitzgerald, Michael Orr, Owen O’Riordan, John Nardone

Guests: Adam Mitchell from Save that Stuff and Clint Richmond from Massachusetts Sierra Club

Members of the public present: Judy Nathans and Ted Live

Housekeeping: The April minutes were amended to include the action item that all committee members should review the sample letter to the commissioner regarding the ordinance banning PS single use food service items. The April minutes were approved as amended.

City Updates

Recycling Director Position

The City of Cambridge recycling director position was posted online May 3rd.

Outreach

There are several upcoming events that RAC committee members should volunteer for if possible.

Curbside Composting

Over 3 days in April, 15 volunteers participated in a door to door outreach campaign to increase curbside composting participation. Outreach was targeted to those households that have not been participating in the curbside compost program. The three most common reasons for not participating in curbside composting cited by residents were: use of backyard composting, use of garbage disposal, and that they do intend to participate but haven’t started yet. Some residents cited specific personal objections to the composting program as their reason for not participating.

Adam Mitchell from Save that Stuff provided information on an upcoming change to their operation of the city curbside compost program. Save that Stuff has been working in conjunction with Waste Management to build a food processing plant in Charlestown that will turn food waste into a slurry that can be transported to an anaerobic digestion facility in Lawrence. The processing plant will first screen out unwanted items and then chop up and mix food waste with waste organic liquids (e.g., tofu processing water) to make the slurry. Turning food waste into a slurry will allow for more efficient and economical transport of the food waste. Almost all items currently accepted in Cambridge’s compost program will still be included, except pizza boxes. Also, biobags, compostable paper and plastic ware (utensils, cups, clamshells, etc) will be screened out. Save that Stuff plans to start operation in July and believes the plant should be fully operational in August.

Discussion Topics

Polystyrene Ordinance – Presentation from Clint Richmond from Massachusetts Sierra Club

Key points from the presentation: The main goal is to reduce single use products, especially from plastics. Single use products are wasteful and result in litter. Plastic packaging and food service items are a particular target for the Sierra Club because of multiple negative aspects of petroleum-based products, e.g., pollution/environmental damage from petrochemical extraction and plastics manufacture, potential toxicity of material, non-biodegradable. Mass. Sierra Club encourages bans on use of polystyrene (PS) given the difficulty in recycling EPS and the potential health issues associated with PS. Mass. Sierra Club supports source reduction and sustainable alternatives to single use plastic products.

Polystyrene Ordinance – Open Discussion

Mike Orr explained his concern as a staff member of DPW that implementing the PS ordinance immediately after the Bring Your Own Bag ordinance may be seen highly unfavorable by businesses whom are reeling from the BYOB Ordinance. It also may damage the ongoing effort of DPW to develop partnerships with businesses to work towards our goals of reducing waste and increasing recycling.

Commissioner O’Riordan said that DPW is in the process of getting a consulting firm to work on a solid waste master plan for the City, but that results would not likely be available until late 2017 at the earliest.

Debby K. expressed concern that it is not yet clear what the better alternatives would be to the rigid PS single use items given that the City’s curbside compost program operator Save that Stuff will not accept compostable paper and compostable plastic food service items (the most obvious alternatives to rigid PS single use items) in the near future as they move to anaerobic digestion for

compost processing. While rigid PS is currently recyclable, the paper and bioplastic alternatives would not be recyclable or compostable by the City.

Rob said that he does not think that any of the single use container options are sustainable and would prefer that Cambridge focus its efforts on developing a more holistic approach of reducing use of single use containers instead of banning certain materials. He believes it could be helpful to look at this issue during the solid waste master plan and would prefer that Cambridge delay banning single use polystyrene containers until more thought and research has been put into determining the direction that Cambridge might take to reduce use of all single use items.

Other committee members wondered if DPW would have enough time to thoroughly prepare for implementation of the ordinance whether it included just PS foam or both rigid and foam PS. However, Mike indicated that they would be shifting their attention and time from implementing the BYOB ordinance and other activities to the PS ordinance and would manage to implement the PS ban by October if required.

Polystyrene Ordinance – RAC Discussion and Vote to Decide Recommendation to Send to Commissioner

Keith had suggested three options for a recommendation to the Commissioner that the committee could vote on:

1. No change – the committee supports the ordinance as written
2. Foam/expanded polystyrene only – the committee recommends that the City revise the ordinance to ban polystyrene foam only (and not rigid polystyrene).
3. All polystyrene banned, implemented over 2 year timeframe: the committee recommends that the City revise the ordinance to include a stepped implementation schedule – EPS in Oct 2016 and rigid PS in Oct 2017.

Keith made a motion to vote on option 2, but Janet suggested the committee have an informal vote on all three options to see which one had the most support. Then the committee could take an up or down vote on the most popular option. The informal vote on all three options was taken and option 2 had the most support. A motion was made and seconded to vote to select option 2 for the recommendation to the Commissioner. The result of the vote was 8 yeas, 0 nays, and 0 abstaining.

Legislative update – Bill H.646

Discussion on a letter to the DPW Commissioner regarding Bill H.646 in the Massachusetts legislature to amend the current bottle bill was tabled until the June meeting.

Action Items

- Keith will finalize the letter, post for Debby G. and Janet to review, and send to the DPW Commissioner.

Announcements

No announcements were made as discussion of the Polystyrene Ordinance went through the end of the meeting.