DRAFT

Recycling Advisory Committee (RAC) Meeting Minutes

June 13, 2018, 8am – 9:30am

City Hall, 795 Massachusetts Ave, Council Chambers

Minutes taken by Rob Gogan

**Members present**:  Ilana Bebchick, Debby Galef, Rob Gogan, Martha Henry, Susy Jones, Debby Knight, Laura Nichols, Michael Pappas, Anne Sherman, Meera Singh, Matthew St. Onge, Quinten Steenhuis (& Henry), Mary Verhage, Kristen Watkins

**Members absent**: Janet Mosley

**Staff**: Meryl Brott, Camilla Elvis, John Fitzgerald, Michael Orr

**Members of the public present**: Barbara Harris, Judy Nathans, Helen Snively

**Housekeeping**

Barbara Harris, a Cambridge resident interested in RAC’s activities, introduced herself.

May Minutes were approved.

Chair Anne Sherman announced that at the September meeting, members will sign up to take minutes at the RAC meeting of their choice during FY2019, September through June. [Rob Gogan will take September 12 RAC Meeting Minutes.]

**City Updates**

* Mike Orr reported a decrease of 8.8% in trash tonnage for this April and May compared to the same period last year. This proves that the curbside compost program is diverting much more organic waste than was deposited at the drop-off stations. On average, the compost trucks collect 6-7 tons per day of food scraps.
* Mike mentioned the WGBH story about how Cambridge organics are not in fact composted. He met with the WGBH radio reporter for an hour. Mike emphasized that distance was the prime motivator for choosing the Charlestown drop-off location and that in fact there was no compost option within a reasonable drive of Cambridge. Committee asked if we should write a rebuttal, pointing out Mike’s tour of GLSD and their net zero goal, US EPA’s determination that digestion is better than composting, the fact that Saugus is not an option as they are not permitted to take the volume the City generates, exclusion of industrial waste water by GLSD, low test results for industrial pollutants in testing program and other reasons. Mike said feedback about the story is fading. Consensus of the Committee: Stay the current course; maybe in the fall, post to the website a more comprehensive explanation of the program with test results, etc.
* Need to clean up recycling as poor markets have put strain on Casella to clean up the mix—need for "Recycle Right" campaign. "Oops!" tag for contamination draft, to be affixed with painter’s tape, shows residents why their tote was not picked up and how to do it right. The rules have changed. Committee consensus that we need to educate residents about top five misperceptions. MassDEP will help State by putting together PSA about improving quality.
* What is best color blue for totes going forward? Need to consider different eyesight capabilities and what colors are used by other communities, especially if City provides gray or black trash toter in the future.  Medium blue was voted the best.

**Letter to Commissioner**

Members reviewed and discussed the draft letter to Commissioner Owen O’Riordan regarding whether the City needs to provide a toter for trash. Committee revised and voted to approve the letter and Mike will send it to the Commissioner in June. Mike will also invite Commissioner O’Riordan to our September RAC meeting.

[APPROVED LETTER BELOW]

**Announcements**

* Committee thanked Mike, Meryl, Camilla, Deb, and John for all their hard work implementing the widely acclaimed City-wide curbside compost collection program, and recognized the difficulty and complexity of this task. Rob said that this was the second biggest achievement he’s seen after curbside recycling in his 25 years of service to RAC.
* Fixit Clinic at Cambridge Public Library on Saturday August 18, maybe with a clothing swap on lawn. Other events including Hoops & Health, City-wide Dance Party Friday 6-29-18 volunteering starts at 6 Household Hazardous Waste day,

Meeting adjourned at 9:21.

Dear Commissioner O’Riordan,  
  
We are writing to you to request further research on the potential of city-provided, standardized trash containers for City-collected residential trash. This research would build on the recent HDR report. The focus of this study would be to choose trash bin sizes to support the City’s trash reduction goals.  
  
Other cities, both local and national, provide standardized trash containers. Below are a few examples of other cities’ bin sizes:

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| --- | --- |
| **City/town** | **Standard Size of Container Provided** |
| Somerville, MA | 65 gallons |
| Medford, MA | 65 gallons |
| Belmont, MA | 65 gallons |
| San Francisco, CA | 16 gallons |
| Seattle, WA | Options range from 12 to 96 gallons |
| Cambridge, MA | Trash bins not provided; will collect up  to 150 gallons trash |

Currently, Cambridge collects up to 150 gallons of trash per household per week and does not provide standardized containers. Preliminary analyses by the Recycling Division in 2017 suggest that 86% of households produce 35 gallons of trash or less per week. With the addition of curbside composting, volumes are decreasing and are expected to decrease further.

By providing standardized trash bins to residents, Cambridge can better manage and reduce the amount of trash it collects from residents. Standardized containers would also allow the City to collect trash using tipper technology, a more efficient and safer approach for workers. Additionally, the trash bins will help control rodents.

Given these potential benefits, we recommend the Department of Public Works invest in research to better determine how to implement standard trash bins in Cambridge. The research could include collecting data such as current waste generation rates per household, determining the appropriate bin sizes, and a cost-benefit analysis of investing in trash bins versus the potential waste reduction.   
  
With the implementation of the new curbside composting program, increasingly limited landfill capacity and rising disposal prices, we believe it is critical to conduct this research in 2018 to provide the information needed to develop and implement a program by 2020.  Doing so is important for the long-term environmental and economic sustainability of Cambridge’s waste services.  
  
Thank you for your consideration and continued commitment to the City of Cambridge’s sustainability goals. The next RAC Committee meeting is on September 12, 2018. We hope to hear from you by then.  
  
Sincerely,

The Cambridge Recycling Advisory Committee