

Recycling Advisory Committee (RAC) Meeting Minutes
January 13, 2020, 8:00 am - 9:30 am
Virtual Meeting
Minute Taker: Leah Beckett

Members present: Ilana Bebachick, Leah Beckett, Holden Cookson, Shirley Elliott, Debby Galef, Rob Gogan, Martha Henry, Susy Jones, Sakiko Isomichi, Debby Knight, Lindsay Levine, Scott MacGrath, Janet Mosley, Laura Nichols, Audrey Ng, Diane Roseman, Meera Singh, Quinten Steenhuis, Mary Verhage, Suzanne Wong

Members absent: Catrina Damrell, Richard Nurse, Kristen Watkins

Staff present: Camilla Elvis, John Fitzgerald, John Nardone, Owen O’Riordan, Michael Orr

Public present: Judy Nathans, Helen Snively

1. Discussion with Commissioner Owen O’Riordan

Owen O’Riordan introduced himself and launched into an explanation of our curbside compost woes:

- Pre-Covid there were 6 trash and 2 compost trucks, with 3 people in each truck
- City owns 17 trucks in total but many are old and/or in disrepair
- Currently using 8 trucks for trash, with 2 people/truck
- Due to Covid we couldn’t have 3 people/truck, sitting too close to each other
- 3 new, hybrid trucks set to arrive soon
- Hoping curbside compost can resume in March (maybe a soft relaunch in February?), accompanied by major publicity program

Need to get trucks in and settle with union employees to have agreement to deploy 11 trucks (8 for trash and 3 for compost). Important to relaunch this in a way that captures the community’s attention so people understand the importance of the program to the city.

Should people continue putting out green bins?

Owen: Yes. Thought we’d be in this situation for shorter period and didn’t want residents to get out of the habit. We compost for food diversion but also rodent control and we want to continue storing that in a tight bin.

There will be City Council discussions in February or March about single use plastics. Mike and others working on creating a proposal. Everything stopped with COVID – picking it up again to see if landscape has changed. Incremental improvements may be way to proceed rather than major change.

Effect on businesses?

- Is there a more effective policy [currently one in the state house about extended producer responsibility]?
- Goals for zero waste within this policy is to have greater than 65% of waste recycled by X date and then increase it at a later date.
- Reduce litter, reduce effect on environment, but do so in a way that will not have adverse effects downstream.

What about packaging?

Michael: That's a tough one. Bringing the entities to the table is difficult. Lifecycle analysis brings into question what is the better option: is a paper carton that won't be recycled better than a plastic container that would be? A lot of uncertainty around next steps for packaging.

Effort to make plant based linings on paper cups so they can be recycled? Many cities and towns announced ambitious single use packaging bans but COVID has eclipsed them. Even pre-COVID scenario, we needed to look at a phased access approach. We counted over 25 separate products (deli containers, plasticware, coffee lids, coffee cup lid plug, etc.) – each one has its own best use for prevention and replacement. No city had a solution for all aspects of ending single use. Phased approach makes sense to eliminate some items instead of introducing new products. Medford working with small businesses and public art to educate residents on changes to single use plastics during COVID. Tiered approach gets fuzzy.

MA DEP ban on mattresses and textiles in landfills coming this fall

- Options for textiles:
 - Simple Recycling pink bags, which Somerville and many other communities use
 - Helpsy – less convenient (no curbside collection)- there are already Helpsy bins in Cambridge
- City's concern is to have them picked up regularly – don't want to have textiles sitting in rain or on curb for an extended amount of time. Textiles tricky with their market value. Worst quality not lucrative. Things that can be reworn can make the company money, which they need to balance the rags. Hoping to have something by the end of 2021.
- Looking at making improvements to making recycling center more accessible
- Improving reduce/reuse education
- 2020: 4% recycling contamination! – reflected in the lower price we're paying.

The December minutes were approved.

City received \$100,000 grant, probably going towards mattress recycling program. We can roll money over, so waiting to see how budget unfolds.

Cambridge got most money because of point system based on number of waste reduction programs community has.

2. Repair and Reuse Subcommittee presentation

Suzanne presented on behalf of the sub-committee

With more people at home, people want to get rid of it right *now*. A lot of organizations that originally accepted items were shut down. Many have reopened, though maybe not completely.

Group thinks Get Rid of It Right (GROIR) tool should be augmented with a near real time tool to show donation centers such as Salvation Army or Goodwill, or peer to peer organizations like the MIT Furniture Exchange or Next Door.

Next steps:

- Data standardization (item categories, resource type [retail store, peer to peer, etc], condition
- Implementation on the Get Rid of It Right website
- Include missing groups cited on Get Rid of It Right
- Creating update frequency and core to achieve near real time status

Open Questions:

- Would people use this?
- How will this be promoted?
- How do we measure success?

Thinking about excess and those who don't is widening. Wondering what impact organizations have and who benefits from that. It would be nice to know where items go (women's shelters, etc). Suzanne agrees but thinks allowing people to get rid of their things right now is more important. In the future that is something that should be added.

Quentin: people overvalue their used things and perfect is the enemy of good in seeking what to do with them.

Lindsay: Contacted shelters and found that many were not accepting used items and/or were only taking items still in packaging

Debby K: Educating people on higher level message of donating correctly. Having this use live links so people can easily find out what different organizations can and will use.

Martha: This is a great list and people will discover organizations that they hadn't heard of. Someone on the subcommittee should be point person to update as organizations change in status.

Meera: How do we promote this app when people don't even know about the GROIR tool?

Michael: GROIR gets used a lot. 18,000 searches in the last 30 days.

Most popular searches [changes seasonally]:

- Christmas trees
- Clothes
- Mattresses

- Plastic Bags
- Couch
- Styrofoam
- Batteries

Suzanne:

- Repair resource hub
- Promoting a culture of reuse and repair
- Audit the volume diverted via peer to peer groups

3. Action Items:

- None

4. Announcements:

- Rob:
 - Greater Toronto Repair Cafe doing virtual fix it clinic. Can sign up on the website
 - Harvard doing annual Valentine's Day cosmetics drive. They are most interested in getting feminine hygiene products, diapers, hair care products, anything that touches face (lipstick, razors, etc). Can drop them off at 28 Travis Street, Allston, MA, 02130
 - Last date for donations: Monday, February 8th so they can get delivered to Cambridge Family Y for them to allocate cosmetics fairly
 - Website (sent via email after call):
<https://green.harvard.edu/events/harvard-valentine's-day-cosmetics-hygiene-totes-drive>
- Camilla has been a collection point in Cambridge, delivering goods to Allston
 - Cambridge needs a third Buy Nothing group because they cap at 3-4,000 people.

Zoom Chat:

Rob Gogan to Everyone (8:08 AM)

mike you skipped Holden

MICHAEL ORR to Everyone (8:21 AM)

yes. she was introduced

Quinten Steenhuis to Everyone (8:47 AM)

4% is great!

Susy Jones to Everyone (8:50 AM)

I wonder if a lot of folks had more time to "think" before placing things in bin during pandemic.

Analytics subcommittee - might be an interesting behavior to look at in a survey!

(re: drop in contamination)

Thank you Owen!!

helen snively to Everyone (8:50 AM)

thanks, Susy.. I was thinking the same thing.

Rob Gogan to Everyone (9:08 AM)

Great presentation Suzanne!

Judith Nathans to Everyone (9:13 AM)

Please note that Revolve sells high-end clothing and accepts the same for consignment. So yes, they are a resource but not sure they fit clearly in this list. Perhaps a separate category for consignment. Also, Buffalo Exchange did buy clothing outright, not sure they have started this again.

Susy Jones to Everyone (9:15 AM)

I love the Cambridge Chronicle "use story" idea.

Quinten Steenhuis to Everyone (9:16 AM)

really nice work

Camilla Elvis to Everyone (9:16 AM)

exciting

helen snively to Everyone (9:18 AM)

mike--do you gather data on usage of GROIR? Maybe there's a function in google docs that lets us track usage?

that is, usage of this add on

Meera Singh to Everyone (9:19 AM)

Good to know it's used a lot!

Inichols to Everyone (9:23 AM)

It is great! Don't forget to include 'Find It Cambridge' and the City Manager's publication to get the word out.

helen snively to Everyone (9:24 AM)

thanks, Laura

Susy Jones to Everyone (9:26 AM)

Great work Suzanne and subcommittee!!

Diane! to Everyone (9:30 AM)

bye everyone! great job Suzanne and committee!

Shirley Elliott to Everyone (9:30 AM)

i have another meeting. Well done everyone!

Lindsay Levine to Everyone (9:31 AM)

I have a 930. Thanks all and good to see everyone!

Quinten Steenhuis to Everyone (9:32 AM)

Camilla I forgot to say I think we picked something up from you on the Buy Nothing Cambridge Group