

Recycling Advisory Committee (RAC) Meeting Minutes
October 11, 2023, 8:00am – 9:30am

Virtual - Zoom

Minute Taker: Stephanie Wasiuk

Members present: Dailey Brannin, Dave Demme, Debby Galef, Tracie Gordon, Sakiko Isomichi, Debby Knight, Elka Kuhlman, Emily Lee, Scott MacGrath, Audrey Ng, Carlie Peters, Diane Roseman, Helen Snively, Meera Singh, Quinten Steenhuis, Alex Toupal, Rob Vandenabeele, Stephanie Wasiuk

Members absent: Lee Elliot, Laura Nichols, Richard Nurse, Dawn Quirk, Siddharth Vedullapalli

Staff Present: Mike Orr

Public present: Judy Nathans, Tamene Tedla, Amy Waltz

1. Housekeeping

- Vote on September Minutes - Approved

2. City Updates

- Textiles program:
 - During first 6 months of year, we recycled 57 tons in 2022 and 97 tons in 2023.
- Compost program
 - For September: averaging 8.8 tons/day in 2023 vs 7.4 tons/day in 2022.
- Upcoming Fall festivals; please let Mike Orr know if you can attend:

November 7, 7am-9am, 4-6pm, Election Day, Polling places across the City

- Compost tabling at Porter Square on Oct 16th - let Mike know if interested

3. Zero Waste Master Plan discussion

- RPF still out, consultants won't be on board until ~end of November
- Consultants will meet with RAC to understand what's important to the community
- Engagement opportunities for the community - minimum of one required, but will likely have more
- Uptick in single-use take out containers, especially from the pandemic - is there a way to have a bigger impact on how much goes into trash/what could be recycled?
 - Impacts residential and public trash bins
 - Which other cities have been able to mandate take out container types?
Personal requests don't seem effective.
 - Consider starting small, maybe with plasticware

- Inclusion of unconventional waste streams (e-waste, mattresses, cords, k-cups, ink and toner, oral care, etc)
- More availability of/longer hours at recycling center, feels very limited, can be hard to get there if you don't have a car and live across the city
- Mobile recycling collection - monthly in different neighborhoods so people don't have to cross the city. Could we implement home pick up?
- Compost mandate
- Pay-As-You-throw policy?
- Engage mid- and large-sized buildings in compost program.
 - Can the city require this when permits are opened?
 - Also need to target the older buildings.
 - Building managers are saying they can't compost because of rats.
 - Can the city bring all the large building managers together to share concerns/solutions? Provide a written guide to building managers in addition to conversations that are already happening.
 - Leverage tenants and give them tools to push management to improve recycling/compost.
- Inclusion of universities
- Can we start corporate composting? Expand other recycling services (like thin film) to corporate entities.
- Reduce number of plastic bags (grocery, take out, etc)
- Education about which thin films can be recycled (stretchy ones, but not from frozen food)
- Move-out waste
 - Consider looking at Harvard's program for furniture reuse, etc. Does require a lot of space.
 - How can we encourage/reward furnished apartments to reduce turnover?
- Engagement with city councilors running in upcoming election - would need to be as individual residents, not from the RAC directly; Mothers Out Front city council candidate forum - Oct 24th 6-8 pm at the City Senior Center
- Composting, other sustainability issues can be brought up to city councilors at any event or in individual conversations, doesn't have to be a specific "green" forum
- TerraCycle pick program
 - Would residents have to pay? Would it be integrated through the city
- Tap into PB ideas (e.g. sharing library)
- Encourage reducing waste in the first place - what kind of systems can enable this?

4. Update on food scraps collection. How does the compost program affect rodent issue?

- Trash carts are being chewed through in as little as 3 weeks
- Cost savings with composting, since there's an associated reduction in cart replacement

- No data on how many compost carts have needed replacement but trash carts are significantly higher.
- Trash bins lids don't always fall flat; rats can smell food so start to work their way in.
- Compost carts have heavier lids because of lock.
- Comes down to eliminating rats being able to smell the food.
- Compost carts seem to be denser plastic than trash and recycling bins.
- "Rodents" goes beyond rats - includes squirrels and rabbits. Squirrels may be creating the holes that rats can then get through.

5. Closing

- Prepare for ZWMP discussion at Nov. RAC meeting - Mike to send out ZWMP for everyone to review ahead of Nov meeting.
- Guest speaker next month will talk about yard waste and stormwater.
- Tour of yard waste facilities on Oct 31st (approx 9:30 - 1:30 tour) in West Bridgewater/Brockton - Mike to send out details.
- Public Comment - no comment
- Action Plan/Decisions
- Announcements
 - Helen S. looking for new space for BN swaps, ideally centrally located in Cambridge

5. Action Items:

- Develop focus group for move-out waste
- Speak to city councilors/attend MoF event as residents if interested
- Mike to send ZWMP from Somerville, Boston, maybe other cities
- Mike to send information about which thin films can be recycled (<https://how2recycle.info/sdo>)
- PB vote when final ideas are selected

6. Chat:

Quinten Steenhuis to Everyone 8:00 AM

Good morning!

Tracie Gordon to Everyone 8:03 AM

Good Morning All! Ive Got no audio. I'm going to try something else.

You to Everyone 8:04 AM

We can hear you Tracy

Sakiko Isomichi to Everyone 8:04 AM

We hear you Tracie!

Tracie Gordon to Everyone 8:05 AM

Ok thanks But I still can't hear you! I'll try sometrhing else Thank you!

Quinten Steenhuis to Everyone 8:10 AM

Congratulations!

You to Everyone 8:10 AM

Congrats, Mike!

Diane Roseman (she/hers) to Everyone 8:10 AM

Best news ever

Tracie Gordon to Everyone 8:14 AM

Congratulations Mike!

Helen Snively to Everyone 8:19 AM

what is compost monday?

Sakiko Isomichi to Everyone 8:19 AM

mandate!

Sorry, I was mumbling

Helen Snively to Everyone 8:20 AM

Thx, Sakiko... maybe I wasn't listening. :).

carlie to Everyone 8:22 AM

Does that include including office buildings?

Sakiko Isomichi to Everyone 8:22 AM

For compost mandate, I'm thinking every person and building including offices

Alex.Toupal to Everyone 8:22 AM

Allston Christmas

Helen Snively to Everyone 8:23 AM

emily.. I'd be happy to work with you on how to address move out.. maybe a small group of us?

Emily Lee 8:24 AM

Yes, let's connect outside of the meeting about it! I've been pondering on what you've been doing with Buy Nothing and the Community Center and whether/how we can do it larger-scale.

carlie 8:25 AM

@Emily Lee I also wonder what the colleges/universities in town do & what could be partnered or learned from them

Helen Snively 8:25 AM

good point, Emily.. Dailey.. do you have ideas?

Tracie Gordon to Everyone 8:23 AM

The problem is that the apartment buildings need help or a plan to control RATS. Perhaps we need to SHARE INFO on how to control the RATS first and then help them learn to compost.

Alex.Toupal to Everyone 8:23 AM

<https://roamingboston.com/allston-christmas/>

Helen Snively to Everyone 8:24 AM

thanks for this link, Alex.. I wonder if we could take those basic ideas and make it less chaotic, and safer/cleaner?

Sakiko Isomichi to Everyone 8:27 AM

Probably the implementation of compost mandate goes along with rodent control visits

Sakiko Isomichi to Everyone 8:27 AM

What are ways to reward buildings that come furnished?

Debby Galef to Everyone 8:28 AM

Info sheet for building managers would be helpful

Rob Vandenabeele to Everyone 8:30 AM

At the risk of sounding preachy, isn't the only viable SOLUTION to actually commit to REDUCE - Reuse - recycle via circular systems?

Helen Snively to Everyone 8:31 AM

i like sakiko's idea of rewards.. how could we build that in? an award for best recycling/compost set up in a building of over 12 units?

Rob Vandenabeele to Everyone 8:36 AM

Why not more education on the environmental and quality of living issues directly related to a throw away culture of convenience that creates mountains of trash?

Debby Knight to Everyone 8:38 AM

Life Alive requires people to indicate whether they need utensils or not when they place an on-line order. Much better than the default of just adding them to every bag!

Helen Snively to Everyone 8:40 AM

good point Debby.. what can we do to get this practice more widespread?

Amy Waltz to Everyone 8:41 AM

mother's out front is having a gathering for city council candidates which would be a great place to weigh in!

Elka 8:42 AM

Amy do you have more information about this event to share?

Judith 8:42 AM

October 24, City Senior Center, 6-8

Helen Snively to Everyone 8:42 AM

candidates forum Tues 24th.. includes Green Cambridge and MOF and others.. let's all go and ask the candidates how they feel about composting and single use etc. We don't have to identify ourselves as RAC members, just as residents

Tracie Gordon to Everyone 8:42 AM

Grubhub and doordash orders generally DO ask if you need utensils I believe. I placed an order last week and in small print was asked.

Helen Snively to Everyone 8:42 AM

oh Amy and I .. same thought.. the event is the senior center on Mass ave, 6 to 8 pm 24th

carlie to Everyone 8:47 AM

Probably mobile

Scott MacGrath to Everyone 8:47 AM

Agree - mobile monthly is a great idea

Diane Roseman (she/hers) to Everyone 8:47 AM

Mobile I think

carlie to Everyone 8:48 AM

I love the pickup idea

Emily Lee to Everyone 8:48 AM

I second that mobile would be more helpful. When you've accumulated so much stuff for recycling, it's hard to cart that to the recycling center if you don't live close by.

Mike Orr to Everyone 8:48 AM

<https://terracyclepickup.com/>

Amy Waltz to Everyone 8:49 AM

For me a 24 hour drop sight works better than pick up for recycle items.

Emily Lee to Everyone 8:52 AM

Regarding single use take-out, Recirclable is a company that has a reusable take-out container network going. They don't have a lot of restaurants in the Cambridge area, so it's worth mentioning to your favorite restaurant and encouraging them to join:

<https://www.recirclable.com/>

Debby Knight to Everyone 8:53 AM

Love mobile opportunities idea- it might also help build community where neighbors see each other and talk up best practices for dealing with waste

Helen Snively to Everyone 8:32 AM

I agree Rob.. Let's work toward that.. but until we get there let's get more people composting :)

Rob Vandenabeele 8:46 AM

Decreasing actual food waste would yield far more beneficial results to composting (and remember, we don't actually compost our organic waste).

Helen Snively 8:48 AM

are you saying this to the whole of rac or just me... maybe we can make this part of the plan?

Rob Vandenabeele 8:54 AM

I think we need to prioritize reducing and reusing, and admitting to the citizens of Cambridge that recycling is not actually a sustainable solution to our (and the national) waste crisis.

Scott MacGrath to Everyone 8:54 AM

Go to elka

Emily Lee to Everyone 8:55 AM

I thought Mass Recyclers said the frozen food bags aren't recyclable.

Amy Waltz to Everyone 8:55 AM

Yes Helen, Crutial to bring this topic up to all potential counsil candidates! I only know one strong advocate.

Meera Singh to Everyone 8:56 AM

You can put those frozen veg bags in the RecyclingCenter, no? I do. I go by the mantra "if it rips, recycle it". So have I been contaminating our plastic bag recycling?

Dave to Everyone 8:56 AM

I thouhgt that our recycling center took film plastic.

Helen Snively to Everyone 8:56 AM

to Elka's point.. I am so curious about all that.. can we do a more thorough list of what does and doesn't work and share it among ourselves and then make it more public?

Mike Orr to Everyone 8:57 AM

<https://www.cambridgema.gov/Services/CurbsideCollections#!rc-page=253145>

Meera Singh to Everyone 8:57 AM

Dave, I don't think they take film plastic

Mike Orr to Everyone 8:57 AM

scroll to the bottom for link

Helen Snively to Everyone 8:57 AM

clearly a lot of us are struggling with what goes in plastic film recycling.. let's all pay more attention to that and share our understanding with others.

Sakiko Isomichi to Everyone 8:57 AM

I was wondering about something similar to Scott's idea

Debby Knight to Everyone 8:58 AM

I remember hearing at one of the RAC meetings a few years ago that the chemical composition of bags and some paper boxes for frozen food makes them ineligible for recycling

Sakiko Isomichi to Everyone 8:58 AM

Outreach to other MA communities?

Emily Lee to Everyone 8:58 AM

Regarding frozen food plastic film recycling, <https://recyclesmartma.org/results-materials/#!rc-page=595936>: "These bags are not recyclable because they typically have barriers that protect the food from freezer burn or spoilage (oxygen and moisture barrier layers, for example). These barriers render the bags non-recyclable. Additionally, some of them won't pass the stretch test (the stretch test refers to whether or not the plastic bag stretches when you pull it apart. If the plastic bag isn't stretchy then you should Not recycle it with other film and wrap). For more information on film plastics visit plasticfilmrecycling.org."

Sorry have to hop off for a 9 am meeting; handing over to Diane! Great discussion!

Tracie Gordon to Everyone 9:00 AM

Lots of frozen foods have microwaveable bags and containers. Are these able to be recycled?

Quinten Steenhuis to Everyone 9:06 AM

With that kind of damage can you do any patches or repairs?

Helen Snively to Everyone 9:07 AM

mike.. these rat eaten carts.. are they in big buildings or ordinary houses?

great theories Mike.. i bet it's a combination of the 3 factors

Helen Snively to Everyone 9:14 AM

i don't see Richard on here.. I bet he'd have a chemical solution.. something to add to trash bin covers.. or something :)

Tracie Gordon to Everyone 9:15 AM

Halloween tours can we come in costume?

Helen Snively to Everyone 9:15 AM

yard waste on Halloween! Great way to celebrate !

Scott MacGrath to Everyone 9:15 AM

Can you link the ZWMP on the new RAC page?

Tracie Gordon to Everyone 9:16 AM

Why not suggest people put used litter in trash bins it will deter rats

Helen Snively to Everyone 9:19 AM

now I'm looking forwrd to Halloween :)

Alex.Toupal to Everyone 9:19 AM

Need to drop, thanks all!

Tracie Gordon 9:19 AM

How can we get a transcript of the chat.