

**Cambridge Recycling Advisory Committee**  
March 11, 2010 – Minutes Taken by Adam Mitchell

**Members Attending:** Kevin Douglas, Russell Disposal; Rob Gogan, Harvard University; Jarrod Jones, MIT; Judy Nathans, Cambridge resident; Randi Mail, Recycling Director; Adam Mitchell, Save That Stuff; Robert Winters, Cambridge resident

**Guests Attending:** Meryl Brott, Recycling Program Manager; David Demme, R.W. Beck; Mark Evans, Casella; Ryan Gray, MIT; Ted Live, Cambridge resident

**Market Report**

Mark reported that fiber prices rose in January and February. Plastic still has not recovered from the crash in 2008; most grades are still at 50% of their previous value. Tin is up. Casella's ACR (Average Commodity Revenue) is in the mid \$70's. They have a new commodity called commercial single stream.

Randi asked members whether the single stream should be considered for the Recycling Center. Currently there are separate roll-offs for paper and commingles, and there is a compactor for cardboard. Small businesses bring the bulk of these materials, especially cardboard, whereas residents bring non-traditional materials such as food scraps, plastic bags, books and clothing. The paper roll-off is emptied 2-3 times per month, commingles 1x/month and cardboard about twice per month. Consolidating the materials would increase the number of hauls but free up space at the Center to possibly expand or add new materials. Further evaluation is needed.

**EPA Webinar on Recycling Markets**

Randi reviewed a recent free EPA webinar, titled [Recycling Markets 2010](#) presented by Jerry Powell, editor of [Resource Recycling magazine](#). He discussed impacts/lessons of the 2008 market crash including:

- 25% drop in demand for recyclables in the last 16 months.
- Plant closings were lower than in other industries.
- Warehousing baled recyclables proved to not be cost effective for paper and plastics, but OK for metals.

- China's economic stimulus plan stimulated demand and market prices for US recyclables.
- Mills pushed on quality standards. Winners were suppliers that are loyal, large and produce better quality

6 trends for recycling from the recession:

1. Recycling is part of the national economic fabric, not a fad, we weathered it well. Our products are favored.
2. Need major improvement on local market development and procurement standards. Eliminate tax credits to mining and other extraction industries to level the playing field. Invest upgrades in existing mills.
3. Sustainability filter needed – ex. e-waste.
4. Are we going back in terms of recyclability? Debate over biodegradable plastics. Rededicate ourselves to ensure reuse and recyclability of stuff
5. Will dependence on China haunt us? Will they become more self reliant?
6. Will big companies keep getting bigger? Mergers, etc.

**Review of Food Scraps Drop-off Program**

Randi reviewed the City's program, which is now 2 years old, begun in February 2008. She has been invited to speak about the program at the [10<sup>th</sup> Annual MA Organics Summit](#) on April 6.

Initially, Cambridge learned of 2 similar programs: [Duluth, Minnesota](#) and [Boulder, CO](#). [Chittenden Solid Waste District in Vermont](#) recently started programs as well. In the beginning about 500 Cambridge households sign up to participate.

On average, 700 lbs/week are collected at the Recycling Center and 1,000 lbs per week from

Whole Foods on Prospect St. Material collected doubled in 2009 compared to 2008. DPW has five 68 gallon totes for organics, picked up once per week by Save That Stuff, twice a week in the summer. Ronan Delaney, the Recycling Center Monitor washes the totes on a regular basis, replaces the liners and offers hand sanitizer at the Center for users. Odors are controlled by placing pizza boxes and cardboard in the tote.

DPW values its partnership with Whole Foods, as they are demonstrating leadership by offering a retailer take back program. The City is seeking other similar partnerships in North Cambridge and Cambridgeport, in which the host takes full responsibility to maintain and pay for the program.

A Harvard Extension student, Nupur Hiremath reported on the program in June 2008, conducting an online survey of users and interviews with City staff. A new survey is underway. At the time:

- 45% of participants lived in zip code 02139, 28% in 02138, 13% in 02140, 10% in 02141.
- 26% had 1 person in household, 45% had 2, 12% had 3 and 16% had 4.
- 23% have outdoor space, 41% have shared outdoor space and 36% have none, while 49% had attempted backyard composting
- 49% have a garbage disposal and 66% of them are used
- 76% generate meat waste
- 96% said that sorting organics from the trash was easy, while 66% said all organics were kept separate
- 21% said the Recycling Center was very convenient, 52% said reasonably convenient and 28% said not very, but I do it anyway!

DPW staff have observed that this is a very popular program, some residents freeze scraps to save room and control odors, backyard composters drop-off meat, fish, etc b/c not accepted in their home bins, some bring compostable packaging peanuts, some bring in compostable bags BPI certified with US Composting Council are OK, and some bring in compostable takeout containers from Whole Foods.

The food waste drop-off program can be viewed as a bridge to curbside collection. The new curbside contract for yard waste will allow the City to renegotiate the terms to add food and offer year-round collection if adequate processing capacity develops in the region. Other next steps include: inspire more municipal programs, identify more community partners, consider the possible role of [in-vessel composters](#), and food waste disposers (which send waste to MWRA's [Deer Island Treatment Plant](#) and is turned into fertilizer).