

Cambridge Recycling Advisory Committee - Business Subcommittee
Meeting with Solid Waste Haulers to Discuss Business Recycling
April 27, 2011

Haulers Attending: Allied Waste, Gino Dugan; B-P Trucking, Robert McDevitt; Capital Paper / Mass Hauling, Craig Lovett; Casella Recycling, Mark Evans; Charles George Companies, Vinnie Freelove; Earthworm, Jeff Coyne; Earthworm, Matthew DeMarrais, Earthworm; E.L. Harvey & Sons, Ben Harvey; E.O.M.S. Recycling, Lori Besegai; McGeoghean Waste Systems, Paul Delaney; Save That Stuff, Adam Mitchell

RAC Members Attending: Claire Davies, Jan Dillon, Rob Gogan, Jarrod Jones, Juliana Lyman, Judy Nathans

City Staff Attending: John Fitzgerald, DPW Environmental Program Manager; Randi Mail, Recycling Director

Introduction

- Meeting
 - Organized by City (DPW & License Commission) and Recycling Advisory Committee's new Business Subcommittee. RAC is volunteer group, 16 members appointed by City Manager
 - Goals – for RAC to gather information, digest and develop recommendations for DPW

- Background
 - City Ordinance in 1991 established mandatory recycling for all buildings that generate waste. Requires that if a commercial landlord provides for trash collection, then recycling must also be provided.

 - All materials subject to state waste bans must be recycling if they comprise at least 5% of waste

 - Cambridge businesses can set up curbside recycling collection with any licensed hauler

 - Small businesses with 50 employees or less, may use City's Recycling Center
 - Located at 147 Hampshire St, rear of DPW yard
 - Open hours: Tues/Thurs 4pm-7:30pm and Sat 9am-4pm.
 - Accepted materials include Batteries (non alkaline only), Books (3 ring binders OK), Bottles & Cans, Cardboard, Paper, Scrap Metal (no sealed containers or large appliances), Mercury Items (fluorescent bulbs, thermometers, thermostats) Packing Peanuts, Plastic Bags, and Large Plastics (laundry baskets, crates, toys, etc.)

 - 2010 changes to hauler license required:
 - All haulers provide recycling services (either directly or through subcontractor)
 - List of customers must indicate which services (trash, recycling) are provided to each. City merged these lists and it appears that 35% of commercial customers do not appear to have a recycling program.

Brainstorm: What are the barriers to recycling for Cambridge businesses that do not have a program?

- Space & Access
 - internal storage space or room for toters
 - Access for haulers to conveniently service businesses (parking, easy access to buildings)

- Cost, Time & Benefits
 - Lack of storage space may mean more frequent pick-ups, adding to cost of service

 - It can take 3-6 months to start a program, so it takes time for a business to realize benefits.

 - Some vendors do have case studies and successful examples, but for smaller businesses it can be more difficult to estimate or show the benefits.

- Vendors do offer education and waste audits
- Noise ordinance: hauling is an early morning business and access is hard if you cannot get there before delivery trucks and rush hour traffic gets bad. Noise ordinance compounds the cost to customers given pick-up efficiency impacted. Changing the ordinance to 6am vs. 7am would be very helpful.
- Lack of knowledge. Some customers expect to be paid for any amount of cardboard recycled.
- Options
 - City Recycling Center option for small businesses with 50 employees or less: about 40 small businesses use it. Need to raise awareness, more businesses probably are not aware of this option. Open hours (Tues/Thurs 4pm-7:30pm and Sat 9am-4pm) may not be adequate.
- Attitudes
 - Indifference. Businesses have to want to recycle and understand the benefits to them. Some see it as another layer of regulation, expense and work. Customers don't want to think about trash. It's an aggravation, a cost of doing business (so is always a target for reduction in cost)
 - Resentment: some businesses may resent the mandatory regulation. How is enforcement done?
- Challenges with Small businesses
 - Cost, space issues and size of the business are the real barriers
 - Volume generated determines whether recycling cost can be justified. If a business is not generating 50% or more material that is recyclable, costs are difficult to justify financially. They need to want to recycle on principle, company values.

How can haulers help businesses implement new programs, and maximize recycling?

- Education:
 - Need to offer education/assistance regardless of business size. For haulers, this ability is an investment, and a commitment.
 - Onsite training should be based on location and generation volume and type.
 - All haulers send regular memos to existing customers to encourage recycling, and waste ban notifications. Help customers understand what to recycle. Waste ban enforcement often falls to haulers. Haulers periodically gauge what's in load and give feedback to customers. Ultimately customers decide whether to do anything about it, some will, some won't. Notify clients "you're exceeding the allowable amount given the waste ban", but if you're too tough they'll call another hauler that is 'easier' to work with.
 - Ex. Harvard received a waste ban letter re: too much cardboard in trash. Little action was taken until DEP published a list of violators. Then Harvard switched trash compactor for single stream recycling instead. More recycling results from the 'shame' of being on the DEP list of violators.
 - Leadership
 - Each business needs a GOOD recycling coordinator (ex. Rob @ Harvard) – really important.
 - Top down support. If owner is supportive, others will recycle. It's key to have the owner/leader involved and focused on recycling. Encourage and incent business owners to take the lead and support recycling will help ensure the business as a whole participates.
 - Haulers present at this meeting are the 'good guys' - - not everyone is focused on recycling.
- Flexibility

- Free/Reduced rates: Some offer free/reduced rate for initial service period so customers can experience recycling/composting and see the benefits first. Easier to do this when market is strong for recyclables.
- Lack of service contract: Customers can say 'yes' to more easily without long term commitment
- Customize a program to fit a customer's specific needs. One size does NOT fit all.
- Starting programs one step at a time can make a big difference.
- Setup
 - Do haulers need to provide collection bins for inside building?
 - Not an issue. Inexpensive options at Staples.
 - Improvise, use any container. Start with what you have.
 - Single stream makes it a lot easier
 - Space issue relieved some: fewer totes because fibers & containers can be mixed
 - Education is easier.
 - Usually less expensive for hauler, and can pass along savings to customer. Though lower revenue can make it more expensive.

What are the benefits of recycling to businesses, and haulers? Best strategies to increase recycling?

- Business benefits
 - Keeps them compliant with waste bans
 - Company image: being perceived as a 'green' business
 - Avoid bad press
 - It's the right thing to do, makes them feel good
 - Most haulers can provide waste audits and further help reduce trash pickups
- Trends
 - Public and large businesses recycle more
 - Retailers are foolish not because there is always a cost savings. Trash pickup frequency can definitely be reduced, and should be to avoid unneeded pickups. Haulers want to minimize pickups because of operating costs and environmental impact.
 - Small businesses (mom & pop) recycle less.
 - Don't perceive or care about benefits. They run their businesses lean and may not have staff to coordinate efforts. Some have even stopped because they couldn't afford it.
 - If a business is not recycling, we'll check the dumpster first to see if it is even worth trying to sell recycling services.
 - Recycling markets are cyclical.
 - Haulers struggle market is weak. Those implementing on a shoe string budget are very susceptible when the market dips, and could go out of business.
 - Market swings effect long term investments and financing plans for equipment.
 - Despite market volatility, recycling will still grow, it's a core service provided.
 - Haulers need to expand recycling routes and numbers of customers to optimize routes/pick-ups. We need to grow small commercial business recycling. It's to everyone's advantage.
 - Bundle services in one price?

- This can hide true costs of trash and recycling. Used more in midwest and western US states when there is a single provider servicing an area.
 - May not work in Cambridge since different haulers have different capabilities and it is good to have the variety of offerings.
- Hauler benefits
 - Recycling keeps us all competitive. If we don't offer the service we lose business to our competitors
 - Reducing tons disposed lowers cost for haulers
 - Recycling revenue offsets some operating costs. Financials are different for small vs. large companies.

What are the priority areas the Business Subcommittee should address?

- Education
 - Raise environmentally literacy among business owners might
 - Consider how to replicate/leverage the trend against smokers. Now if someone asks "You're a smoker?" it has an impact. How can we have the same impact when we ask "You don't recycle?"
 - Ensure outreach programs are multi-lingual, especially for janitorial staff. Some haulers do this.
 - Similar to Better Business Bureau window sticker, consider developing an 'Accredited Cambridge Business Recycler' certification and logo. Save That Stuff offers customers a sticker.
 - Focus on landlords.
 - Ensure all landlords understand that if trash collection is provided, recycling must be as well.
 - Landlords of multi-tenant buildings should be required to provide trash/recycling – ensures a coordinated approach for collection and on-site storage of material.
- Regulations
 - Simplify Ordinance. Instead of 5% rule, define requirement by business type. Example: retailers must recycle cardboard, restaurants must recycle containers and cardboard, etc.
 - Have the City's Inspectional Services Department enforce recycling.
- Other
 - Consolidation/co-op formation: encourage small businesses to consolidate with peer businesses to aggregate volumes and therefore allow haulers to provide service more efficiently/effectively.
 - Identify businesses that may want to recycle and don't know how. We (recycling advisory business sub-committee) may have contacts/relationships that could be leveraged.
 - Share list of businesses that do not appear to be recycling, with the haulers.
 - This is a very competitive business. Changing regulations and driving enforcement will help address those businesses that are not currently recycling.
 - Ways to create economic incentives: Consider tax credits or other business incentives to encourage recycling. MA DEP grants or other funds could help businesses that want to start recycling, especially during the learning curve or initial stages of recycling where benefits may not yet be achieved. "If consumers are getting tax credits for doing 'green' things, why aren't businesses?"
- Consider collection for businesses by the City

- Make it easier for people to put out trash & recycle independently of who provides service and what they charge (i.e., allow people to put out trash and recyclable materials at the curb and make it transparent who picks it up)
- There is a reason why city and towns are getting out of the collection business for commercial accounts – administration, inspection and ensuring the right pricing is difficult