

Meeting Notes
RI Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP) Advisory Committee - August 19, 2014

Held @ RI RRC – Johnston, RI - 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

Members in Attendance: Mike Asciola (Town of Johnston), Dan Lanier (RISEP), Eugenia Marks (RI Audubon), Jim Nocella (Waste Management), Jon Schock (Town of S. Kingstown), Bob Vanderslice (RI Dept. of Health)

Working Group in Attendance: Paul Gonsalves, (DOP), Laurie Grandchamp (DEM), Nancy Hess, (DOP), Sarah Kite (RIRRC), Mike McGonagle (RIRRC), Mike O’Connell (RIRRC), Jared Rhodes (DOP)

I. Introduction

Paul started the meeting with an agenda overview. Nancy then gave a brief description of the August 2014 draft plan layout highlighting how the writers from the three agencies addressed comments and feedback from the Committee within.

II. Draft Plan – Discussion

Mike O’Connell began discussing the plan by stating that the recommendations represent the best long-term options for the state. One of the most important questions that we face is, “How do we extend the life of the landfill?” He also mentioned that on Sept. 3rd, there will be a RIRRC board meeting where the plan will be discussed and feedback will be sought. As the acceptance of the plan for the most part, depends on the strategies outlined, Mike then opened it up for group comments.

Eugenia started by saying that the overall plan was put together very well. She suggested that the recommendations be listed upfront, perhaps in the Executive Summary. One of her top questions dealt with administrative procedures of RIRRC. If a Pay as You Throw (PAYT) program were to be implemented, would it REQUIRE legislative action? She said that an action should be added to address air quality monitoring at the landfill and she also had many smaller written comments that she intended to hand over to Nancy at the end of the meeting.

Bob stated that the plan has ended up in a pretty good place, after some uncertainty early on in the process. He commended the “open minded” approach to looking at different strategies. The plan is practical and focused and there is not a great deal of “fluff”. He did suggest that the existing responsibilities chart be edited to identify the sectors involved at each step of the waste management process. Non-profits should have an expanded role in implementing the process. Mike McGonagle added that this document is mostly a planning document and the implementation will be able to identify groups who will be best able to help out. Bob then mentioned that SGP elements have a track record of having multiple uses (which this one does, see the Abstract) and the Executive Summary of this plan should be made useful to legislators. Sarah said one of the goals will be to give the legislature a separate piece that is very basic and straightforward when legislation is requested. In a perfect world, the municipalities would be able to initiate the recommendations of the plan, but it won’t pass many municipal councils, so state legislation may be the best option. Mike M added that this PAYT strategy goes beyond what we have typically known as PAYT. This would be a complete overhaul to the funding structure of the RIRRC. He wanted to make sure that this important point comes across implicitly in the plan. Jim agreed that we are dealing with volatile topics and going the route of PAYT will be a long difficult road.

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The topic of how PAYT could be implemented came up again. Mike O was pretty sure that it has to be done through legislature, as there may be an alternate way to get it through administratively, but that would require RIRRC to be denied an increased funding request. That route would not be in the best interest of the long-term life of the landfill. Eugenia stressed the concept of waste management being looked at more as a utility. Mike O added that the specifics would vary and that RIRRC will have to go to each municipality individually. Jim said that the whole discussion of tip fees vs. PAYT is a polarizing issue and that it will be made a decision point sooner rather than later. Eugenia agreed and added that the price/cost should be discussed upfront, at the beginning. Bob added that the PAYT rate will be small when compared to a rate increase if nothing is done. This needs to be addressed now, as we will be entering the 1st year of a 2-year legislative cycle. On a related note, Dan Lanier brought up the point of relating the plan to RI's workforce. Making a connection to the workforce may be an important selling point to the General Assembly.

Sarah stressed the fact that most people understand that it has been 20+ years since there was a price change in waste collection. If PAYT will be the "next big thing", we need to make it a point now and be very clear about it. Nancy suggested we look at our neighbors in Fall River, as they have recently implemented a PAYT because of need due to a closing landfill. Mike O estimated that the revenue from bag fees might be the equivalent to about \$100/ton. In that scenario, a significant amount of funds could be given back to municipalities, while operating and outreach costs are fully met at RIRRC. PAYT and statewide recyclables collection though, does not come without some significant concerns.

Eugenia expressed concern with contamination of recyclables. Sarah said that food and construction debris remain the biggest culprits. The program will have to include an extensive piece on enforcement and education aimed at the municipalities. The current outreach/education expenditures per household is at about \$1, where the national ally recommended expenditure should be about \$2.50/household. With PAYT, the funding will be there. Sarah suggested that the legislation should have an explicit set aside for a % of proceeds going to directly fund education/outreach programs. Nancy took the idea a step further and suggested another set-aside for youth development and employment programs, as that would be popular with town councilors and legislators. Something similar to the youth litter corps programs that used to exist in the 1990's. Eugenia added that a piece should also address permanent employment for those without high levels of formal education.

Jon brought up the point of municipal funding. Not all municipalities fund waste management the same way. There will be a good deal of logistics to be vetted, as communities currently using a PAYT program, the new funding structure be required to be set up as an enterprise fund, where communities without PAYT usually have waste collection as part of their general funds. He also talked about South Kingstown's experience in attempting to adopt a "hybrid" system of PAYT where franchising comes into play. In that the Towns went out to bid and the low bidder would of had exclusive franchise rights to the municipality. Under this scenario, residents still would have had the option to drop off their own solid waste. It was not adopted locally due to complaints at the Town Council level from noncompetitive bidders. Nancy compared this strategy to the 2009 Water Use an Efficiency Act where major public waters systems are required to be run as an enterprise. Any funds collected had to be funneled back into the water system.

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III. Next Steps

In concluding, Mike O stated that the next scheduled meeting is September 9, 2014. Based on the discussion, he asked if we should hold the meeting as it would basically be the same type of discussion as today or if final comments could be taken care of electronically. Jared reminded the group as to the remaining steps to the adoption process: where the RIRRC board and DEM and the still have to sign off on the plan before it goes to the State Planning Council and its Technical Committee for formal review and public hearings. Nancy then suggested that for the benefit of the members not in attendance, we can send out another request for comments and a request to see if any Committee wants to meet in September. On a final note, Jim suggested that instead of sending out another full version of the plan that a list of discussed/proposed edits be sent out to the group. Nancy will summarize today's major talking points and email the Committee.

Remaining meetings are:
September 9 (if needed)

The Solid Waste Management Plan web page on the Division of Planning website can be found at:
<http://www.planning.ri.gov/statewideplanning/land/solidwaste.php>