

# MINUTES OF THE SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE

## EXECUTIVE CONFERENCE ROOM

April 27, 2021 - 6:00 P.M.

Committee members present: Sarah Eckstein, Chair, City Councilor Crystal Paradis, Wendy Berkley, Doug Watson and Michael Bobinsky.

Pending Appointee: Lilac Hallowell Snowden

Guests: John Storer, Community Services Director and Councilor Dennis Shanahan, City Councilor for Ward 5

Chairman Sarah Eckstein called the meeting to order at 6:15p.m (due to technical difficulties)

**1. Approval of Meeting Minutes:** Minutes of the March 18 meeting were tabled due to time constraints and will be reviewed and voted on at the next meeting.

**2. Group Discussion on Reducing Pesticide Use:** Using the City of Dover's efforts as an exemplar, guests spoke to what worked and what did not work and what they learned)

Sarah opened the meeting with why we are discussing pesticide reduction now. She expressed that the timing is good. Along with our neighboring towns and cities, the City of Somersworth just signed a commitment to make measurable reduction of nitrogen in the Great Bay estuary over the next 5 yrs. She expressed, as a community we are going to have to decide what we do about pesticide reduction. *"As we all know using pesticides end up causing runoff and seep into impervious surfaces that end up into our streams, drinking water, wastewater and that not only affects our health but the health of natural habitats like the Great Bay Estuary."*

Mike gave a detail on two parks the city uses fertilizer on today: Noble Pines and Stein' Veteran memorial park. The City has experimented with other organic material from time to time. Sarah asked the question of whether we see the municipality leading the way and at what level should the bar be raised? Many households use fertilizers today. Some cities have implemented ordinances but what recommendations should we make to reduce pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers?

Sarah introduced our guests who represent the City of Dover and have played a critical role in advancing their city's organic land management (OLM) practices. Their OLM makes up two specific programs: curbside and turf management. Prior to the implementation of their revised OLM program, they treated 30-35 miles of curbside roadway and historically used municipal pest inc. This contractor would apply glyphosate (\$8-10k/year) by spraying directly on weeds.

Over the course of three years, the City of Dover had progressed slowly integrating organic practices:

1st year: 25% of the 75% was organic

2nd year: 50% organic - 50% less harmful/least toxic treatment

3rd year: 75% organic - 25% less harmful/least toxic treatment

Working alongside community groups such as Non-Toxic Dover, the City applied and received a Stoneyfield grant shortly after the resolution had been past. Wendy had asked what this grant allowed the city to do. Councilor Dennis responded, "This grant allowed us to educate the community and experiment with several alternatives to glyphosate. Our intent was to use "the least toxic" pesticide available (nonsynthetic/non chemical form)."

The City experimented with several alternatives to glyphosate such as burning the weeds, weed wacking, steaming the weeds, they proved to be unscalable and ineffective. Starting in 2020, they used ammoniated soap products ex: polysands (Portsmouth also uses this solution today) and has proven to work. In 2021, they made slight modifications to polysands and placed it in the seams where weed seeds can take harbor, germinate and grow. They would seal up the cracks and treat it with ammoniated soap on any weeds that evidently came up to the surface.

John Storer spoke from the perspective of implementing the policy. Traditionally the City of Dover has gone out to bid for two separate services: 1-curb side weed treatments; and 2-turf management of city properties (parks and ballfields). As John mentioned, they have made significant adjustments to both programs to avoid toxic, synthetic herbicides. They continue to advance their learning curve and make additional modifications moving forward.

Councilor Dennis spoke from the perspective as the listener of the community and worked with the community groups like Beyond Pesticides and Non-Toxic Dover. Dennis brought the resolution forward to the City Council.

The buy-in from the community was pretty much there from the start Dennis said. The City Council went from eliminating the municipal use of glyphosate and 24D but expanded to support the elimination of municipal use of all synthetic pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers. Dennis described his community's sentiment as, "*They felt it was the right thing to do*". There was consensus that it would be a fiscal risk had they not done anything about it. Around the same time, the World Health Organization declared the use of glyphosate as a toxic chemical. The only real back Dennis stated, was from the individual that had the turf management contract for the city. Dennis reiterated, "*Community involvement is vital in order to have a big impact*"

Dennis and John named several challenges they faced in implementing their solution. Several of them were due to the following:

- Droughts
- Scarce vendors with little expertise in OLM
- The learning curve to familiarize yourself with OLM
- Not many accreditations out there on what materials you should be using and can trust
- The word "Organic" can be misleading and found several products still carried toxic chemicals in their ingredients even though they marketed themselves as "Organic"

Councilor Paradis asked if the City of Dover was ready to make the jump from a resolution to an ordinance. Their response was that they were not ready to make the jump because they still have work to do to promote the community on what their intent is.

Sarah had asked what the typical cost they've seen in the market to go fully organic. John mentioned they've seen ranges in the \$20k-\$30 but can go as high as \$75k range.

Both John and Councilor Dennis shared lessons learned:

- It is recommended to set the program goal of getting to 100% organic in one year vs three. They found it to be more difficult to try and reach 25-75% organic since it is difficult to implement otherwise
- Rather than putting out an RFP, conduct an RFQ first since they felt they went in blindly and at times felt naive to vendors that didn't have the qualifications, expertise and references behind them. An RFQ would help understand and assess the city's needs, budget area, pilot scale..etc..
- It is recommended to work with UNH to understand your baseline and level your expectations: understand your soil biology and its impact on soil chemistry, lawn location and what benefits your watershed
- Define what organic means to you
- Work with Chip Osborne, Osborne Organics. They wrote a program for a ball field and suggested to apply through the Stonyfield grant.
- Work with PJC organics - Pam Nucum. Pam markets her own organic fertilizers. She helped us navigate how to scale back where we needed to
- It is always good to conduct a pilot first especially as you apply OLM to different applications using different applicators. We focused on Woodman park first and then expanded from there.
- Due to northeast weather conditions, you need to be somewhat forgiving for using some level of synthetic pesticide. There needs to be room for some flexibility given the market we are in today.
- OMRI - is a great trusted resource. They produce lists of "organic" that fit within our definition.
- It is recommended to take the NOFA course - trainings on monitoring resources. Just know it can be a bit pricey per person (\$600)

### **3) More ways we can collaborate with the City of Dover:**

- John and Councilor Dennis offered to send us links to promotional materials as both cities work together on the Great Bay Estuary
- As the joint seacoast communities agreement gets underway, there may be more opportunities to curb fertilizer use (MAAM)
- A community learning series on the topic of pesticide reduction

### **4. Actions coming out of tonight's meeting:**

- More discussion is needed amongst the Committee on what pesticide reduction measures they should suggest the City of Somersworth to take

## **5. Old Business**

- Crystal will get Sarah info on solar ordinances or a contact that can provide additional info on it
- Sarah needs to give Wendy additional topics to focus on for the next few newsletters
- Sarah will engage Diana Carpinone to get her perspective on her involvement in the City of Dover's resolution
- Sarah will get some tentative dates for upcoming community learning series on a variety of topics
- Council Dennis will give Sarah the contact of Dover for Dems to get info on their rain barrel program
- Sarah will put out a poll to the members to see what the date and time will be for the next Committee meeting.

## **5. Public Comments**

None

Sarah Eckstein moved and Mike Bobinsky seconded the motion to adjourn meeting. Meeting ended at 7:15pm.

Respectfully submitted Sarah Eckstein