

# MINUTES OF THE SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE

City Council Chamber

MARCH 21, 2019- 6:00 P.M.

## WORKSHOP ON CITY RECYCLING PROGRAM

Committee members present: Scott Orzechowski, Chair, City Councilor Ed Levasseur, Doug Watson, Devon Stanley, and Michael Bobinsky. Sarah McGraw was absent from the meeting.

Guest: Peter Lachapelle of WMI

Scott Orzechowski opened the meeting at 6:09pm. Scott announced that tonight's meeting is a Committee workshop on the City's recycling program. Scott also announced that Peter Lachapelle from WMI was an invited speaker and here tonight to provide an update on latest issues and trends in the City of Somersworth municipal recycling program. Scott invited Councilor Levasseur and Mike Bobinsky to say a few words as part of the meeting introduction.

Mike indicated that the City has a solid waste and recycling collection contract with WMI and that Peter L was invited to discuss latest issues occurring in the recycling markets and how that translates to new processing costs and expectations for residents. Mike also provided background on how the City service program is reacting to changing recycling markets and new requirements residents are asked to follow in order to have items collected. Mike discussed information flyers, website updates and eblasts have been used over the past year to educate Somersworth citizens on the proper way to recycle. Mike also advised there are now added processing costs that WMI is passing along to the City due to higher costs WMI has when processing recyclables with end users/processing plants. This new processing cost was not included in the City's FY19 budget resulting in DPW budget going over by an estimated \$60,000. Councilor Levasseur then discussed that the City Council just recently passed an ordinance to increase the cost of the City trash bags as a means of offsetting these new recycling process fees that are now being passed on to the City. Ed advised this new fee would take effect as of July 1, 2019 and will increase the price of a bag by \$.20. \$.15 toward recycling process fees and \$.05 to recover the cost of a new bag inventory management system that is to take effect sometime over the next 2 months.

### **Peter Lachapelle, Government Affairs Rep for WMI.**

Peter provided an overview of the latest in recycling trends, that for the past 10 plus years, markets for recycling products have been stable and WMI and other processors of recycled material have had good markets (namely in China) to help offset the labor cost of collecting and processing of the material. That condition changed in 2018 when the China market stopped accepting most of the North American recycling items due to poor quality, food contamination, lack of quality control by US providers. China is now advising they will only accept US recyclables that have less than 1% contamination in it. This extremely higher quality standard is hard to achieve and has forced WMI to rethink how they collect,

process and charge for collecting municipal recyclable material. WMI has developed a massive public education campaign aimed at correcting past behavior such as use of plastic bags, refusing to collect material that appears to have food waste in containers and or items that are simply not recyclable. While markets get re-established or developed, WMI is having to pay higher processing or storage costs with end users which in turn is passed along to their customers/contracted communities like Somersworth. The City anticipates DPW budget will be over expended by \$60,000 at the end of this fiscal year due to these new process fees added on to the City's monthly collection billing.

Peter explained no easy answer. Canceling recycling programs and sending all material to the landfill has long term costs as it will help fill up our regional landfill faster. Turnkey Landfill as an example, has about 200 acres of active landfill space and WMI was very recently approved to expand to accommodate future growth, but that has limits and costs. Perhaps considering having residents go back to source separation at the curb, (all plastics and containers in one and paper in another) is a better way than comingled as we have now; residents may be more careful with items. Currently however, lower graded plastics have no markets along with mixed paper; glass has no market as well, and WMI is trying to find innovative ways of using these items rather than just landfilling them. Peter explained an example of this is taking glass and crushing it into a fine sand and using that as road base within the expanded landfill development. WMI is also investing in new technology at their processing plants to help ensure only clean acceptable items are sent out for recycling.

Peter mentioned that Somersworth has very high recycling participation rates, approximately 34% of the City's solid waste is recycled. Peter discussed that WMI uses their Billerica Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) for most recyclable material collected as they have the ability to process and store material. Peter also encouraged the City to continually educate the residents on proper ways to recycle, what can and cannot be recycled; he complimented City efforts to continue the program with the added surcharge planned to go onto the price of a trash bag in July, as a means to recover some of these new costs.

Members discussed the future HHW collection event now set for Saturday May 4 at the WMI facility in Rochester and how that helps get rid of special waste; Committee members expressed desire to increase the number of days for this event to better meet needs. Members also discussed future food composting programs and how this is a new waste stream being addressed in some small ways, but that it requires another truck for collection, needs a facility to transport to or an end user, and requires other program elements to ensure public health is maintained with the program. The Somersworth School Department has been doing food composting in the Middle School and High School past few years and is using a private contractor for hauling away the food waste collected in the cafeteria.

**Next Steps:**

Recommended to stay close to developments, monitor market trends with staff, continue to educate the public on proper methods to recycle and support the implementation of the added fee on the trash bags to offset program costs.

Respectfully submitted by:

Michael J. Bobinsky, March 25, 2019.