

Ad-Hoc Curbside Trash Committee
Thursday, February 9, 2023, 6:00 PM
Veterans Room

Minutes

1. Call to Order: 6:00 PM
2. Roll Call: Councilor Marketti (Chair), Councilor Steeves, Health Inspector Daniel Wasiuk, Board of Health Member Daniel Grabowski, Citizen Members Kevin Buxton, Steve Gregoire, Mark Lataille, Kathi Grenier
3. Consider and approve Curbside Trash Committee minutes of January 26, 2023.
Approved 8-0
4. Discussion of Survey results to date.

Discussion: Mr. Wasiuk said we have received approx. 1,000 responses. He read the tally results and comments from residents. One of the main comments was there was not enough information about the cost.

Question 1: Where do you get your town information from?

Town Council meetings 153
Mail 488
Website 277
Newspaper 227
Social Media 304
Coffee Shop 47
Senior Center 24
Other 122

Question 2: I am a Southbridge:

Owner 687
LandLord 51
Renter 215

Question 3: Which option do you prefer?

A) Taxes 276
B) Flat Fee 255
C) User Fee 414

Daniel Grabowski talked about what his neighbors on Jennison Street think about curbside. They want to keep it the same as we have now. They're not worried about the cost, but they don't want to pay through the roof. They're more concerned about having it hauled, instead of being stuck with it.

Mr. Buxton said he is glad about the survey and choosing the service fee. He feels more information needs to get out. He thinks we should recommend the utility fee to the Council.

Mr. Gregoire said some of the same sentiments were expressed on Facebook as in the survey. He also said the reason there wasn't more information in the poll is because we don't have more information, such as the RFP. The town is going out for pricing and when we get the RFP back it will help us with more info for the community. He also talked about the confusion residents had with the survey and we need more outreach.

Mark Lataille said most people were confused about the cost, but our goal was to get more people to the meeting and we accomplished that. There was also discussion about future mailers and who should receive the information. It was noted that some residents did not get the survey with the census.

Several residents spoke about the survey:

Bruce Wyrebek, 209 Hillside Rd., said he was happy to see the survey, but there was no dollar amount on the survey and he asked why? He is waiting for more info. He also felt this is the most important issue in town, and unlike the roads which we drive on whether they're bad or good, trash pick-up is essential and could go awry in a hurry. He also offered examples of other cities he has visited which were once clean, and then went downhill. He feels we have to make this the easiest way for the residents and suggested property taxes are the way to go.

David LaRochelle, 580 Lebanon Hill Rd. had a question about surrounding towns and what they are doing for trash pickup and the cost? Irene Congdon answered that Webster is private, with a small transfer station and PAYT. Dudley and Douglas drop-off with a flat fee. Charlton is using Casella and Oxford transfer station for two bags a week. Most people are using private haulers. Sturbridge has drop off PAYT and private haulers, which is very expensive.

Stanley Pikul, 83 School St., spoke about his taxes. He said he does not put a lot of trash out. He feels the town employees should take a cut in pay for the trash pick-up. Hopes we consider cutting their pay.

Kevin Buxton wanted the public to understand the enterprise fund option would be used for curbside pick-up only. He encourages the committee to choose this option, and also spoke about toter sizes and bag options.

Mark Lataille spoke about a misconception with PAYT, which would not cover everything, and bag costs can increase. With a property tax option we're all paying the same, whether you use 1-2 bags or the person who uses 6-8 bags.

Anna Smith spoke about the container restriction in our regulations that each household gets one 65 gallon container.

One resident spoke about the cost of curbside with a private hauler, and the problem with multiple haulers on the streets at 4:00 AM in the morning. He felt we are on the right track with property taxes.

Maureen Doyle spoke about bin sizes and asked if we could get smaller trash bins. She also spoke about cutting town employee pay.

Councilor Adams spoke about independent contractors, the problems with oversight and how do you verify trash pickup? One positive thing is you can shop around. He doesn't like idea of trash pick-up at 4:00 AM.

Ron Blanchard, 334 Pleasant St., asked for a recap on what options we are looking at. The Chair said there are three options: Property taxes, a flat fee such as water and sewer, or a user fee such as a bag program. Ron also asked about bags and how to make sure people are purchasing bags? He spoke about illegal dumping in town and in the woods.

Steve Gregoire spoke about the charge of the committee. Figure out how to fund the curbside pick-up that we have now with the three options. A) Property Taxes. B) Flat Fee, charged per unit. C) Town bags of a certain color, which would not cover the full cost. In the end we are trying to keep the same service we have now.

A resident asked about the clear bags and how that worked? Anna Smith said the concept did not work too well. Although it is in the bylaw, we don't follow it.

Kevin Buxton spoke about the clear plastic bags and the free trash pick-up, which he refers to as the "gravy train." He spoke about past issues that the Board of Health was focused on, but in the future, they are going to have to crack down on "this, that and everything" to keep our town clean and pretty like we want.

John Szlyk, 334 Pleasant St., said he was confused about the bags. He said we have the blue totes and asked if we would be replacing the totes with the bags? The Chair said that residents would buy bags to offset the cost of trash pick-up. We would still use the blue tote and the bags would go into the tote. Mr. Szlyk asked about the recycle tote. The Chair responded that recycle will be included with curbside pick-up and the bags would be for the trash tote only.

Evelyn Velez, 26 Dennison Cross Rd., asked if the town is looking for some money to pay for this, or would it be a combination of town funds and taxes? The Chair said if the program comes out of the budget, then it will be paid through property taxes. Councilor Steeves answered that we are looking at ways to fund this, and mentioned using some royalty funds. He said those funds are limited because they are not recurrent, whereas taxes are. He also spoke about councilors and committee members also being tax-paying residents. Ms. Velez said we need to do what we can because people are sick and tired of their taxes going up. Councilor Steeves agreed.

Mark Laitaille asked if we can do another override when we already have the fire station override? Councilor Steeves answered it depends on the levy capacity. He explained that the fire station is actually a debt exclusion, which will eventually be paid off. An override is permanent. Mark said that if we are already paying an additional 6% on the fire station, a curbside override would add more to that.

Councilor Adams spoke about the landfill debt exclusion and the payment schedule which will drop off. He also said the override is permanent until we do an under-ride. He also said we can't just keep doing overrides.

John Pulawski, Old North Woodstock Road, spoke about the options that were being discussed by different members of the committee. He felt town officials were constrained and hopes we learned from our mistakes from the past landfill deal. He also asked that we break down our quotes; one for trash and another for disposal.

A resident asked about the length of the contract. Anna Smith said we are looking at 3-5 years. The consultant is recommending a 5 year contract. She also said the RFP will be going out and the turnaround is 60 days. She also spoke about the size of the proposal.

5. Review/discuss funding mechanisms including Gregoire plan.

Discussion: Irene Congdon said the numbers are preliminary and cautioned they are very fluid. She provided exact numbers for trash and recycle tonnage in 2022, and spoke about the cost per ton for pick up, the cost for disposal and recycling. Adding everything together she came up with an estimate of about \$1.8 million. She also spoke about other costs; the recycling coordinator's salary, billing service, various municipal costs, education, hazardous waste. The cost of the program itself is going to be one cost, it doesn't matter how it's funded, it's how we are cutting the pie. If we did all; a little bit of tax, \$400,000.00 of tax money, a \$100.00 flat fee, and a \$2.00 bag, what would the

system look like? She said this is all preliminary because we don't have an RFP. She explained the revenues and bag costs. The full program estimate of \$2 Million cost. She left the municipal costs open. She added a DEP one time grant and then totaled the revenue coming in for taxes, flat fees, bags.

Mr. Buxton asked about the bag program, how many bags would residents have to purchase and the costs per year? Ms. Congdon said 1.5 bags per week, \$2.00 a bag, the price per year would be \$156.00. The per unit costs \$100.00 and then \$400,000 in the tax base. If we did a flat fee, each unit costs \$300.00. She then explained the different scenarios and how do you pay for it? \$400,000 in the tax base she didn't think we would have to do an override.

Mr. Gregoire stated that if we did not sell enough bags to cover the cost of the program, taxes will have to kick in the rest. Ms. Congdon responded that it could be taxes or an enterprise fund, but in the end the residents will have to pay. It's just a matter of how they are going to pay for it.

Councilor Adams spoke about the tax levy and how it fluctuates year by year. He asked how we would pay for it depending on a bad year when we don't have the extra capacity? Ms. Congdon spoke about using an enterprise fund. Mr. Gregoire spoke about using landfill royalty money and placing it into an enterprise retained earning fund. Councilor Adams said we need to be cautious about using royalty funds as we are still liable for potential litigation down the road over landfill contamination. The Chair responded he thought insurance might cover that.

Daniel Grabowski spoke about the bags and everyone knows how many bags they need per week, and they're not going to skimp on bags. Mr. Gregoire responded that if we estimate selling 100,000 bags one year, but we only sell 50,000 bags, now we have a budget shortfall and the money will have to come out of taxes somehow.

Ms. Gondgon spoke about the three options. Mark Lataille said we need something more stable. He talked about the grant but it all sounds too good to be true. Mr. Buxton spoke about the three-pronged approach and said he thought we would have to adjust costs for all three, flat fees, taxes and bags. He suggested a service fee for the toter and we should help households reduce trash and doesn't feel we need to purchase bags.

Mr. Lataille said he thought 6300 households on a program has got to be cheaper than one person going out for trash and recycle service on their own. He feels we should give people the option to opt out and if they want to opt out and pay more that's their choice.

Chair Marketti asked if Irene's numbers are for all three programs, taxes, flat fee, bags? Ms. Congdon said is just one example and she has others. If we take one thing out then something else increases. One example is if we did a flat fee, everyone paying the same, it's \$300. It doesn't matter how many bags you put out. Mr. Gregoire pointed out that a single family home would be \$300, a three-family home would be \$900. It's a scale per unit.

Marketti said he thought the bag estimate is high, but Ms. Congdon said she didn't think so. She also spoke about the costs of the various combinations of options. She said if we did a flat fee and taxes, the per unit flat fee would be \$250, but then there is the tax cost. If we go with taxes and PAYT, people wouldn't necessarily see the taxes, but the cost per bag would be \$2.50, or about \$200 per year. A flat fee and bags, \$2.00 a bag at 1.5 bags per week, then \$156 per year for bags and a flat fee of \$150 per unit per year.

Mr Gregoire spoke about option B, he is warming up to the flat fee system. There's a couple of ways to structure it. \$300 for single family, \$600 for 2-family, 3-family \$900. He would like to see out-of-town for profit landlords take a little bit, bigger piece of the pie. He doesn't know how to graduate that scale so that we are not crushing them. Depending on what options we pick, there's a subset of different options within that to set the rate. He feels a lot of people who voted for C in the pole might change their minds if they watched the meetings and listened to facts, they'd be in favor of flat fee.

Chair Marketti asked if the numbers could be posted? Ms. Congdon asked that we not post the numbers yet, as they are just estimates. We need to keep moving forward. A lot of people talk about a user fee this is how a user fee works. The Chair asked for clarification on a flat fee and user fee. A flat fee would be a utility bill, per household unit, a user fee would be for each bag. Ms. Congdon continued to speak about the costs of bags.

A resident asked what retailers would sell the bags? Ms. Congdon said most local stores would be ok with selling the bags, because it brings in customers. She also said the bags would be sold in rolls of 10. He also asked about price gouging. Ms. Congdon said typically it has not been an issue. The town seal is on the bag, and the price is set.

Councilor Steeves spoke about the tax rate on households. He said the numbers of \$650,000 for taxes, that would equal roughly \$0.50 cents per 1,000. At \$400,000 the cost is \$0.25 cents per thousand. The Chair asked the median house value Councilor Steeves was basing his numbers on? Steeves said he used the average \$200,000.

Kevin Buxton said we like enterprise funds and suggest we pick an arbitrary number and start high. Mr. Gregoire said we can't purposely overcharge people. Mr. Lataille asked what would happen if there was a shortage on bags? Ms. Congdon said she's never seen that happen in larger cities.

Rachel Carney, Town Assessor, spoke about someone who voted on the survey and who called her office and asked about out of state landlords. Who's responsible for the bags if the property owner lives out of state? Health Director Wasiuk said the property owners are responsible per state sanitary code. Ms. Congdon said we would have to talk to Worcester as they have a bag program and people are trained for getting their yellow bags.

John Pulawski said sometimes when money is exchanged in this industry, sometimes they talk weight, sometimes they talk volume. Mr. Pulawski spoke about recycle bank which was based on weight. It seemed to work at simplifying the program.

One of the residents suggested a selling point would be, it's going to cost you \$5.00 a week or \$10.00 a week for trash pick-up. Rather than abstract numbers.

6. Update on RFP draft template and billing ideas.

Discussion: Councilor Steeves spoke about billing ideas brought to his Gen Gov Subcommittee Meeting. One of the issues brought up was the way the billing software works. He thinks it is more complicated than what we thought. He used the Airport billing as an example, and said bills would have to be re-entered every time for 6300 curbside households. He also asked Charlie Blanchard to look into it. There was further discussion on how our neighboring towns do billing.

7. Continue Senior and Landlord Education with Irene Congdon, MassDEP Regional Recycling Coordinator.

Discussion: Irene spoke about reaching out to seniors and landlords. She said that many seniors and landlords are not on social media. She said we need to discuss how to reach them. Mr. Wasiuk said most respondents on the survey get their information through the mail. Ms. Congdon said unless they live in town, they didn't receive the survey. She was thinking we should add something to local organization's newsletters.

Ms. Congdon asked if we have a timeline for getting to the town council? The Chair said he was told we need to recommend something to the Council in March. Ms. Congdon said getting something to the seniors and landlords is essential.

Mark Lataille read something from Facebook concerning Middleboro's cost increases on the bags.

8. Next meeting date: March 2, 2023, 6:00 PM in the Veterans Room.
9. Adjourn. 7:55 PM

Respectfully submitted by Chairman Marketti