

TOWN OF SOUTHBRIDGE
Ad-Hoc Curbside Trash Committee Meeting
Thursday, March 2, 2023
6:00 PM Veterans Room
Minutes

Call to order 6:00PM

1. Roll Call: Councilors Michael Marketti (Chair), Gus Steeves, Health Inspector Daniel Wasiuk, Board of Health Member Daniel Grabowski, Citizen Members Steve Gregoire, Mark Lataille, Kathi Grenier (Kevin Buxton absent).

Also in attendance: MassDEP Municipal Assistance Coordinator Irene Congdon, Recycle Coordinator Anna Smith, Stephen Lisauskas, WasteZero Rep. Residents George Chenier, James and Ruth Corbin, David Maricola, Denise Clemence, Nancy Graf-Harwood.

2. Minutes of February 9, 2023. Approved

3. **Presentation by WasteZero PAYT Program.**

Discussion: Stephen Lisauskas, from WasteZero, made a presentation on a PAYT bag program. He also handed-out copies of his presentation and talked about the program. Stephen explained what WasteZero Company is and that their mission is to reduce trash 50% across the United States; they focus exclusively on reducing trash, increasing recycling, increasing organic separation. He said that trash is the last unmetered utility and spoke of the history of electricity and water use, that originally was unmetered. When we started metering them, we saw a 30% reduction in use. He explained that if we pay for trash through taxes or a flat fee, it is unmetered. When you implement a PAYT program, what that does is meter the trash.

He also handed out samples of bags from other communities and explained the savings to the town using PAYT; less disposal costs, potentially less collection costs. Some towns reduce collection to 4 days, which saves on Monday holiday bumps and Saturday O.T. He also spoke about the fairness of bags, automated collection, convenience for residents. His company would do all the work to produce the bags, to insure them, to store them, get them to the stores, collect the revenue. He showed some projections for 30% waste reductions as the program incentivizes people to recycle more. Savings per ton for disposal of trash, or up to \$150,000 potential disposal cost savings to the town. He also presented examples of the bag program in other towns.

Questions: Denise Clemence spoke about the toters we use in Southbridge, that only a certain amount of bags will fit into the toters, so there is already a limit on the amount of trash we can dispose of per household. She also spoke about making people buy bags and had concerns about that.

Mr. Lisauskas said that people already shop at stores where the bags would be sold. So he felt this would make it convenient for residents to buy the bags. Concerning the carts, the 64 gal cart is already providing too much capacity for the average household. The average HH in a bag source system is 1 bag per week, so from a PAYT standpoint, you have an infinite limit. There was further

discussion about bags, overflow and compliance. Mr. Lisauskas spoke about the data on illegal dumping, and said a vast majority of illegal dumping was from commercial waste, not residential.

George Chenier asked about the different size bags. Mr. Lisauskas said there are 2 bag sizes; 13-15 gal or 30-33 gal bags, which the town can choose. George talked about educating the residents about bags and also how to enforce the use of bags. He spoke about the problems with overflowing carts. He also spoke about the demographics of Southbridge being a poor community.

Mr. Lisauskas spoke about other communities and how they engaged and educated the residents. He said Fall River achieved 90% compliance. He also spoke about notices sent to residents and enforcement issues. Mr. Chenier asked if people complain about fairness with a tax or enterprise system? Mr. Lisauskas spoke about his own situation where he puts out 1 bag per week, his neighbor puts out 6 bags per week, yet they pay the same and he is unhappy with that system. He feels a good model is a hybrid system, fee plus bags. We should all share in the costs.

Mark Lataille said Southbridge is being compared to other cities and feels we are not the same. He would like a model for our diverse community. He spoke about our tax system and how a 6-family home is assessed lower than a single family home in Southbridge. He also spoke about the costs of a new fire station, and the tax levy is going to be to the max. He'd like to know who makes the bag? Mr. Lisauskas said WasteZero makes the bag and sells it directly to the residents.

Steve Gregoire asked if there was a sense of how much people are willing to pay for a bag? Irene Congdon said around \$2.50 a bag is standard. Steve said he is in favor of the Flat Fee system, but is open to the hybrid model. It gives a benefit to those who throw away less trash.

Mr. Lisauskas said a large bag is around \$2.00 for a 30 gal bag. A bag half that size should be slightly more than half the cost, due to the cost of making the bag. Example around \$1.05-\$1.25 for a small bag. Steve asked what the haulers do if they find non-participating bags? Mr. Lisauskas said it's an automated system with cameras on the back of the trucks. The camera can detect the color of the bags. They wouldn't pull the bag out of the truck, but would report an address through their system.

Resident James Corbin asked about multi-families? Mr. Lisauskas spoke about State Law on curbside collection, up to 4-unit properties. Multi-family is a business. The property owner is responsible for the bags. Enforcement isn't against the tenant, it's against the property owners.

Mark Lataille said the problem in this town is multi-families are not considered a commercial property until after 4-unit. There was a rule for 4 and up, they had to pay for their own disposal, but we didn't follow that rule. He spoke of enforcement issues at the Board of Health and DPW ends up picking up trash. Many landlords don't live in town and it's difficult to chase them down.

Mr. Lisauskas suggested the town make the rules regarding multi-family limits on pick-up, and the hauler must follow the rules the town sets. As for enforcement issues, when people understand the rules through education, the program maintains itself. He spoke of illegal dumping in other towns and how to identify residents.

Irene Congdon spoke about illegal dumping. She also spoke about the program in Milford where the town gave out a letter to landlords explaining the program and noting it was a benefit to them. If they didn't follow the program they risked being taken off the list.

Mr. Lataille spoke about communication problems with Casella and asked about reaching out to the vendor. Ms. Congdon said in the contract language the town is the customer, so the vendor is responsible for enforcement and problems. She asked Mr. Lasauskas if he has done enforcement? Mr. Lasauskas said in Fall River they had someone follow the trucks around for a week, but eventually found there was no need. He also said they can send letters to violators, they can send bills. The only thing they can't do is collect. The town's treasurer/collector has to do that.

Denise Clemence spoke about the average multi-family housing values in town and that we are 50% multi-family housing in town. The projections based on unit pricing is not a tax based on the value of your home, where you pay more than a 3-family business owner who may not be local. A flat fee program would be based on units, whether it's 3-family, 4-family, each unit would be responsible. She felt that the idea of the landlords being responsible for the bags is ridiculous. She also spoke of compliance issues. We had a fines for people who did not comply, and landlords were being slammed. Landlords were complaining because it's their tenants who did not comply, and they can't be there when the trash is picked-up. She feels the tenants should be responsible. She also spoke about labeling the toters and enforcement and making sure nothing is free. She felt there should be no free bags and landlords should not be held responsible.

Mr. Lasauskas clarified his comments. He did not say landlords should provide free bags to their tenants. What he said is, it's not the municipalities problem how the landlord manages their business. Legally, the landlord is responsible for waste generated on their properties. The tenant is required to pay for the bags, but it's still the landlords property so they have to make sure the tenant buys the bags. The landlord may want to purchase bags for their tenants to avoid dealing with the problem. It shouldn't be the municipalities problem. The municipality has a program and the landlord is the intermediary. He agrees it's better to have the tenants buy the bags to send the right signal. There was further discussion about who is responsible for bag purchase.

Ruth Corbin spoke about taxes and multi-families vs. single families. Values of homes being the same, she didn't feel it was fair for her to pay the same for trash pick-up as a multi-family who produces more trash.

Councilor Steeves asked about bags and the toter system, how to determine the use of illegal bags if they're inside the toters? Mr. Lasaukas said the trucks have cameras that monitor for things such as propane tanks. They would be able to see the colored bags. Steeves asked if the bags are taken out of the trucks and the answer was the bags are not removed, but the resident is reported through the enforcement process. The hauler puts them on a list and letters are sent to residents by WasteZero on behalf of the town. Steeves asked about tonnage rates and recycling, do people tend to throw away recycle material anyway? Mr. Lasauskas spoke about efforts in other towns to go through every bag of trash to determine how much of it was recycling material. He also spoke about education targeting the type of recyclables that are being thrown away in the trash, such as

cardboard. Steeves asked about the effect of doing this secondary education and how it worked? Mr. Lasuskas said it averaged some percentage movement but nothing drastic.

George Chenier asked if a community has pick-up for 4-family with an Enterprise Fund, would each unit be billed separately? He felt without the bag system, single families would still be billed the same amount and tonnage would not be cut. He felt an enterprise fund is still a tax based fee.

Steve Gregoire said that the enterprise fund is just where you pull the money. A general fund where the money can go anywhere, or enterprise fund where the money is just for trash, which he felt had a lot more accountability. Taxes are based on the value of your house.

Denise Clemence said water and sewer went to a shut-off program. If someone doesn't pay then the water is actually shut off. So if someone violates the trash then the same thing, they would have to find a private hauler. We should replicate the same system as water and sewer.

Chair Marketti asked a question from residents about the revenue from the bags. Mr. Lasuskas said the revenue to the town is estimated at \$500,000, the savings to the town around \$150,000. Marketti pointed out the discrepancy as the committee has been talking about \$900,000 in revenue. Mr. Lasuskas said it all depends on the set cost of the bags. A question was asked about a flat fee for someone who only disposes trash every other week. Mr. Lasuskas said the savings would be on the bag purchase.

A question was asked about the size of bags and savings. Mr. Lasuskas said he recommends offering two bag sizes. Question about savings, if a person only uses 1-2 bags, and the cost goes down, do the residents reap the savings? Would the fee decrease the following year? Mr. L said we typically take into account the savings at the front end, and base the fee on that.

Last question, Chair Marketti asked if WasteZero charges a fee for the bags? The fee is the cost of bags. There is no up-front cost. Mark L asked if the cost of the bags can go up? Mr. L said yes. Mark asked if there was ever a shortage of bags? Mr. L said usually the shortage comes from businesses who import bags from China. WasteZero produces bags in the U. S., and they keep a surplus for the town of 2 months worth of bags. If the bags are running low, they will let the town know to produce more.

4. **Review/discuss RFP**

Discussion: Anna Smith spoke about a pre-proposal meeting. Three contractors showed up. Meeting was productive, with a lot of questions. There will be an addendum set up to answer additional questions. One of the biggest questions was if we would bump the timeline out a bit, so we are giving them another week to submit proposals. Now due March 16. No other changes to the timeline.

Councilor Steeves asked who the three contractors are. Anna said Waste Management, Casella and Republic. Steeves asked about smaller people taking out bids? Anna said we sent out bids to six companies including smaller ones, only these three attended the pre-proposal meeting..

Denise Clemence asked how the RFP worked since we are still deciding on bags, no bags? Anna said the RFP does include the possibility of bags and need for cameras on the truck. There were further questions about grants for PAYT.

5. Review/Discuss Survey results.

Discussion: Health Director Wasiuk presented updates on the survey and read some comments.

Question 1: Where do you get your information? Direct Mail 745 Social Media 465 Town Website 437 Newspaper 303 Town Council Meetings 219 Other 178 Coffee Shop 68 Senior Center 35	Question 2: I am a Southbridge... Homeowner 1,054 Renter 308 Landlord 83 Question 3: Which option do you prefer? C. USER FEE (PAYT) 644 B. FLAT FEE 413 A. PROPERTY TAXES 407
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He also broke it down by affiliation:
Option A) Taxes - Homeowners 253 Renters 98
Option B) Flat Fee - Homeowners 246 Renters 88
Option C) User Fee - Homeowners 457 Renters 73

There were many comments on the survey about needing more information about costs to make an informed decision. Also comments about high taxes in Southbridge. Irene Congdon said the next step is public education. Steve Gregoire commented about the difference between what the homeowners want and what renters want. Daniel Grabowski asked about the accuracy of the numbers that former Health Director Pelletier put together, and could we base the costs on those numbers? The Chair reported that Pelletier felt his numbers were accurate.

6. Review/Discuss funding mechanisms.

Discussion: Irene Congdon spoke about Flat Fee and Bags making it fairer for everyone. The Flat Fee depends on the billing process. She wondered if we could do a test of just trash? Steve Gregoire said there is a problem with the MUNIS software. Gus Steeves spoke about intercommunication problems between softwares. They're trying to solve the problem between the Assessors office and Accounting office. Ms. Congdon asked if we could have our own system for just trash or outsourcing billing? There was further discussion about billing using the MUNIS software and having the right program.

Chair Marketti passed out a pie chart he put together based on Ms. Congdon's numbers. He was unsure about the costs to residents. Either Property Taxes at about \$319.00 per year, or a Flat Fee of about \$150.00 per year, plus user fee 1.5 bags per week of about \$156.00 per year. Ms. Congdon said the whole program is around \$300. If we do a flat fee it's \$300 per unit. If we use bags, we get better numbers, we get better rates. The bag total is an average, depending on how many bags are used by household.

Steve Gregoire said it depends on how much the cost would cover in the flat fee, and how expensive do we want the bag. His rough math was the bags being 25% of the total cost. About \$1.50 per bag, one bag per week average. At 327,600 bags per year, it would raise a half million dollars. Take the remaining \$1.5 million divided by 6300 would equal \$238.00 per unit per year. There was further discussion about the costs of bags and disposal costs.

Denise Clemence spoke about the billing presentation by Francine Farland. The Assessors office needs to move forward to find out about MUNIS and the cost of the program.

7. Continue public education with Irene Congdon, MassDEP Recycling Coordinator

Discussion: Irene spoke about meeting with as many groups as we can and getting the word out on social media. There was a question about the meeting on March 15, 2023 at the Senior Center. Ms. Congdon and Committee members will be there to discuss Curbside options.

8. Next Meeting date. March 16, 2023, 6:00PM in the Veteran's Room.

9. Adjourn 7:45 PM

Respectfully submitted by Committee Chair Councilor Marketti