

Shutesbury Recycling and Solid Waste Committee

Meeting Minutes – February 3, 2010

Posted meeting convened at the Town Hall at 7:10pm

Present: Paul Vlach (Chair), Nancy Dihlmann, Ron Essig, Mino Caulton, Gail Fleischaker, Steve Rice.

Absent: Gary Bernhard, Karen Czerwonka, Meryl Mandell.

1 – Minutes taker for this meeting: Paul

2 – Review and approval of Minutes from January 11, 2010 meeting. Approved unanimously. Paul will deliver them to the Town Clerk and arrange posting on the Town website.

3 - School composting project - discussion of recent developments. Gary Bernhard had reported that his recent meeting with Rick Innes of Clear View Composting and Bob Mahler, Shutesbury Elementary School principal, had gone well.

Innes stated that he charges \$35 per ton for composting and \$.50 per mile round trip for pickup, which would be approximately \$15 per week for the Shutesbury school. That would be \$60 per month. Innes was meeting with the Leverett school, and if a joint program was developed the price may drop to \$10 per week for Shutesbury with the combined trip. (Note: Gary later reported Leverett was NOT interested at this time.)

Paul moved and Ron seconded that our previously voted \$50 per month expenditure cap to implement this program be raised to \$60 per month, in anticipation of the potentially higher cost. Approved unanimously. Paul will notify Gary of the new parameter voted, so he can continue work on this project.

Gary had also reported that they had discussed the possibility of picking up at other Shutesbury events, such as Celebrate Shutesbury, the Fire Department Pancake Breakfast fundraiser, etc.

4 - Discussion of previously voted recommendation that the Select Board increase the price of "sold" trash bags, over and above the annual 50 bag allotment, to \$3.00 each, instead of the original system price of \$2.00 each.

Paul explained that this was the primary reason for calling this meeting on fairly short notice, which is why several members were unable to attend. The Select Board had raised concerns during their discussion of our recommendation, and they asked that we attend one of their upcoming meetings in order to discuss this further. The issues, as reported to us by the Town Administrator (TA), included:

- The timing, given the economy and job losses;

- a potential perception that we are doing this primarily to fund bag supplies, not to reduce trash volume and encourage recycling; and
- they wanted to hear more about the educational steps we had alluded to in our written request.

In response to their concerns on our request, Paul had arranged and posted tonight's meeting, and invited the Select Board to attend, via the Town Administrator. They had not responded to this request. Paul explained that with nine members in our group, and only two on their board at this time, the hope was that we could meet jointly in order to resolve this promptly, and it was apparent that the scheduling would not work in the near future to attend one of their meetings.

Paul then reviewed a personal analysis of the situation, which he had presented to Gary and with which Gary concurred. It is summarized below:

*** Paul's analysis summary ***

We should back off on the suggested increase until we can actually identify the heavier users; and target them for education or assistance in shifting more of their waste stream from trash to recycling; thereby eliminating or minimizing their need to buy any "extra" bags. If they are non-recyclers, we use enforcement tools; if they're big households we help them mitigate their situation through training; if they are in a unique situation (medical waste, etc) we assist them as we have offered in the past with other people facing those difficulties.

The TA seems to think they might be unemployed people, or on fixed incomes, etc. That does not mean they can't recycle, or minimize their trash bag needs. It's apples and oranges, in my mind, but the fact is, we have no idea who these people are, or what their circumstances are, and we need to have that info to make informed decisions.

The three ways we've already discussed to identify these households is:

First - and I believe this HAS to be done, regardless: Fully tracking all bag sales.

- The Town Clerk says that she will gladly record sales, but didn't know we had forms available again.
- Require the use of sales tracking forms at the library, or end sales there.
- Do whatever the Coordinator feels is necessary to get full compliance/cooperation from the Leverett Coop on recording sales customers, or cease the sales there, so we can take control of our inventory.

It's a subsidized program, and we need an assurance that these sales are going only to town residents; and that they are being used for residential trash, and allowed commercial trash only.

Second - identify problem locations (always multiple bags; never any recycling, etc.) through:

- fully involving the drivers; and
- doing spot checks every week around town, checking different roads at different times, in proximity to Duseau route pickup times.

- Another option to add, potentially, is soliciting resident reports to help us identify the problems... they see who does it right, who doesn't, and when it is unaddressed it impacts on the integrity of the system.

We need to have some level of monitoring and enforcement. It appears that the drivers are not rejecting things as they should. We can see this regularly in personal roadside observations, and we never hear of any rejections occurring. Either we enforce the contract requirement, or shift the enforcement duties to the Coordinator or committee members, or both, until we get a handle on this.

Third: clear and repetitive educational outreach.

- Make the 'acceptable items' list clear to all, so they can do all they are able to divert items from trash to recycling.
- The MRF (Materials Recycling Facility) fliers coming from CET (Center for Ecological Technologies) will give us the ammo to reach out. Using the school to distribute them, with presentations at an assembly, say, would reach most homes. Maybe we target the others with a directed mailing.
- "Talking Trash". the email outreach series, and town website resources, can round out the program.

The Select Board rightly has questions about our educational outreach plan... and we have none properly defined at this time. Whether that will come from the Coordinator, the committee, or a combination, is up for debate and discussion, but we'd better have something to offer. The focus appears to be on the disincentive of raising the bag prices, and although that is not our overall intent, we need to flesh out the rest of the program to address the problem.

The bottom line - we need to exercise more control over the system. That's our charge, and there is no one else responsible.

*** end of summary ***

Paul further noted that Gary advised he is having a follow-up meeting with the school and the CET rep Lorenzo Mancaluso to discuss educational programs within the school and that the principal is fully supportive of the concept. Gary plans to draft a plan to share with the committee.

Steve advocated strongly for demonstration bags, showing a trash bag with typical recyclables included and one with all potential recyclables stripped out. He suggested these be set up at our bag distribution days, and included in any educational plan.

Other discussion points raised during Paul's analysis included:

- A belief that Becky notes bag sales at the town hall within the master book, but that we don't feel the master book is being reviewed in order to determine who is making repeated purchases. It was felt that the use of the stand alone sales slips would make it much easier to identify trends and sales chronologically.

- On the topic of rejections at roadside, there was debate about the level of expectation placed on the drivers, where the Coordinator responsibilities fall and the impact on the contract with the hauler.
- We agreed that the process Duseau uses for weekly pickups as well as for Bulky Waste Days, must be fully defined. Gary has pledged to do in the near future.

There was agreement on the analysis that Paul had presented. It was moved, seconded and voted unanimously that we would write to the Select Board indicating that we were withdrawing our suggestion for a bag price increase at this point in time.

We would indicate our intent to gather further information about the demographics of those using more bags than average; institute a sales tracking system and review that data; and formulate an educational campaign.

Since we are now entering the heaviest annual period of “extra bag” purchases, we hope to gain insights which will help us to make the overall recycling and solid waste program more effective, and guide us in the best way to reduce trash and increase recycling. After we have done this we may find that bag sale prices should still be increased as one component, but that we're comfortable holding off on that recommendation at this time.

Paul agreed to draft the message to the Select Board along with an indication that unless they felt otherwise, we would not plan to send any members to their meeting on February 16, as had been discussed with the Town Administrator.

5 - open meeting law versus sharing of information by e-mail: The committee has relied heavily on e-mail exchanges between members in order to share information between meetings. Recent changes in the open meeting law and the annual re-issuance of advisories from the Town Clerk has prompted further discussion on this point.

Paul provided a copy of a message from the Town Clerk dated January 29, 2010, in which she reviewed the highlights of a recent training she had attended. Within the Town Clerk's message was the operative phrase:

The new open meeting law recognizes electronic mail, and allows for its use for ***“the distribution of a meeting agenda, scheduling information or distribution of other procedural meeting or the distribution of reports or documents that may be discussed at a meeting provided that no opinion of a member is expressed.”***

The committee discussed how this might apply to our exchanges with multiple examples shared during the discussion. It was agreed that from this point forward, we will make every attempt to respect the letter and spirit of this premise.

Therefore, the following outline was agreed to unanimously:

- there is value in sharing information about ongoing efforts by individuals, especially the Coordinator or those who are assigned to projects
- when this information is shared between meetings, it should be done so in a factual manner, without expressing opinions or advocating actions to be taken
- the flow of information should be one way, with no acknowledgments or responses given. Expressing support of the efforts or offering follow-up questions or suggestions could be construed as a violation of the open meeting law statutes
- if group discussions or decisions become necessary, which cannot wait for the next scheduled meeting, then a new meeting should be called for, typically by the Chair or Coordinator
- although we're all reluctant to schedule additional meetings, it was felt to be a necessary step. Paul proposed that we meet monthly from now through the Spring Bulky Waste Day so we can effectively complete our ongoing tasks.
 - Of the members present, it appeared that Tuesdays are the best meeting days to avoid other commitments, and Paul will begin by setting up the next meeting for the third or fourth Tuesday from tonight.

Meeting adjourned at 8:50pm

Note: These Minutes were approved at the March 2, 2010 meeting. PAV