

Blair County Municipality Meeting
Held by the Blair County Commissioners and the Intergovernmental Relations Committee (IRC)
Logan Township Bldg, 100 Chief Logan Circle, Altoona, PA 16602
September 5, 2012 7:00 PM

Meeting began at 7:00 PM with Commissioner Diane Meling starting the meeting. Commissioners Meling and Ted Beam were in attendance, as was John Frederick of the IRC, Terry Keene of Barton & Loguidice (the County's solid waste plan consultant), municipal representatives, citizens and others. Everyone in the room introduced themselves and whom they represented. Commissioner Meling expressed her pleasure at the number of people who attended this meeting. A sign-up sheet was provided for attendees to sign, and is attached.

It was explained that under Act 101, Pennsylvania's Municipal Waste Planning, Recycling and Waste Reduction Act, the County is mandated to secure municipal waste disposal capacity for Blair County in landfills, provide a recycling coordinator, and look for ways to help the state achieve its 35% recycling goal. Act 101-mandated communities (all communities over 10,000 population, and more dense communities over 5,000) are also required to separate and compost their leaves, and to curbside-recycle. The County currently operates two composting facilities serving the four IRC-member communities as well as other County municipalities. The County also operates nine (9) recyclables dropoff locations in the County, and participates in or conducts other recycling education, collection and environmental-based programs. There are also some other programs currently coordinated by the County, including illegal dumping reduction efforts, household hazardous waste and community clean-up programs.

Landfill fees that once were collected and that support County solid waste and recycling programs are no longer collected, due to court rulings. Since then, the County Department of Solid Waste and Recycling has been operating off reserve funds from previous fee collections. The reserve fund is dwindling and is now close to extinction. This financial situation has caused the County to make alternate plans for County solid waste and recycling services in the future. The County announced that it will close the County Department of Solid Waste and Recycling on September 30th, will discontinue operation of the recyclables dropoff sites by September 30th, and will transfer certain County composting operations to the IRC.

The IRC will take over operation of 22 acres of the Buckhorn Composting Site by Oct 1, 2012 (target date). Currently, there are a number of municipalities (beyond the four IRC communities) that use the composting facility, and many of the County's citizens also utilize the composting facility directly. The IRC has decided that the Buckhorn compost facility will remain open to all County municipalities for the remainder of 2012. However, beginning in 2013, some form of financial support will be needed from non-IRC municipalities that utilize the composting site. Also, it was explained that in order to continue to be eligible to receive County recycling performance grant money, the IRC would need to continue to offer Household Hazardous Waste programs.

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Part of the reason for this meeting is to gauge interest in municipalities supporting continued operation of the current recycling dropoff sites that are scheduled for closure. The IRC has determined that it cannot take on the burden of continuing the County's recycling dropoff sites (except for the one that is co-located with the Buckhorn Composting Site – see later discussion). A recent request for proposals (RFP) issued by the IRC to see if a private or another public entity (such as Centre County SWA) may be able to provide dropoff site services at a reasonable cost resulted in submissions with quite high costs. In general, the bid costs to service the smaller sites that are located further from the service providers were the most costly. The IRC is concerned about services versus limited available IRC finances, but there is a hope that municipalities may partner to help continue some of these recycling programs.

The IRC passed out a brief municipal survey related to current recycling and composting activities, soliciting possible interest in supporting dropoff recycling in Blair County, and asking each municipality to fill out and return one form. Regarding return of the surveys, John Frederick requested surveys back tonight, or that they be faxed, e-mailed or mailed to him. John provided business cards with his contact information. The survey form is attached.

Citizen Rob Griffin asked if they thought about what will happen when the dropoffs are taken away. Rob expressed concern that people will drop their trash and recycling in parking lots. There will be twice as much trouble. The response was that it has been contemplated.

Someone asked if there are any plans to put any teeth in the illegal dumping ordinance. It was indicated that the Solid Waste Department has tried to do illegal dump cleanups (successfully), and whenever they have come upon evidence, they go toward prosecution. They feel their efforts have made a difference. With closure of that department, there will no longer be a County enforcement person to address these illegal dump issues. IRC staff will be limited in size, and county-wide enforcement of such programs will be very difficult. It was suggested that a sample illegal dumping ordinance can be included in the Solid Waste Plan Update, if needed. Ed Frontino, Logan Township Supervisor, said most municipalities have those ordinances in place already.

Ed Bender from Freedom Township stated that they have recycling bins in their parking lot, and asked if there is a way that we can all sit down as a whole and discuss how we can get this process to work. There are other municipalities that use Freedom Township's bins, and he feels it would be unfair to tax only Freedom Township for materials handled from outside that municipality. It was suggested that such a comment be placed on the municipal survey response. The IRC is willing to assist in helping set up meetings and in participating in those discussions.

Someone asked if anyone has approached some of the commercial organizations to see if they will help fund any of the recycling dropoffs in the County. He believes these companies are community-minded, and hopes that the County will begin making contacts with these commercial organizations. The response was that this has not been done yet, but using the recent dropoff RFP responses and further analyzing data from the County, we now have a better understanding of what it costs to operate and

maintain these dropoffs. Based on County and bid information, it is estimated that the current (County) cost to operate the least expensive of these dropoff sites at the Walmart is approximately \$6,000 per year. The costs range from around \$6-\$7,000 on the low end to about \$18-\$20,000 on the high end, per dropoff site per year, for operation and maintenance, based on current County costs and how frequently they are being serviced right now. The private bid costs for providing these services could be significantly more. As a hypothetical example of financially supporting a dropoff program, it was explained that if the equivalent of \$2 per ton were collected on waste generated in the County, and if the average per capita waste generation per year is 0.8 tons, about \$1.60 per person per year may be collected to support a dropoff program such as this one. Someone asked if it would be feasible to charge \$5 per household to help finance this type of dropoff program. The legality of such collections would have to be reviewed, as well as how the fee would be collected, etc. Proposed state legislation to allow the collection of county fees has not gone far, and the County's tax ability is very limited. Municipalities may consider their own types of fee collections to support these programs.

Citizen Donna Gority asked if the dropoff bins will be removed from the dropoff sites between now and September 30th. The answer is yes. Someone asked that if before they take the bins away, if they will ask the borough or municipality if they will be interested in sponsoring some of these bins. The response was that this is a primary purpose of this meeting, to present the plans to the municipalities and to find out if there is any interest in dropoff sponsorships.

Rob Griffin asked if anyone thought about using the County highway staff to pick up the dropoff containers. The response was that it takes much more time and effort to service these sites than what is commonly expected; the cost and effort of picking up the materials can be significant.

Ed Frontino asked about current recyclable materials prices. The response is that they are somewhat variable but have been relatively average over the past year. Ed Frontino observed that the profit margins for the haulers to deal with this are fairly low. Ed asked how much trash/ contamination ends up in these dropoffs; the response was that it varies from site to site, that people generally do a good job, but that it is always a challenge.

Someone asked what residents should do with recyclables if they no longer have the dropoff sites available. One option is to institute curbside recycling. Some places have it. In several Blair County non-mandated communities, there are ordinances that say that the trash haulers must offer curbside recycling if the residents request recycling. Curbside recycling can be a positive upgrade to dropoff programs, and can help improve waste management in general. It was suggested that perhaps the municipalities meet and discuss options, possibly in conjunction with the County Plan Update, to see what options are available. Curbside recycling may not be a fit for every rural township, but it may work for the majority. Also, it was pointed out that if there was interest in keeping a single dropoff open that serves multiple municipalities, perhaps those municipalities could consider charging a fee to their residents, to collect funds to operate and maintain that single dropoff.

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Donna Gority asked if the IRC is going to continue to accept the recyclable materials at the composting site, including possible dropoff-site collected recyclables (if another entity continues a dropoff site operation). The response from the IRC is that the compost site recyclables dropoff facility will remain open, and the IRC would also consider accepting recyclable materials brought to the composting site from the other drop-offs (by others). Other outlets for collected recyclable materials may be the local haulers or the local recyclers in the region.

Ed Frontino asked if anyone has reached out to the haulers to see if they are interested in offering curbside recycling. They already have the equipment, and to give them the additional customers would make sense to add more customers to their routes. The response is that this has been discussed with some of the haulers. Ed thinks the residents would jump on board with having haulers do this, so they don't have to drive the recycling and garbage to dropoff sites, considering the cost of gas, etc. In non-mandatory municipalities with recycling ordinances, haulers do provide these services. It's also much more cost-effective for haulers to pick up everyone on a street than to pick and choose only certain houses that choose to recycle now. This situation may create an opportunity to turn the page to do more curbside recycling in the County.

A Citizen from Hollidaysburg asked what the percentage of costs each member of the IRC pays for services. The response was that costs and revenues are split equally among the four IRC member municipalities now; it has been looked at a number of times. With variable costs and revenues to the system, this has worked reasonably well so far. If other municipalities agree to support recycling or composting services financially (beyond the four current IRC communities), the IRC is open to discussion on how costs and revenues can be shared fairly based on services provided and membership status.

Ed Frontino asked for a better idea of when the County/ IRC needs to know if municipalities are willing to support the dropoff program, before the County/ IRC decides to take the dropoffs away. The response was that this needs to be done as soon as possible, preferably within the next week or so. Hopefully, this topic can be discussed at municipal board meetings during the week of September 10th.

Rob Griffin asked if the County has considered selling the other acres at the composting facility to raise money. It was pointed out that the land is owned by the Blair County Solid Waste Authority and not the County, and is not high-quality land. There are other considerations here, but this is something to consider revisiting in the future.

Rich Lasek from Blair Township invited someone from the IRC or the County to attend his Township meeting next week to explain the background and options further to his board. The IRC can give the townships some ballpark numbers to use at their meetings, and will try to provide someone at the meeting if possible.

Several things have to be accomplished to remove all of the dropoff bins from the dropoff sites by Oct 1st, such as publicity and public release of information on the site shutdown, signage posted at each dropoff site explaining the upcoming closure, etc.

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Someone commented that that is no incentive for the townships to pick up this recycling. It was pointed out that most municipalities must accept the fact that that this may be a very heavy load for them, although many residents may want to see the municipalities take over the dropoff sites' operations and service. If a number of municipalities decide to coordinate their efforts, another level of discussions may be warranted.

Commissioner Meling thanked Logan Township for the use of their facility for this meeting, and thanked everyone for coming out to participate in the discussions this evening.

The meeting adjourned at 8:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Cathy Johnson

EfficientC

Blair County Municipal Survey

Drop-off Recycling and Compost Facility Utilization

Municipality: _____

Contact Person: _____

Contact Address: _____

Contact Email: _____

Contact Phone: _____

Are you interested in continuing a drop-off recycling program for your residents? Yes No

Would you consider contributing to the cost of a drop-off recycling program? Yes No

Do you currently collect yard waste from your residents and take it to the Blair County Compost Facility on Blacksnake Road? Yes No

Do you collect yard waste from your residents and take it to the R&D Compost Site in Duncansville? Yes No

Additional Comments:
