

SWAAC Meeting Minutes

Albemarle County Solid Waste Alternatives Advisory Committee

April 13, 2023

Attendance:

SWAAC: Christine Hirsh-Putnam, Peggy Gilges, Victoria Walsh, Betsey Soulsby, Kendall Dix, Teri Kent, Adam Gendell, Margaret Eldridge, Annie White

SWAAC members absent: Jesse Warren

Liaisons: Jim Andrews, Lance Stewart, Phil McKalips

Guests: member of the public (John)

Christine called the meeting to order at 4:06pm.

Old Business and Action Items:

- April 13, 2023 agenda approved
- February 2023 meeting minutes approved
- March 2023 meeting minutes approved

Guest: Eric Walter, Black Bear Composting

Black Bear began work in 2011, about 15% growth last year. About 30% in the last three years. Mix of commercial and residential customers. COVID saw an increase in residential accounts. Business / school composting habits transferred well to home habits. Larger bins for county residents due to more yard waste. 3:1 city to county account ratio but ratio for volume of material is more like 3:2 due to yard waste.

Using repurposed trash trucks to compact on route, enables increased collection per miles driven. Finished compost deliveries are not proportioned by resident input. Schools also get a share of finished compost.

Able to help customers track diverted organics / calculate carbon footprints (using established tool) - commercial clients are weighed, residential is averaged. Plan to open up special pickups to non-customers.

Black Bear does accept

- pet waste
- yard waste in composting cart
- yard waste in compostable brown bags
- Christmas trees

Hospital / office / church composting is growing as well. Food pantry is participating. Drop off programs include some small HOAs.

Schools program requires support to build momentum. Second biggest share of county accounts but participation is uneven. Staff participation and student awareness can be uneven. Programs may have to re-start when staff turns over.

Betsey has been hands-on in the schools, notes that milk is a waste issue. There are requirements for offering milk which must be disposed if not consumed. It's compostable but heavy, cartons are not compostable. Also suggests labeling containers as "food scraps" vs "organics" for simplicity.

Q&A :

Where do you see challenges and opportunities for county/ city to get to 100% diversion?

- Contamination
Limited contamination (fruit stickers) are tolerated, some facilities have two levels of finished compost quality. Panorama paydirt does this - two separate input streams feed these.

New tool: drivers take image of contaminants and email to clients. Paper causes some confusion (coatings). Averaging 1% contamination by weight, but a lot of contamination is low weight.

Greenwashing causes some confusion as well - "biodegradable" vs compostable materials sometimes. *Note: [Greenguides comment period is ending 24 April](#). Recommend reviewing and commenting - <https://www.regulations.gov/document/FTC-2022-0077-0001>

- Transportation - essential for residents without the space to home compost
- Lack of data
Need to track sources of organic waste - food and yard waste are the key drivers, ratio depends on location (city vs county)

Are you able to match supply and demand at this time?

Trouble getting coarse organics. Use some mulch from Ivy - needed for bulk. Have been operating at less than 50% permitted volume, so plenty of room to grow. Also have space to add permitted capacity. Trucks on order now to satisfy new residential accounts.

Do you approach HOAs to encourage participation?

Right now participation is high and contamination is minimized by an opt-in system. Would start with food waste only for new outreach accounts. In growth posture, so ready for that.

Is there any pre-sort for contamination?

Not at this time. Some operations go after food waste that includes packaging. Uses a maceration / skim process to pull slurried solids. Remainder is composted. Black Bear uses a series of screens to size-sort. Some contaminants end up in the overs. After several cycles, is moved to landfill usually with some useful organics.

Are you seeing trends for area businesses?

Walmart, Wegmans (donating edible food, will also de-package), Kroger family of markets all compost. Smaller stores and Food Lion are hit or miss, as are city restaurants. County restaurants are near zero. In markets with strong restaurant association there's more opportunity. Most have interest but lack resources, space. Hospitals and UVa are doing well. Noticing more compostable take out containers in Black Bear bins.

Downtown mall lacks space but more interest - opposite situation in county. Some caterers will coordinate composting at events. Some store designs prevent addition of composting bins in trash corral.

Any special events for Compost Awareness Week?

Facility tour the first weekend in May. Will also have an event at City Market.

SMM and Climate Action (Isabella O'Brien)

Notes on report:

Scoring / prioritization based on amount of GHG reductions, other impacts on community

- Community development
- Equity
- Cost

SMART goals are at the chapter level and actions / sets of actions are at lower level.

Fellows were in last fall to help with analysis of

- Energy use
- Land use

No major increases in dumping have been found when pay-as-you-throw is implemented. Works with private as well as municipal hauling providers.

USDA grants have been used to reduce organic waste to landfill in Wisconsin and Virginia. More info and case studies here:

<https://www.usda.gov/topics/urban/coop-agreements>

Next SWAAC meeting will be held **in person** Thursday, May 11, 2023, 4-5:30 in Room 235 of the County Office Building.