

Working Stakeholder Meeting on “Sustainable Materials Management”

February 27th 2015

SUMMARY OF KEY OUTCOMES

The Senator George J. Mitchell Center for Sustainability Solutions at the University of Maine has organized an interdisciplinary team of researchers with a wide array of expertise related to solid waste. Together we seek to engage with stakeholders throughout the state to identify and alleviate information gaps, provide opportunities for dialogue and to participate in the process of designing and building support for more sustainable materials management solutions in Maine. On February 27th the Mitchell Center formally embarked on this process by bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders from throughout the state to discuss the future of materials management in Maine. To provide a starting point, all participants were invited to read and comment on a white paper which outlined the history of solid waste in Maine, the challenges associated with our current system and opportunities for the future. We continue to encourage all participants to engage in the process of revising the document and contribute to collective definitions of both the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. We also provide here a summary of the key insights generated at the meeting and invite all participants to comment and supplement the outcomes.

Panel Discussion “Drawing on the Lessons of Success”

The opening panel featured five stories of success in Maine’s solid waste history with the intent that we might be able to identify some of the key conditions which enabled success:

- From Jim Guerra we learned about the importance of perceived fairness and equal treatment for fostering collaboration
- From Ruth Libby we learned about the value of supporting creative thinkers and entrepreneurs to develop unforeseen solutions
- From Melissa Walsh Innes we learned about the value of involving all stakeholders in the hard work of resolving differences and achieving compromises
- From Brett Richardson we learned about the importance of looking for opportunities and the importance of public/private partnerships; and
- From Troy Moon we learned about the necessity of a careful and well-planned process that integrates multiple view-points to work across differences.

What should the future of materials management in Maine look like? (listed in order of greatest consensus)

- We will have cost effective and collaborative regionalized solutions (multiple yet integrated) that can take advantage of economies of scale but are responsive to localized needs.
- We will have engaged in long-term planning at the state level.
- We will have a citizenry more educated about and engaged in materials management.

- We will have policies and pricing structures that support the waste hierarchy and the reduction of materials use.
- We will have more fully developed markets for materials that are captured.
- We will no longer think of waste as “waste” but rather as a resource.

What are the conditions necessary to achieve our envisioned waste management systems?

- Well educated and engaged consumers.
- Better data and evaluation metrics to determine best solutions, track progress.
- Better understanding and dissemination of “best practices.”
- Better markets for recycled materials.
- Enhanced programs for extended producer responsibility.
- Incentives/policy support/investment to shift business models.
- Definition of appropriate scale for programs and ability to blur town lines for cooperation.

How can we draw on past successes to help achieve our vision for sustainable waste management?

- Look at already existing models of regional cooperation.
- Recognize that policy and the marketplace must move together.
- Communicate successes (regardless of scale) to serve as models for others.
- Recognize the importance of flexible frameworks that can support key goals but leave room for regional differentiation.
- Continue with extended producer responsibility as a low-cost but highly effective strategy.
- Work to make the connections between producers, consumers, waste managers and materials markets more explicit.
- Need to recognize that investment in sustainable materials management requires some predictability and long-term planning will help.

Are there specific proposals, ideas, or pilot projects that we might explore which could help us achieve our envisioned waste management system?

- Compost collection on a regional level/curbside pilots in urban areas/food to table.
- Enhanced regional collaboration (shared transfer station/transportation collaboration/by UMaine campuses).
- Public engagement/education (waste characterization studies).
- Universal tipping fees (fund community solutions).
- Extension of EPR into other product sectors.
- Local pilot projects to align supply and demand (agriculture, compost, food service).
- Incentives for bottom-up innovation.
- Aggressive policy shifts – mandates, universal recycling.
- Utilizing electronic resources to disseminate best practices and the exchange of reusable items.