

## Working Stakeholder Meeting on “Sustainable Materials Management in Southern Maine”

July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015

### SUMMARY OF KEY OUTCOMES

#### Introduction

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. In response to stakeholder interest, the Mitchell Center is organizing a series of regional meetings this spring designed to bring together diverse stakeholders in each region to identify regionally-appropriate opportunities and needs. On July 14<sup>th</sup> four members of the Mitchell Center team traveled to The University of Southern Maine’s Portland campus where we met with more than 30 local stakeholders representing municipalities, waste operators, waste haulers, institutional waste generators, regional entities, environmental organizations, waste-to-energy facilities, composters, national recycling organizations, waste reduction businesses, landfill operators, construction and demolition debris recyclers, reuse entities, bottle deposit companies, plastics industry consultants and educators.

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

- We will have a more educated and engaged public, aware of the real costs of waste management
- We will have implemented a series of incentives to encourage more sustainable behavior
- We will have built upon the strength of the waste hierarchy to implement stronger diversion goal, close the loop, and create a zero waste economy
- Organics will no longer be a part of the waste stream, but a resource
- We will have reduced the need to transport waste, dealing with materials closer to origin and through the creation of local and regional processing and reuse centers
- We will have standardized statewide planning and policy (to reduce consumer confusion) while maintaining regional flexibility and recognizing the needs of rural and sparsely populated areas.
- We will have better data on all aspects of waste and materials management to make better decisions and capitalize on entrepreneurs and “think tanks” that can test ideas
- We will have better technology and infrastructure to manage a changing waste stream
- We will be better at collaborating; among both market actors and across municipalities

## What opportunities exist in Southern Maine to help achieve this vision? (listed in order of greatest consensus)

- To have better and higher quality data that helps the state and municipalities plan and make decisions
- To separate out organics from the waste stream
  - Establish a clear plan on how to best do so
  - Potential to pilot an organics ban somewhere in this region
- To create oversight for Solid Waste that has an understandable plan and an accessible vision
- Make the borders go away, i.e. home rule to be softened/removed so that municipalities can cooperate to a greater extent
- Education to make solid waste something that the average citizen can care about
  - Create a clearer message and treat education as a tool, not the goal
- To have (dis)incentives for (un)desired actions for a clearer relationship between waste hierarchy and costs
- Analyze what policies are working elsewhere and adapt them to fit Maine
- Set policies and allow for markets to form and meet needs
- Pilot projects to track and show if there are savings (or what the costs are) from diverting materials, organics for instance
- To engage the strong and engaged public school systems and the many potential institutional partners
- To make sure to celebrate successes and find ways to help others replicate
- To shift conversation from “waste management” to “job creation”

## What needs and barriers must be addressed in order to make progress?

- We need a state plan for waste and materials management that recognizes the economic development potential of recovered materials
- We need a shared vision of the future, adopted by towns and municipalities
- We need to curtail the availability of artificially cheap, below true cost, disposal options
- We need better data to understand lifecycle influences and to better match and influence economics and the waste hierarchy
- We must figure out how to meet home rule and recognize the rural nature of the state while also working to improve cooperation and economies of scale
- We need more effective education and incentives to ensure consumers and communities are engaged partners, less resistant to change and more open to new policies
- We need more than just directives and goals; we need enforceable regulations
- We need to get organics out of the waste stream which will require more destinations for collected organics; digesters and composting facilities
- We need to address and prevent legal liabilities associated with resale and reuse
- We must address competition for materials and create means to adjust to price fluctuations
- We must utilize better technologies

### Are there emerging goals or programs that should be pursued?

- As a state we should strive to collect data and utilize it to formulate informed and comprehensive state-level waste and materials management plan
- Our goal should be to dedicate attention and thought to the entire hierarchy, encouraging the legislature to create policy in support of the hierarchy
- We should strive to overcome resistance to change with both policy and consumer education
- We should strive to require generator responsibility (producers and consumers)
- Mitchell Center, including colleagues from throughout the state (e.g. Travis Wagner and other individuals at USM and other institutions) will keep engaging Stakeholders and the Environment and Natural Resources Committee
- We should strive to develop comprehensive, rather than piecemeal policy
- We should create goals to strengthen markets for recovered materials