

**January 9, 2019**  
**Integrated Waste System Strategic Plan Task Force<sup>1</sup>**  
**5:30 p.m.**

**Called to order:** by Chairperson Chaz Miller at 5:30 p.m.

**Attending in person:**

Task Force members:

Sara Bixby, Lauren Greenberger, Ken Lavish, Keith Levchenko, Chaz Miller, Caroline Taylor

Absent: Robin Wiener, Peter Ettinger

County Staff:

Department of Environmental Protection: Patty Bubar, Robin Ennis, Marilu Enciso, Eileen Kao, Anthony Skinner, Willie Wainer

Office of Management & Budget: Trevor Lobaugh

Chief Administrative Officer: Andrew Kleine

Attending as guests:

SWAC: Kelly Doordan and Mark Freedman

Sierra Club: Susan Eisendrath, Amy Maron, Kathy Michaels

EIWG: Adam Diamond

Mike Ewall (phone)

**Opening remarks:** Chairman Chaz Miller said the original intent of the meeting was to discuss what Zero Waste is to the Task Force. He added a discussion about Task Force members' biggest takeaway from the benchmarking task.

**1. *Discussion about the meaning of Zero Waste***

Lavish said he didn't think Zero could be anything but no waste to landfill with all waste utilized in some fashion. Zero means Zero.

Bixby said her belief was that zero can't be zero until the manufacturers are fully engaged in product takeback, which is not something Montgomery County can control or drive individually. She referenced EPA's sustainable materials management approach and said Zero Waste has to mean ongoing efforts to educate, reduce, to recover what can be recovered, to continue to seek alternative options, to dispose what remains as waste in as environmentally sound a way as possible, to manage transportation distances, and to manage who is affected either inside or outside Montgomery County with our waste.

Taylor said that if the group is looking for a working definition, she doesn't know how we can do the aspirational Zero Waste. More practically, she concurred with Bixby's definition.

---

<sup>1</sup> May 30, 2018 Memorandum from Isiah Leggett, County Executive, to Hans Riemer, President, Montgomery County Council

Lavish said if the label is zero, then that's why I went with the more absolute definition. He concurred with the idea and tagline for this project of "Aiming for Zero."

Greenberger said just because it's hard to attain, doesn't mean we don't try for Zero with a completely circular economy and repurposing. For example, she said the HDR proposal didn't include construction and demolition (C&D) debris because it isn't part of the Maryland definition. She said the Task Force should include it and look at everything, not because it checks a box, but because we're striving toward zero. She said Incinerator ash is not a recycled material in her opinion. She referenced the different definitions of Zero Waste by different groups around the world. The big difference she sees in the decision is if Montgomery County burns, landfills, or uses a form of MRBT to digest and stabilize the waste. She also noted that the grassroots definition of Zero Waste doesn't include things that produce toxicity.

Levchenko said he is comfortable with "Aiming for Zero Waste" and the step by step approach that Bixby implied. The goal is not to get to a particular number but to progress through the lens that we put to it. In a decision of incineration vs landfilling, we need to look at the pros and cons of each. Recycling also creates toxicity. The Task Force goal is to try to balance and consider those things and to Aim for Zero.

Lavish said that reducing solid waste by burning it is dumping a bunch of stuff into the environment, which he didn't think was accomplishing what we need to do.

Bixby noted that in a discussion of waste-to-energy (Montgomery County's current approach) to landfilling, an equal number of people will express concerns about landfilling. She said that both can be done effectively and safely. She encouraged the Task Force decision to also consider issues like County control and economics.

Millers said EPA has avoided defining Zero Waste. Maryland Governor O' Malley in his executive order on Zero Waste avoided defining the term except to say, "less to dispose of." Aiming for Zero Waste must address human behavior and the ability to change human behavior. He likes the title of the Task Force - Aiming for Zero Waste. A key issue going forward will be focusing on how we can reduce what goes to disposal. We (individually and Montgomery County as a whole) can't get away from creating waste – until we die. To make a ton of ton of aluminum cans requires more than a ton of old aluminum cans because stuff goes up the pipe. It's all about what's the lowest environmental impact and the biggest bang from what we do.

Taylor summarized that the recurring theme is that Zero Waste is more process than destination.

Greenberger said we're not working on just a recycling plan, but something that looks at all the different things we can do.

The Task Force had a brief discussion about cost and off-setting revenues. Taylor noted that not all of the programs identified will add cost to the County (e.g., Goodwill). Miller agreed but also discussed the life-cycle of products directed to reuse programs like Goodwill. Items not sold here will eventually be resold outside the country. It will eventually get thrown away and end its lifecycle. The Task Force must also consider lifecycle.

## **2. Takeaways from the Benchmarking Study**

Miller said his biggest takeaway from HDR's benchmarking report is that it doesn't matter how hard you try, it's difficult to get to 50% recycling and probably impossible to get to 60% with recycling. He cited the City of Seattle, which was not a benchmarked community, as having true efforts, honest data, and slow improvement. Seattle is struggling to get to 60%. San Francisco "for all its hype about diversion" works only on residences and businesses. There are certain intangibles of behavior and technology that haven't been resolved and we need data from them. Miller said that San Francisco instead of sticking with its Zero Waste goal, substituted a 50% per capita reduction by 2030 goal.

Levchenko said his takeaway is that progress is hard.

Greenberger noted the outline is a good one. HDR has covered a lot of material. The benchmarked communities consistently seemed to find Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT) programs effective.

Taylor commented on the need for education. The way to get there is by making the one million inhabitants in Montgomery County to behave differently and do what we expect them to do. We have a renewed urgency in our climate change plan for the county and an opportunity to weave Zero Waste into that Plan. That could be an aid in getting people to do more.

Lavish said he finds door-to-door education effective. Discussion about the volunteer program that supports County recycling efforts, including with multi-lingual presentations.

Bixby said her major takeaways were on the "low-hanging fruit" identified for Montgomery County by the benchmarking: PAYT, organize up-county collection so we have consistency in the programs the Task Force recommends for implementation; funding and filling solid waste education positions; work to implement the food waste/organics Strategic Plan that has been completed. Educate.

Miller offered an example of a system not in the benchmarking – Subaru's Zero Waste to landfill plant in Indianapolis. The bonus for the plant manager is dependent on plant performance and he/she can control much of what happens in the plant, including decisions affecting waste generation and recovery. He said that position is very different than the position of a county manager who doesn't control many of the decisions made (purchasing, disposal, etc.) within the county by all the waste generators. Greenberger countered that a county manager can influence decisions and create incentives for preferred behavior (e.g., tax incentives).

Taylor said the positive takeaway from the Subaru story is the motivation. Working with Poolesville now – they see smokestacks so that is what they focus on. She has been working in the community to encourage restaurants to let customers bring in their own takeaway containers. The conversation changed to concerns about the potential liability from dirty containers.

## **3. Task 5. Improvements to the current diversion/recycling system outline review.**

Miller told the Task Force it had submitted 51 comments on 37 sections and subsections in the Task 5 outline. He asked to go through point by point to highlight any comments we don't want to forward to the HDR.

Chapter 2: Education: forward it. Maybe not require them to call specific additional resources identified.

- 2.3.1 Food Waste Reduction: Wainer said staff is proceeding with food waste program; discussing options for composting food waste. Even if we don't have a person to educate on board yet, we are moving ahead with our efforts. In a couple of weeks, sending out a survey to what the different businesses are doing with their food waste.
- 2.3.4 – Material Exchange not waste exchange.
- 2.6 Mandating deconstruction – would that require county or state legislation? Question about control over non-putrescible waste.
- 2.7 Recovery - keep in the discussion about discovery parks, take out the discussion about code words for burning in the comments forwarded to HDR
- 2.8 Regulatory: Product stewardship and EPR – there's a limit on what Montgomery County can influence vs Maryland vs federal government
- 2.8.1 bans on additional materials – EPS packaging is already banned from use in Montgomery County retail because it is not easily recycled. EPS packaging shipped in from outside the county is different. That's trash.
- 2.8.2 Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)
- 2.9.11 Standardized trash container – 218,000 total – ties into PAYT.

Wainer said HDR is going to be looking at the multiple ways of implementing PAYT (containers, bags, etc. with costs)

- 2.9.2.1 expansion or modification of County collection

Ask HDR to include a discussion about changing/eliminating the county leaf-blowing/vacuuming service as part of the discussion around yard waste collection

- 2.10.5 Performance Metrics

Include toxicity reduction as a metric that is considered

Include environmental footprint – cradle to grave impacts

Wainer was asked about the status of the food waste recycling program. He mentioned that DSWS is working on the identification of large food waste generators. A SurveyMonkey is being prepared with the goal is to gather input on potential interest by commercial generators in separating food scraps for composting. At the same time DSWS is talking with different composting facilities located in the DC region as potential places for food waste composting.

For all items, the Task Force reiterated that it is a requirement of the contractor to exercise best professional judgment in providing recommendations.

#### **4. County Executive Marc Elrich – calling in at 7:18 pm**

*Elrich: "My goal is for the Task Force to find a way to make it possible to shut down the incinerator by 2022. I would consider it a victory if we weren't putting into a landfill more waste than we are today – primary goal is to get the incinerator shut"*

*Increase our recycling goals, do the food recycling and with those strategies get to a place where it is feasible to dump some of our stuff and not incinerate our stuff.*

*I thought it was important that you hear that from me.*

*I question whether the consultants we have are the right consultants to make the switch over we want to make. Is the consultant willing to work on it in the frame of mind that we want to do? What are we going to do between now and then?*

*I understand there is a healthy debate about what Zero means. We need a plan to achieve this. The role of the committee is to look at the consultant's recommendations and say whether we think this is doable.*

Question to Mr. Elrich: Would you consider an extended timeline for RRF closure? Answer: 2024, I'll talk about it; 2030 or 2040, no.

Greenberger: Repeating what I think I heard you say, you want us to expect the consultant to develop a strategy to send an equal amount of trash to landfill as we are ash to landfill now.

Elrich: *We only do so poorly because we tolerate people not abiding by what our goals are. I'd like to see commercial recycling become real. Also, for multi-family recovery to perform better.*

**5. Minutes from the December 5<sup>th</sup> meeting approved by acclamation.**

**6. Citizen comments:**

Mike Ewall: none

Adam Diamond: Program at the CN embassy, DC Water speaker said it was better to put food down the drain rather than in the garbage. WSSC alleged to have capacity to handle food waste through the pipes. (Keith: that's a program down the road)

Susan Eisendrath: Appreciate the robust discussion around the discussion of Zero Waste. EPA doesn't define it but give many examples and the way many states deal with it, is to call it a Zero Waste approach, which is similar to the aiming for Zero Waste phrase. What you call it makes a big difference. Also encourage you to push HDR to expand discussion on behavior change. How are the various climate change/climate protection reports and plans being linked to this plan? i.e. the County's Sustainability Protection Plan (this plan was forwarded a week later to the Task Force members)

International Green Construction Code – 2018 version – does include some of the mandated deconstruction of materials. Look at the crossover between codes and standards. Department of Permitting Services is reviewing 2018 version. Boost progress toward goals with more collaboration.

Eileen Kao: County adopted International Green Construction Code (IGCC) 2012 in 2017. No all construction sites are required to apply the Green Construction Code. When you apply to have a construction permit, only certain project with a threshold are required to follow the Code. . DSWS provided some information to HDR the other day regarding this regulation. As well as some other initiatives DSWS does in the C&D reduction front.

Amy Maron: To what extent will HDR look at the multiple trash haulers working in the county in contrast to San Francisco where there is only 1 hauler/processor. Chaz: in SF, Recology is part of the city charter and is guaranteed a profit.

**7. Next meeting**

When do we have the next deliverable to review? Wainer said the draft of Task 5 is expected by mid-February. Meet between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>.

Miller asked if we want to meet the second Wednesday of February? He said that Lisa Skumatz, a nationally known expert on PAYT, has volunteered to do a free PAYT webinar for the Task Force. It would be helpful to have and to provide her information about Montgomery County's funding structure, etc. before that webinar. Greenberger volunteered Kristin Brown to discuss the new PAYT program in New Windsor, MD.

Greenberger said we just got a directive from the County Executive and we haven't discussed it at all. Can we do that?

The next meeting was set for February 12<sup>th</sup> with a PAYT presentation and discussion of County Executive Marc Elrich's directive to the Task Force.

Adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Submitted,

Sara Bixby