

**Montgomery County**  
**Integrated Waste System Strategic Plan Task Force<sup>1</sup>**  
Meeting Notes  
March 13, 2019

Attending: Chaz Miller, Caroline Tayler, Lauren Greenberger, Keith Levchenko, Sara Bixby, Robin Wiener, Peter Ettinger

Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)- Division of Solid Waste Services (SWS): Don Birnesser (by phone), Patty Bubar, Marilu Enciso, Eileen Kao, Anthony Skinner, Willie Wainer

Telephone: consultant Christine Roarke, HDR

Guest Speaker: Nima Upadhyay, Special Projects Coordinator, Takoma Park

- County Staff
  - Debbie Spielberg, County Executive Office
  - Adriana Hochberg, County Executive Office
- Harvey Gershman
- Sierra Club: Deborah Cohn, Amy Maron
- Peter James, CCH

**Called to order by Chairman Miller at 5:32 p.m.**

**1. Approve minutes from February 13 meeting.**

Deferred to later in the meeting.

**2. Task 5 Final Draft Matrix** - Christine Roarke – Reviewed the items HDR was scoped to review in Task 5 and provided an overview of the approach they took to each. When HDR undertook the exercise, they wanted to be able to model one change at a time on top of the current County system. Discussed methodology for developing a low and high range of tons diverted estimates. The potential diversion was identified as between 117,240 and 352,030 tons<sup>2</sup>.

Reviewed potential recycling rates – not including C&D because is a non-MRA waste ranging from 66% to 80% with ash and RRF metals and 52% and 65% without ash recycled and recovered RRF metals<sup>3</sup>.

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

<sup>2</sup> A revised version of the tons was sent on 3/15/2019. The corrected potential tons are without C&D: 116,640 and 187,830; including C&D: 142,640 and 317,830 respectively, per Marilu Enciso

<sup>3</sup> A revised version of the percentages was sent on 3/15/2019. The revised percentages are: 66%-73% and 52% - 58% respectively, per Marilu Enciso

Discussed the purpose of the evaluation matrix. Every criterion in this matrix is weighted equally in the Task 5 output (to avoid bias) so HDR basically presented a triple bottom line.

Roarke explained the evaluation processing using a copy of the Recycling Options Excel spreadsheets to demonstrate. The matrix is intended to give a comparison of the options to each other.

Q - Bixby: If evaluation looked at each of these options as one-off changes to the county system, would the scoring related to people's willingness to change be different if faced with all of them? A – Roarke: Once closer to the master plan, there will be a more comprehensive evaluation, and we'll answer that then.

Q - Wiener: Recycling options – questions about the scoring. It seems like there is a lot of subjectivity in views of those technologies – e.g., single stream recycling listed as a 3, but there are also negatives that may not be reflected. A – Roarke: Yes, there is a degree of subjectivity. HDR didn't provide the pros and cons of every single option, but enough to compare the options to each other.

Q - Wiener: What is the timing for the Task Force to react to this? A - Miller – DEP wants recommendations on our priority options by the end of March 2019.

Q - Greenberger: Section talks about you might do this, and you might do that. At some point, will HDR make recommendations about what to do and how to do it based on its expertise? Is it part of your mission to provide a recommended operational plan? A - Roarke: At the previous task force meeting, the task force raised some interesting points about the direction of this plan – is it a true zero waste plan, is it a policy. HDR will need some direction from the County. We can make recommendations, and the county also needs to provide input on its priorities (e.g. GHG reduction or recycling as priority), understanding of what is reasonable and feasible within the county and the timing issues related this. It will be a partnership to best meet the county's needs.

Q - Ettinger – To what degree are you looking at consumer diversion versus commercial diversion and how reflected in the report? A – Roarke: Most recommendations are directed to the residential sector because the County has more control over it. Some options are directed at the commercial sector.

Q - Spielberg: Clarify "control" – do you mean County-provided collection? A: Yes, manages collection.

Q - Miller: About 20% of the county is in municipalities, that don't have to follow the county set-up. But I am assuming your set-up and modeling are based on total county participation? A - Roarke: Yes, total county participation. The optimal.

Q: Who pays in the municipalities? A - Levchenko – It depends.

Q: Should there be a mandatory diversion for the commercial sector if they produce a certain tonnage as a large producer?

Q – Miller: You mentioned the percentages that are feasible. Do you have a list of those included in the feasibility determination (i.e., are you double counting?) A – Roarke: Go to report page 166 and table 14-4.

Q – Taylor: Is there a reason to inform the process at this point with the new administration's desired end? A - Roarke: HDR has been speaking to Wainer and Enciso about that. This would be the best time to get County direction.

Greenberger: When you look at the goals at the beginning of the report, you don't mention the new goal set by County Executive Elrich to reduce by about 2/3 to get down to the current landfilled amount of ash disposed of (333,000 additional tons need to be diverted to match that disposal rate). That should be a goal reflected in the text.

Miller: According to table 14-5, the high range diverted (without ash) is 264k tons so leaves a 70k ton deficit. It likely requires council approval to change the disposal method.

Levchenko: We need to answer where we want to be in 10 years, 15 years and how do we stage things to get there and what are the costs. Eventually, we get to decide how to prioritize these. Some of these in task 5 are prioritized in their section but not across all the options. It's hard to envision it now because we don't see a logical plan to where we want to go – because we don't know where we want to go. What do we implement first?

Miller: We have an old infrastructure (e.g., the Transfer Station was built in 1982, the MRF was built in 1992, so both need to be replaced/improved), so what kind of timeline are we looking at to upgrade, replace, etc.? I don't know how to prioritize or any kind of timeline.

Bixby: It's too early to ask HDR to cost some of this because the facility will look different depending on what the task force wants - e.g., different facility and different costs for single stream vs. dual stream. The task force should do another pass and give guidance before asking for costs. Greenberger and Taylor: We want the recommendations first.

Miller: Providing a Task Force assignment for each member to come up with a list of the five big foundational items that we want by Monday (3/18). The Task Force will meet again this month – by phone or in person – to compile and narrow it down. This is where we build the base.

Taylor: Can we roadmap Montgomery County's process of developing a plan from that followed by the benchmark communities? We looked at where they got to. Do we have a roadmap of their process? What did you do at step 1, step 2, etc.? Can we follow some of their order and learn from their lessons?

Greenberger: HDR should be able to take all those components and synthesize. Tell us.

Ettinger: Give us the list of options.

Bixby – I think they did it. Read the report. Also, we must recognize that we are not at the same starting point as the benchmarking communities, all communities are different.

Levchenko and Wiener: Are there things missing from this report that we could consider?

Wiener: I still wonder about wood/furniture, more OCC. Are there more options not considered in the report and how do we raise those?

Miller: Adding to the Task Force assignment –identify not only the five foundational items also the things we think are missing.

Wiener: We should also add in five things we don't think should be considered. Miller concurred.

Spielberg: From the County Executive's perspective, if you are trying to get to an end goal of significant waste reduction, you may need to do all, but some may be short term, mid-term and long-term (including pilots, retail, composting, etc.).

CONCURRED: Deliverables due by Monday. Provide those to HDR and tell them to give the County a suite of things that meet the Task Force's interests. Miller asked all Task Force members to copy the entire Task Force on the delivery of homework assignments. The Task Force identified March 28 as the best day for a follow-up call or in-person meeting to review compiled results.

**3. Nima Upadhyay, Special projects Coordinator, Takoma Park, provided a presentation on the City's food waste pilot collection program.** The presentation can be found at <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/SWS/Resources/Files/master-plan/food-waste-presentation.pdf>

Miller introduced Upadhyay by saying that he knows Takoma Park has had an active food waste collection program for about six years, which can provide "lessons learned" and serve as a case study of curbside food waste collection for the Task Force.

A few key points from the presentation – please refer to the complete presentation:

- Waste collection from 3,300 single family homes
- Takoma Park has single-stream recycling collection
- Before the food waste collection program – the system recorded 33% recycling, 44% solid waste, and 23% yard waste.
- Two areas were entered into a curbside pilot project in 2013
- Currently, the City collects food waste from about 1,800 homes. The program has an online sign-up. Participants are issued a 5-gallon bucket with a screw top lid with a single six-month supply of compostable bags, as well as instructions. Everything goes to Prince Georges County for processing. That facility was selected over other available facilities because it accepted a wider range of material.

In 2014 the collection went to City run collection.

Results from food waste collection (fiscal years run July to June)

- FY2014- 110 tons
- FY2017 – 212.49 tons (3% of the waste stream)
- FY 2018 – 302.42 tons – about 4% of the City’s waste stream
- Recovery and reduction in trash is limited by capacity constraints at the processing facility.
- About 45% of people are participating
- The average weight of food waste per house – 6.6# per week. Think that is about 70% individual recovery per household.
- Program evaluation – issued a survey last week – 158 responses (about 10% response). Not all respondents put out food every week because the container was not full. Respondents said they had had less waste in their trash; however, overall results citywide have not gone down in trash generation. Most people responded that the five-gallon bucket was the right size and some households want two buckets.

Q: Why not encourage backyard composting. A: Because it is not effective for meat and dairy items. The City program does accept those.

Discussion about bag requirements – participants are not required to use a bag in their five-gallon container; nor are they provided compostable bags after the first supply. Participants can buy compostable bags to use if they want them. They can’t use plastic as non-compostable bags; they are a contaminant in the Prince Georges County processing facility. This approach to bags is perceived to work because participation in the food waste collection is voluntary; responses could change if the program became mandatory.

Compost is also given out to participants every year.

Cost of the program: \$63,245. Four drivers work part-time on the program (one FTE because they rotate). Speaker says about 15% of her overall time is also spent on it.

*Lessons learned from the Takoma Park food waste collection program:*

Buy a vehicle with a body/container designed to handle food waste. Leachate is corroding the City’s current collection vehicle (a Ford 450 converted to run food waste). Miller noted that body corrosion is also a problem in some of the trucks intended for this purpose.

Anticipate a lot of wear and tear on the bin and plan for a high replacement rate. The 5-gallon bucket approach is limiting. Need to find a better container option and start transitioning to it.

Future – explore commercial recovery options and advocate for more local processing options.

**4. Approve minutes** from the Feb.13 meeting. Taylor moved, Ettinger seconded to approve the minutes. It was carried unanimously.

## **5. Public comments:**

Peter James: I've built lots of composters and digesters. Terrified by this whole process. I think you see only a tip of the iceberg with what's possible. Why not crowdsource – put social problems onto the internet – do a sim (simulation) game and 3-D modeling to get people engaged and consider all technology. Look at transportation, public health, etc. impacts rather than what some group of cities has already done. This whole Maker Movement – what if we help inspire an unmaker movement?

Debby Cohn, Sierra Club: In the HDR presentation, they were clear the evaluation criteria weren't ranked. Is there a consensus on the Task Force on that weighting? Is that part of the Monday assignment?

Taylor said she was going to add that weighting in her responses.

Harvey Gershman: Identified himself as a resident and almost-retired employee of Gershman, Brickner & Bratton. He asked when Task 5 would be available online. Wainer said the output was still in draft form and the final would be available sometime in mid-April.

## **6. Additional Task Force Discussion of the County Executive directive for Task Force and extension of RRF:**

Taylor: The County Executive was clear in his statement of our objective. Get us to as close to zero in whatever suite possible. I wrestle with the idea of [environmental justice]. Not dumping our waste on a community that has little power to defend itself. This is a big lift, and Montgomery County should be able to do it.

Miller: To me, the issue is timeline -2022, 2024, or 2026 – and 2022 is a heavier lift. At the backend, is the pure mechanical issue of you can't build a MRF overnight. Is there enough space in the current transfer station – expansion and changing the transportation mode?

Wainer: We are working on that answer.

Greenberger: There are other options; for example, a developer interested in a resource recovery park in Carroll County. It would give us an option to manage material. The Bethesda Beat article cited a report presented to former County Executive Leggett (about transfer and disposal costs, e.g., \$18 million more to landfill than use the RRF). Greenberger said she doesn't believe its statements are true and asked if Wainer had the report.

Wainer said it wasn't a report, but rather an estimate by people helping Mr. Leggett. You can come up with the numbers based on "the letter" very easily – 100 tractor loads a day, distances, gate rates (tipping fees), load size – compared to what it costs the County today. Multiply the differential by the number of tons to be disposed of, if the RRF is closed. No one landfill can accept 600,000 tons a year if Montgomery County were to just show up at their gate – when accepting additional waste, landfills consider a variety of factors such as cell construction, permitting, daily limits, annual limits. A variety of landfills would need to be used and a variety of variables which would be complex and likely expensive.

Greenberger said the Sugarloaf Association is going to ask a rail haul consultant to analyze to find a cheaper option for the County.

Ettinger: When you do your rail haul analysis, it won't be one facility and one destination. Look also at the regulatory considerations.

Miller adjourned the meeting at 7:35 – after the ordered hard stop of 7:30 p.m.