

Montgomery County
Integrated Waste System Strategic Plan Task Force¹
Meeting Notes
March 12, 2020

Task Force members

- Attending in person: Chaz Miller, Lauren Greenberger, and Keith Levchenko.
- Attending by phone: Caroline Taylor, Sara Bixby, Peter Ettinger, and Ken Lavish
- Absent: Robin Wiener

Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)- Division of Solid Waste Services (SWS)

- Attending in person: Patty Bubar, Marilu Enciso, Lonnie Helfin, and Willie Wainer
- Attending by phone: Joe LaDana and Dave Rosenbaum

County Executive Office in person:

- Mark Elrich (join near the end of the meeting)
- Debbie Spielberg, County Executive Office

HDR

- Attending by phone: Christine Roarke, Bruce Howie

Northeast Maryland Waste Disposal Authority

- Attending by phone: Kitty McIlroy, Chris Skaggs

SWAC

Attending by phone: Kelly Doordan and Gina Gangiola

Others:

Attending by phone: Neil Seldman, Mike Ewall, Amy Maron, and Susan Eisendraft

Chaz opened the meeting and ran through the agenda and stated there might be one more Task Force meeting after this. He also noted that Task Force comments had been sent to the County, and they were incorporated in the presentation by HDR. He then introduced Christine Roarke from HDR.

Christine Roarke presented the summary presentation of Task 9

(<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/SWS/Resources/Files/master-plan/evaluation-disposal-alternatives-whats-left.pdf>). A few key points from the presentation:

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

- A. A) HDR presents realistic diversion and recycling goals in the report, based on incorporating new programs for diversion and recycling and investing/expanding on infrastructure, in addition to expected population growth and considerations for both the residential and commercial sectors. These are based on their experience and the benchmarking task.
- B. Recycling rates presented could be higher if the County places a top priority and investment in education and enforcement. Still, the recycling and diversion amounts are based on the experience of other communities (including those in the benchmarking exercise).
- C. The latest WARM model (v15) was used for GHG calculations in the presentation.

After the HDR presentation, Chaz Miller then started to have the Task Force ask their priority questions of HDR, round-robin style.

Sara Bixby – the 92% participation and 92% recovery 100% of the time is an incredible level. Does anyone achieve these levels?

Christine Roarke – No. Those were estimates provided to show the level of effort and participation needed to meet the County Executive’s diversion rate goals. It would require intensive fines, enforcement measures, etc. and it is impossible to consider at this point.

Carolyn Taylor – Did the cost estimate provided by HDR for the cost of building and operating a landfill at Site 2 include replacing the water supply of community because the landfill is sited on top of an aquifer, and it could become contaminated.

Christine Roarke – No

Peter Ettinger – How does the County Executive expect the residents to pay for the increased cost of the services/programs discussed, including compliance costs, on cost per year basis? (Chaz deferred this question). How is the volume of organics, especially commercial organics, that is to be separated under the programs going to be handled/processed and at what facility?

Christine Roarke – The commercial sector will handle its own material and find their own processing capacity. But the County will need to make sure capacity is in place for the programs that will be required. The residential material will be source-separated at the curb with food scrap and yard trim being collected separately.

Ken Lavish – no questions at this time

Keith Levchenko – HDR mentions the importance of collection in Subdistrict B. Why is this urgent?

Christine Roarke – With the collection expanded to Subdistrict B, when you roll out programs in the County, the ability to affect behavior change is increased if all of the services are done together, especially if you are investing all this money into infrastructure, you need to eliminate other program options so you can maximize efficiencies. For example, starting the organics collection program could coincide with standard trash containers or decreasing waste collection to every other week. If the residents in Subdistrict B still contract for their own haulers, they may simply choose to keep the waste service the same and not participate in the organics program or standard waste container program,

because it would be easier for them not to be source separating. Continue with two subdistricts will require a greater level of effort to control. However, from a County perspective, staggering certain program rollouts would be a cost-saver compared to doing it all at once.

Chaz Miller – Does the County have the authority to make municipalities follow its collection system? About 20% of the County population is in municipalities, and there are a lot of projections based on County-wide participation, so this is an important point to clarify.

Keith Levchenko – not sure. (*This is an open item). He committed to find out the answer and follow up.

HDR—With Subdistrict B, the County has authority, but not sure about municipalities.

Lauren Greenberger – Comment – Only increasing the recycling rate by 10% over 20 years is abysmal. The County should get everyone involved and be different and not worry about benchmark communities not being able to get to their high diversion targets, let's be the leader. Question – How is the analysis showing that the RRF is cleaner than landfilling relating to GHG, assuming methane capture and beneficial use, rather than just flaring. Also, the report does not mention the amount of methane captured at the landfill used in the analysis.

Christine Roarke – HDR used the WARM v15 GHG model, which is a widely used model. Christine did not recall the methane capture rate that the model uses but stated that it would have been within the standard recovery rate parameters. The reason for the lower GHG for the RRF is the offset of GHG from electrical generation, not necessarily that it is “cleaner” than landfill emissions.

Lauren mentions the EPA's emissions inventory and the amount of CO₂ (as well as nitrous oxides as well as others) emitted by the RRF according to that site, and that when you look at methane capture that 75% or more landfills around here are doing methane capture for energy. Christine responded again that HDR used the WARM model and that new studies show that landfills are emitting more fugitive methane emissions than what is being measured previously.

Lauren stated that the WARM model uses mostly fossil-fuel electricity generation, and shouldn't this study be comparing the RRF to solar and wind GHG emissions.

Christine stated that the WARM model uses the Maryland mix for generation sources and is supposed to give a general impression; there were no mixes provided for Montgomery County specifically.

Lauren stated that this is faulty analysis and assumption and that biogenic material emissions that come out of the RRF are not being counted in this. Christine indicated the County could study emissions differently since there are a lot of factors involved, and that doing so for HDR would have been out of the scope and budget for this project.

Sara Bixby – how did HDR deal with population and economic growth? Is HDR trying to manage the current materials or is there growth assumed in the diversion numbers estimated, since tonnages will affect facility sizes, etc.

Christine Roarke – The waste amounts are based on 2017 actual tonnage, and composition data, and the projections are based on County anticipated residential and commercial growth rates until approximately 2030 (including SFH, MRH and commercial), so a linear extrapolation. Christine noted

that it is difficult to predict future material mixes and new technologies that might be available to deal with them.

Carolyn Taylor – The Poolesville Beauty Spot was a great example of repurposing and makes a strong case for using this model and improving on this in the County, e.g., by expanding/providing more drop-off locations for residents to participate, and thus increasing their reuse/restoration of material previously destined for disposal.

Ken Lavish: No questions.

Keith Levchenko: Pass.

Peter Ettinger – what is the role/ability of the County to take on/enforce organic waste diversion – similar to the Charkoudian Bill in Annapolis? Has the study looked at this type of diversion where it is enforced on the consumer and corporate side?

Christine Roarke – Yes, we looked at Austin, Vermont, and Massachusetts' programs and their phased-in approach with organics generation based on sizes of commercial properties and mandated participation. Since the County already successfully manages a mandatory recycling program, we considered them to be able to take this on successfully as well.

Chaz Miller – Some of the suggestions in the report require Council/County Executive to take political actions (e.g., PAYT and Subdistrict B collections). Do the time frames for implementation in the report include opposition, or do they assume everything is approved smoothly?

Christine Roarke – The report used the stated timeline by the Executive of closing the RRF by 2026, so the implementation timelines were condensed to meet this goal and are more accelerated than a standard timeline for new policies. The County has to decide if they want to keep its waste within the County, or if rail haul could happen (feasibility study). Political will depends on the public, so if it is a critical priority, there will be a way to meet the timelines.

Lauren Greenberger – For disposal solutions, the top recommendation is the RRF until 2040, but there are significant capital needs to keep it running safely until then (e.g., \$60-\$90 million dollars). The second recommendation is for Site 2, which has capital needs and is only a 32-year solution. Both options require significant capital (almost 100 million dollars for each), and there will be nothing to show after 2040 or 2050. If you spend the capital on the rail system now, that system will be a solution in perpetuity. Thoughts?

Christine Roarke – the costs are based on the waste numbers and the amount of diversion over a 20-year timeline. However, the more diversion there is from strong program performance, the less waste there is, and these options could last longer and lower costs. It is the County's decision whether they want disposal in the County or outside. It is the County's decision on which is more important to look at for now and long term and its priorities with GHG reductions, investments, equity with sending trash outside of County limits into another community, and Risk with relying on private disposal capacity not being in County control. HDR is not knocking rail as an option, but its feasibility and other disposal options merit more study.

Lauren Greenberger agreed there should be more study of the disposal options. It also stated that County is sending almost 200,000 tons of toxic ash outside the County already, and this would be a better material to send.

Keith Levchenko – There are a lot of programs to start in the next few years. Maybe the County should not deal with the RRF issue until the other programs are implemented, such as PAYT, standard trash container, reduced trash collection. He stated it makes more sense to work on disposal options when you have revised number on how much you would be dealing with after diversion program rollouts. He invited a discussion on this.

Chaz Miller – It is criminal that the MRF has not been upgraded since 2000. That should be done, or a new MRF built. Food waste processing should be set up. So the timing of building all the facilities for all the programs is problematic and needs to be thought through as there is a lot to do. He believes we are being too optimistic and not considering siting issues likely to occur. There are preliminary decisions that need to be resolved first before getting into the politics of it since we would be lucky to get these buildings built in three years. He has seen commercial organics and curbside organics programs take two to three years to get up to speed and sorting properly, like in mature programs in Rhode Island and other states. There is little control over customer behavior-- behind the counter organics management is easier to influence first.

Christine Roarke – It is an ambitious, aggressive timeline because of the County Executive's desire to close the RRF in 2026. If the decision was put off 5-10 more years, it would allow the County to move on this more reasonably.

Chaz Miller – Did the County do an RFP for the MRF?

Patty Bubar – No responses had proposals with large enough tracts of land for County needs

Carolyn Taylor – Yes, the time frame is tight, and behavior change will be difficult, but the County has declared a climate emergency, and the how County leadership frames the urgency will drive success. County residents will hear the call and respond accordingly. I am an optimist and believe that with proper education, changes can be made. For example, using a backyard composter is not hard to do.

Sara Bixby – Struggling to maintain relentless optimism with the plan. It seems the County is not moving forward in a rigorous way to get these things done and in place. The County should show the first steps and show willpower to implement diversion programs and do the things they can do and then work to close the RRF. It doesn't look like it will happen on time. If I see the County do these things, I could get behind closing the RRF closing by 2026, but it doesn't look like it's possible.

Peter Ettinger – He would like a real timeline of implementation. This is critical and informs the ability to educate as necessary. He agrees with Sara.

Lauren Greenberger – Does not see a recommended plan to go forward. The County should leverage other organizations to help get the population on board. Montgomery County residents like to recycle. We have a lot of well educated, progressive people in this County that are happy to help with this. How do you increase the County's reach and use of non-profits or for-profits to implement these programs? I didn't really see these organizations listed in the plan. Getting the population currently not recycling and

not on board, like the large minority population not really being reached, should be a focus. I'm not seeing a lot of the minority populations participating at community meetings for green issues.

Christine Roarke – I agree. The study (in the Task 5 Report) does look at partnering with other organizations/non-profits/for profits and municipalities, e.g., for programs like mattress recycling. Have to consider not competing with certain non-profits, for example, with textile collectors and recyclers. There is such a large influx of residents in neighboring municipalities, so standardizing programs with the municipalities would help create a consistent message for home/work situations, where a resident might live in a municipality but work in the County or vice versa, and they can participate with the same rules and correctly divert their materials with ease. The minority population not being reached is a challenge in all communities.

Lauren Greenberger – Is there anywhere else in the country where it has been more effective?

Christine Roarke – Targeted campaigns to help increase the widespread understanding of specific materials for recycling has been successful. Or targeted campaigns in certain areas to reach certain demographics.

Sara Bixby asked Lauren Greenberger – Do you think the lack of participation of certain sectors is a significant contributor to not going beyond 52%?

Lauren Greenberger – I have seen other studies about recycling rates. An example is the use of plastic bags. International grocery stores are not charging for plastic bags and are still offering them. So it would introduce behavior change if the County addressed this and would have a trickling effect of what they are then putting in their recycling and trash bins.

Chaz Miller to Patty Bubar – So has the County been doing more enforcement? Is the tagging program being done County-wide?

Patty Bubar– It is being done in a pilot area with a diverse population that has had lower participation. They see less contamination and more material being put out for collection. The inspections check for non-recyclable items in the recycling bins and sticker them and do not pick them up. Then volunteers are leaving mail hangers and flyers and explaining the program. The whole point was to reduce the contamination since we have high contamination rates in the County. In the Montgomery Village area, we have been finding a decrease in contamination and an actual increase in participation in the recycling program (noted more recycling bins being put out). So it's intensive, but it is working, an experiment showing that conversations make a difference and reinforce the rules. The County has acknowledged that the collection crew is not trained to do that as of now.

Lauren Greenberger – Is the RRF owned by the Authority. Debt has been retired, but not sure if the ownership goes back automatically.

Patty Bubar – Yes.

Lauren Greenberger – The contract says the County should own the RRF². Why hasn't ownership gone back to County if it hasn't?

² The Authority is still the owner of the RRF Facility. The County has the right to purchase the RRF Facility from the Authority for \$1 with proper notices and assumption of certain costs.

Chaz Miller opened comments and questions to the public.

Susan Eisendraft - How is this plan being coordinated with the County Climate Action and Resiliency plan and the consultants hired to pare down those recommendations, as well as recommendations for composting and use of compost as carbon sequestration? There has been a call to look at that sequestration and compost as a priority in County and stormwater reduction.

Chaz Miller – I was planning to attend the meeting this morning that was canceled about this. The County is required by law to move forward with the plan.

Patty Bubar -- The County submitted a draft to the state.

Chaz Miller -- Requirements for the solid waste plan can be met.

County Executive Joins meeting

Patty Bubar – in response to climate action plan question – The scope of the consultant for the climate action plan was based on the workgroup requirements. What was in RFP is focused more on capabilities in clean energy and transportation and the building sectors. Looking at vulnerability and resilience as well as social justice and equity considerations. We have a workgroup to help evaluate and recommend. The solid waste master plan is continuing to proceed, it seems they are on a separate path, but synergy can happen between both plans down the road.

County Executive – He is opposed to giving Covanta the contract for the study³ and opposed to HDR – the findings of the report and recommendations are unacceptable – the incinerator will close in 2026 when the contract expires. We will increase recycling as much as we choose to capture. The County will adopt measures to a reasonable level as opposed to absurd capture rates in the study and then landfill the rest. The County is not spending any more money on Covanta and HDR – it is a waste of money. The report was totally predictable.

Neil Seldman – Mentions the Baltimore planning effort, and it has the same conclusion and outcome, that Bresco should keep going. The 2040 comprehensive composting program wouldn't be established, but in my report, ZW Associates showed that we can do it. The Zero Waste study done by other consultants, including himself, is much better and points to citizens being optimistic and the consultants being pessimistic.

County Executive – agrees with Neil Seldman. If you have a company and hire a consultant with a vested interest, that's what you get as a result.

Sara Bixby – to County Executive – Introduced herself as someone who sat on SWAC and the Zero Waste Task Force. What is County going to do – MRF capacity, Subdistrict B collection, PAYT- all of these can be done now, and don't need to rely on the HDR report or anything else being finalized, they are something the County has control over and can initiate right now and not wait on, they will need political will.

County Executive – the MRF has space limitations, but we are looking at other sites, and we are looking to co-locate with a plastics processor/brick manufacturer. He will push for more space. Noted his own participation in a PAYT pilot in his own home in Tacoma Park, and enjoyed being able to put non-

³ HDR was retained by the Northeast Maryland Waste Disposal Authority. The Authority solicited proposals from its on-call engineers at the direction of DEP and DEP selected HDR from the qualified proposals.

recyclable, compostable paper like a pizza box into his compost bin. Noted that what is left is mostly plastic bags in some way, shape or form, which is depressing. Stated that he believes a PAYT pilot would work. We have funding available to build and deal with these issues. Meeting with a property owner to provide space should be this year.

Mike Ewall – Question for HDR--Did the study look at Maplewood landfill. Its website says it is served by CSX and has capacity. The report listed Maplewood landfill only available by truck.

Christine Roarke – She will need to double check⁴ and look at specific parameters, like the landfill being able to take all of the County's waste, etc.

Debbie -Will, the Consultant, will work with County to develop the Master Plan, not clear how the Task Force's involvement is going to be in the Master Plan? What about the public? For the County Executive – HDR report noted that it looks like land acquisition is an issue for the County. What is the County going to do? It is not clear what land will become available?

County Executive – the County dealt with an unsolicited proposal for a site which wasn't going to be big enough and could do another proposal. The County will look at other sites. There is another close site the County will be looking at. There is 10 million square feet with large parking lots of vacant office space that can be an option. It's not like there has been an exhaustive effort in looking for land so far.

Patty Bubar – HDR has given the County the draft Master Plan and the County will take over at this point and develop from there since it has consultant input, and use it as part of its 10-year planning requirement, which includes public meetings and will allow for a public comment period and County Council hearings.

Meeting Adjourned

⁴Note, HDR is aware that Maplewood is available by truck and rail. HDR used Maplewood as an example of a VA landfill that could take waste by truck and another landfill located a similar distance as one that could accept waste by rail.