

Montgomery County
Integrated Waste System Strategic Plan Task Force¹
Meeting Notes
Skype Meeting April 2, 2020

Task Force members

- Sara Bixby, Peter Ettinger, Lauren Greenberger, Keith Levchenko, Caroline Taylor, Chaz Miller, and Robin Wiener
- Absent: Ken Lavish

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

- Patty Bubar, Marilu Enciso, David Frank, Eileen Kao, Adam Ortiz, Alan Pultyniewicz, and Willie Wainer

County Executive Office:

- Adriana Hochberg

Northeast Maryland Waste Disposal Authority

- Kitty McIlroy, Chris Skaggs

SWAC

Kelly Doordan

Others:

Susan Eisendraft, Amy Maron, and Diana Younts

Chaz opened

Chaz Miller opened the meeting at 5:30 p.m., and ran through the agenda. Minutes from the past two meeting(s) were approved. Caroline Taylor noted that she would send in one correction to the last meeting minutes. Chaz Miller stated that Task Force would be discussing what they believed would be worthwhile, yet achievable recycling and organics goals/rates, as well as the priorities for achieving them. (Link provided here for presentation:). He noted that public comment would be left for the end of the presentation.

Adam Ortiz gave a quick thank you announcement to the Task Force, DEP, and all who contributed to providing review and input on the Master Plan. He stated that he was excited to hear the Task Force feedback now that the HDR feedback has been wrapped up. Adam signed off the call for another meeting right after giving his thank you announcement.

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

Chaz Miller: Opened with the slide Priorities to Increase Recycling & Organics Diversion. He stated that recommendations on each slide are a placeholder, pending the consensus of the call and include what he received so far from Task Force members. He said that they are subject to amendment.

He then moved to the slide What Recycling & Organics Recovery Rate can Montgomery County Achieve? He asked what an achievable goal that is an appropriate percent, and what should the goals be is?

Robin Wiener: stated that she had just seen the PBS Frontline special on Tuesday night about plastics. She asked why are we trying to arbitrarily set a number for a recycling rate? What is our goal for the whole management system? She stated that it might sound odd coming from her that recycling is only part of it, and it is not the end all be all and only one aspect of the solution. We should maximize each element of the materials management system. How do you even determine what that number is [for recycling], excluding material that shouldn't be there in the first place?

Peter Ettinger: Agree in a broadway. We have to think overall for the County for what our goals should be, continue to educate all ages and corporations. Putting 60% as an aspirational goal might help us get there strategically. We should put something like 60% even though a lot of jurisdictions have a lot of trouble trying to get there; we should still set something, so we have something to achieve too.

Caroline Taylor: Agree and also 60% is not unreasonable and is aspirational at the same time. Things like source reduction are harder to measure.

Sara Bixby: Mentioned before that, she is tired of talking about numbers. We'll continue to spend more time arguing about it, but let's move on and start doing the work.

Lauren Greenberger: Also, philosophically agree on the same principles. Setting the numbers is something you can do, depends on the budget of County, and if we are aiming for zero waste, that is something we need to do. For example, for all commercial organics, design the program around the number you set, so it's the will of the County to do that. For example, related to the PBS Frontline episode, which doesn't apply to organics as much, but how can we as people do better with recycling with things like plastics, turn it on its head and get our County to step in and not put it all on the consumer to recycle it all.

Robin Wiener: It applies to organics as well, where we should reduce the volume of material that ultimately ends up in the landfill or incinerator. Reuse center, source reduction, increase recycling are part of our main goal, which should be the reduction in what is going into the waste stream.

Chaz Miller: Speaking on behalf of Keith Levchenko, who is currently attempting to get back on the call, the number he sent in was in the 60% range. Chaz also stated that based on his career and the HDR benchmarking report, that King County, Washington is just below 60%, Seattle is about 56 ½% now since it had slipped down, and San Francisco is about 50%.

There was a question about these rates being about organics.

Chaz Miller: Responded that it was including everything, organics, and recycling, etc. When you have a rate in the 50s, you have a really strong program, and getting there takes time, building programs.

Lauren Greenberger: We don't have any timeline here. HDR said 10% in 20 years. What program and timeline are we talking about? What is appropriate with what timeline?

Keith Levchenko: Discussion before about source reduction and per capita measurements being the most important. Sometimes reuse negatively affects recycling rates. Also, people understand recycling rates [better] and they are useful in that way. I ran the County recycling rate with and without ash, which is an important distinction. HDR gave 50% capture rate for single residential homes, why can't we aim for 80%? Also subdistrict B, PAYT, carpets, textile, mattresses could be in the 80,000 more tons we could find without ash and we would be at 67%, and based on Chaz's experience, that would be nation leading and aspirational. With ash we would be at 80%, not sure how realistic these rates are and how soon we could get to them but I think it's important to do these things rather than fixate on the number that goes against these things.

Lauren Greenberger: What are the numbers you ran that brought you to a 67% recycling rate?

Keith Levchenko: I used the current tonnage projections and the state formula.

Lauren Greenberger: Programmatically, what do we do to get there?

Keith Levchenko: 130,000 tons of total food waste, so you can assume where we get that. I threw out 80% capture number as aspirational, then additional tons from more current captures from what we recycle and materials we aren't getting yet, like mattresses, carpets, etc., and PAYT was a big one including getting more mixed paper which we aren't getting much now, and I assumed 80,000 tons for all of these. And then I used the state formula.

Robin Wiener: What I want to see specially as a priority is a comprehensive education and enforcement campaign with the goal of reducing the volume of waste going into the landfill. I say campaign as if it's more expensive than it would need to be. Just engage all residents and let them all know what the County is doing.

Chaz Miller: Okay, I think we had a good discussion.

3. Chaz Miller then moved to the Source Reduction slide. He asked the County, do you have staff available to work on source reduction activities listed in the report?

Eileen Kao: We do have staff working on general source reduction, also just finished interviews for food waste manager position, but filling the position will be delayed because of COVID-19.

Chaz Miller: So this effort of source reduction doesn't need additional funding?

Eileen Kao: That is not what I said.

Sara Bixby: 12-18 months ago we were talking about the County hiring for a food waste manager position, why hasn't it been filled yet?

Eileen Kao: We did fill this position, but the person resigned. Also, whatever other recommendations, for example, a reuse center, we don't have adequate funding for that currently.

Patty Bubar: Availability of land is a huge hurdle that has to be addressed, for reuse centers, etc.

Chaz Miller: I understand, I didn't mean to imply there was funding or land either.

Sara Bixby: I concur with that recommendation; we have to focus on source reduction.

Lauren Greenberger: Have you considered looking at public/private partnerships? Has there been outreach to the Economic Development Council or MoCoGreen or BethesdaGreen? So the County doesn't have to take all this on, on its own.

Eileen Kao: We do work with partners and organizations. We currently do try to find out what other organizations can serve as destinations for donation/reuse and provide that information together to multifamily, residents, businesses to divert material to those places directly.

Lauren Greenberger: Agrees to adopt this recommendation.

All agreed to the adoption of the recommendation.

4. Chaz Miller moves to the next slide, Processing Facility (MRF) Needs. He asks will the MRF be able to get the upgrade funds for this year and/or be replaced by a new facility?

Keith Levchenko: Everything is up in the air right now; the budget process will be different this upcoming month. Whether MRF gets funding this year is up to other factors. This has already been presented to Council in the past year or two, about new equipment for the current facility, and the previous searches for a new facility have been unsuccessful so far. But it has been moving along. Very uncertain, though about where the budget will be.

Chaz Miller: That's great news that Council has been aware of this in the past and aware of the environmental issues over the past couple years, that it's not a question of intent but making the numbers work.

Robin Wiener: I believe it's definitely needed, should be considered as a concept of MRFshed, such as producing products to make it more appealing and/or working with/accepting other jurisdictions' material.

Lauren Greenberger: We have a clean MRF right now. In the interest of stabilizing material with a dirty MRF, it should be included in addition to having a clean MRF, to treat biological material before going to a landfill if we are getting rid of the incinerator.

Robin Wiener: I think you are talking about something else, a collection method?

Lauren Greenberger: If the County Council is planning for a clean MRF they should consider co-locating a biological treatment in the same footprint to deal with biological treatment of the material to be stabilized in a dirty type of MRF, it might be the wrong term.

Sara Bixby: But addressing the MRF right now is critical, to keep a solid recycling program we can't allow the virus from distracting us from the idea that the MRF upgrading is a critical funding need. A lot of County funding is hurting right now. We are jeopardizing what we have right now by getting distracted.

The MRF upgrade recommendation was approved.

5. The Task Force then moved onto the Organics slide

Peter Ettinger: Working with large organics feedstock processors, if this is different, then we take past laws and make this harder, if it is the same thing then no comment.

Chaz Miller: I believe it is the same thing, but I don't think the County has separated organics from trash mandate.

Peter Ettinger: It does not currently. But County could mandate it and do pay per ton from large commercial organizations to help fund some of these projects or mandate large commercial organizations to send organics to a processing facility. Many public/private opportunities that should be looked at.

Chaz Miller: Replace the term "separation" with "diversion" or "collection." Processing infrastructure would be implied/necessary to be built then, if we replace the term with "collection."

Keith Levchenko: For FY 21 budget, what are the assumptions for commercial organics diversion, not really a pilot, but more about connecting them with capacity, a question for DEP?

Willie Wainer: On the commercial side, we have already identified several large commercial generators who want to divert food scraps, and the projected tonnage is 2,500-3,000 tons/year. The County has purchased a vehicle, customized, to get the program started, that vehicle was ready to go. We purchased stickers, and 32-gallon containers at these locations in public/private schools, supermarkets, but the virus has closed down a lot of these locations like restaurants and bars. We will be ready to start when the virus goes away. We have capacity at Western Branch to send the SSO material.

Chaz Miller: So not necessarily full-fledged

Eileen Kao: Correct, we have the capability to negotiate for more tons, currently have 4,000-ton capacity allowed. Rather than doing this broadly, we are trying to build with parties we have now. We will continue this initiative into the next F.Y. in what was budgeted so far.

Peter Ettinger: Maybe it should be more specific in funding consumer pilots and then find residential and commercial organics.

Keith Levchenko: Concern is there is no capacity that we have right now, we don't have enough places to send it. The intent is to do the residential pilot to work out kinks, so instead of mandating, we do the pilot first and build capacity.

Peter Ettinger: Other states built a larger capacity than what was needed. My perspective is that with A.D., I would fund the facility and build it if organics is mandated in the County.

Keith Levchenko: The mandate should not require that it go into effect until capacity is available.

Peter Ettinger: The mandate is broader and the specific requirements/tactics can be more prescriptive. Usually, within a 20-30 mile radius, you are mandating.

Sara Bixby: Capacity leads. Capacity should be built first.

Peter Ettinger: Please build something, we should not start collecting until we have a place to send it.

Chaz Miller: How should we reword the recommendation?

Peter Ettinger: This is not time-specific, but would bet it will pass in M.D. legislature next year, mandating organics.

Lauren Greenberger: We do have the Dickerson Yard Material Processing Facility, that if there was a legally binding contract with the Sugarloaf Citizens Association, they would probably agree for organics to be accepted there if we stop burning our trash. It should handle all residential organics, at least if the County agrees to close the RRF by 2026.

Peter Ettinger: Instead of "separation" put "diversion."

The Organics recommendations were approved by the Task Force as amended.

6. The Task Force moved onto the Pay-As-You-Throw slide. The recommendation for this system was discussed, although it was acknowledged that the County would have to amend its current solid waste fees.

Chaz Miller: We cannot just wave a wand and have a PAYT system; it's a little more complicated than that.

Lauren Greenberger: I support it.

Robin Wiener: Support it.

Chaz Miller: Is the last sentence worded well, to imply the existing fee?

Keith Levchenko: There is not a solid waste fee; there are a series of solid waste charges. We're talking about how it would be changed, which would require a change in law, but we don't have to get into that now, but I think we agree that this greatly affects behavior change.

Chaz Miller: "Collection of solid waste charges" rather than "solid waste fee."

Keith Levchenko: Subdistrict B? Single district? Do these go hand in hand? PAYT creates another incentive for why you would want to do a single district.

Lauren Greenberger: We would get more bang for our buck if we did the two proposals together.

Keith Levchenko: But we could probably mandate it through haulers even if Subdistrict B is not included with Subdistrict A collection. HDR said this was almost essential to do.

The PAYT recommendation was approved by the Task Force as amended.

7. The Task Force moved onto the Subdistrict B slide and reviewed the recommendation for the County to consolidate Subdistricts A and B for waste and recycling collection.

Chaz Miller: Stated ~127,000 homes in Subdistrict B. ~90,000 homes in Subdistrict A. Municipalities have about ~80,000 homes. Recycling is mandated as a collection in both districts, so this is more about making a consolidated program. Does County Council have the authority to do this on its own even if Subdistrict B votes against it?

Keith Levchenko: I believe so.

Chaz Miller: Remaining municipalities have their own authority to manage waste. But County can have the ability to negotiate with municipalities about PAYT add on.

Keith Levchenko: I don't know. I know County negotiates with municipalities all the time.

Chaz Miller: It is important to create a uniform program, but important to know if they are not required to participate.

Sara Bixby: Fundamentally, what we are talking about doing is bringing the largest number of houses in the County into more alignment into the goals of the County, with the least amount of disposal possible and shutting down incineration. Let's focus on that first.

Lauren Greenberger: If we could get uniform messaging in the County, that would help with the confusion. Uniform programs and bins.

Robin Wiener: I support that 100%.

Peter Ettinger: The County already indicated they were going to do this with organics and building up the MRF.

Keith Levchenko: Organics would be almost like recycling in this way since both districts get recycling. And we will want to have the ability to limit trash collection in both districts in the future.

Lauren Greenberger: Should we focus on getting the municipalities in this now?

Sara Bixby: Let's focus on what we can do first and then try and talk them into it later.

Keith Levchenko: The OLO report talked to haulers about haulers in Subdistrict B. Next step is a committee work session with a full Council, but that won't happen for a few months. The OLO report stated that Subdistrict B could vote on staying in Subdistrict B or moving to Subdistrict A, but that County Council can still mandate it.

Keith Levchenko: Include "pursuing negotiations with municipalities," as part of the language to vote on for municipality recommendations?

Both recommendations were voted on and approved by the Task Force, the first to consolidate collections between Subdistricts A and B. The second to pursue consolidating collections with municipalities “try and negotiate uniform programs with municipalities.”

Chaz Miller: Would this mean the County takes over these programs, and do some of them have single-stream?

Lauren Greenberger: It could be either.

Willie Wainer: All of them have single-stream if private contractors are picking up it’s single stream, and it’s processed at private facilities.

Keith Levchenko: It doesn’t have to prescribe a specific program.

Lauren Greenberger: People move around so much it would be great to have a uniform system.

Diana Younts: If Tacoma Park went to a uniform system, we would be taking a step back because we have organics already.

Chaz Miller: It would be a part of the negotiations.

Keith Levchenko: Places like Tacoma Park would decide if they want a uniform program or to keep their program.

The recommendations were approved as amended again by the Task Force.

8. The Task Force moved onto the Education and Enforcement slide and reviewed the recommendation for the County to expand its education and enforcement efforts.

Robin Wiener: It is too limited to recycling, we need to have branded effort across the County for all of these programs (diversion and waste minimization), it has to be a much more expansive education program.

Peter Ettinger: Like to incentivize the school system or innovation hubs to fund alternatives for using traditional recycled materials, some haulers do this now, innovation education.

Robin Wiener: Engagement with schools, like what is happening in D.C.

Lauren Greenberger: Uneven acceptance rate, can we recommend a targeted campaign to go after community groups to get that?

Chaz Miller: The pilot program includes low participation rates and contaminated materials.

Willie Wainer: That is correct.

Chaz Miller: It is implicit.

The Task Force approved the Education and Enforcement recommendations as amended.

9. Chaz Miller then opened up the meeting for public comment.

Diana Younts: How to be a grassroots organizer to help you achieve these goals? How do I work as a grassroots organizer to help? I was very involved with HB 589 (for organics, which included a 30-mile radius for any facility willing to accept) getting passed and involved with the advisory group in Tacoma Park for recycling/organics. The introduction provided, so my background is better understood. I wanted to ask a question about identifying a site in Montgomery County for organics and if it needs assistance from the planning commission.

Chaz Miller: DEP is working on a site, and it is not prudent to find a site immediately.

Diana Younts: Why is it not prudent?

Chaz Miller: Mainly due to timing and cost. Provided his email for them to talk outside of this call.

Lauren Greenberger: I just received a text as a public comment, this isn't something we talked about, how to include multifamily and commercial sectors?

Chaz Miller: My response is I think it is implicit and explicit in the residential and commercial references and programs discussed.

Sara Bixby: Agreed.

Lauren Greenberger: We didn't talk about C&D waste. We should have a recommendation on that.

Chaz Miller: We should.

Sara Bixby: Thought we talked about it.

Chaz Miller: We talked about it, not specifically, in the March meeting.

Lauren Greenberger: DEP should be thinking about everything, not just what enters in the recycling numbers.

Chaz Miller: We have three options, come up with recommendations now, not provide any recommendation, or provide a recommendation in another meeting.

Sara Bixby: Prefer to do it in another meeting.

Additional subjects for discussion and recommendation are due by COB April 8.

The decision was made to provide comments for C&D recycling and have a meeting on 4/15.

The Task Force meeting was adjourned at around 7:45 pm with the intention to resolve the C&D recommendation and any other pending items in one last meeting.