Bethlehem Transfer Station Committee

Bethlehem, NH

Minutes of the Meeting

November 10, 2020

Note: Virtual via “Zoom”

Committee members participating: Nancy Strand (host), Barry Zitser, Andrea Bryant, Katherine Darges. Guests: Cheryl Jensen; Margaret Gale; Tim Wennrich, guest speaker.

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM.

Tim Wennrich of Meadowstone Farm in Bethlehem was the guest speaker. He spoke to the group about composting of food scraps and how he can provide collection and composting services. Currently, he picks up approximately 500 gallons a week from the Littleton Coop and Franconia Market. Also, there is a bin at the entrance to the farm for people to deposit their food scraps. He is limited in collection ability but can handle material that is delivered. The farm accepts anything except raw meat and liquids. They take scraps all year long.

The Meadowstone composting project has grown mostly by word-of-mouth, and Tim would like to expand it because of the necessity of keeping compostables out of landfills. Further, the resulting compost is important for soil enrichment.

Barry Zitser asked whether it would be helpful to Tim's operation if Casella's North Country Environmental Services (NCES) established a food-waste collection and diversion program." Tim would be happy to work with Casella if the company provides containers at schools and the transfer station, and transportation of food waste to Meadowstone.

Barry asked about whether Meadowstone provides containers. Tim said that they provide 60 gal. wheeled bins and can dump them twice a week. They do that year-round.

Nancy Strand inquired about whether Meadowstone will need a permit to compost. Tim will have to look into what may be required if he is receiving waste and if he is composting. He would like to avoid having to charge people to accept food waste. Nancy explained that when the Town goes to pay-as-you-throw, residents will want to reduce the number of bags for which they pay. Since about 20% of their refuse is kitchen garbage, it would be advantageous if they could put it into a can for composting.

Barry asked that, if it is appropriately “Town news”, if Tim would like us to put a notice in the Town newsletter telling folks that they can take their scraps to Meadowstone farm for composting now. Tim said that he would be happy to have something about his composting program in the newsletter and would write it if we would like for him to do so.

Nancy asked if Bethlehem residents will be able to use the compost. Tim said that Meadowstone sells 80-90% of the compost they make, and would consider giving it to the Town gardens, and other civic organizations.

Tim explained that the food waste may start out as non-organic, but when it gets to a certain temperature for a given number of days then everything breaks down, including herbicides and pesticides, making the final product *de facto* organic although he has not gone through the certification process to label it so.

Andrea Bryant told Tim that we didn’t know until very recently whether the Trudeau Road landfill was going to close in 2021. Because of that, the Transfer Station Committee (TSC) wanted to put together a comprehensive waste removal plan that would be viable in the short-term. Since the landfill will be open for approximately five more years, we can start an education program to help Bethlehem residents understand the importance of composting so they will be ready when they can no longer throw food scraps into their trash. Tim says that he has done farm tours to educate people on the way the farm works and about composting. This year, he can do a virtual tour if an in-person tour is not possible. He agrees with the TSC members that it will be a good idea to start to educate people now on the importance of diverting food waste from the landfill.

Cheryl Jensen noted that people who live in apartments in New York City save their scraps and take them to farmers’ markets in the city for recycling.

Barry explained that one of the conditions of approving Casella’s landfill expansion is that it must assist 10 large users, including five municipalities, in diversion programs for their landfills. [This became Section 27(e) in the permit approval]. Since Bethlehem is a host community and Casella picks up our solid waste and recycling at no charge, we might be able to benefit from this.

Barry thanked Andrea for arranging Tim to participate in our meeting and discuss what he can do to help Bethlehem.

Barry began the discussion regarding the NCES Stage 6 expansion. He reported to the Committee that he sent comments to the Department of Environmental Services (DES). The first was that DES should make its determination on the expansion permit as soon as possible because if the permit is denied, towns will have little time to make alternate arrangements for their trash services. The second comment was that, if the permit is granted, it should include language encouraging Casella to develop waste diversion programs and recycling for the towns that will be using the landfill.

When the expansion was granted, the DES permit included Section 27(e) as noted above. They are required to document their assistance to communities in their waste diversion programs. It is an order, not a favor, and must be done in good faith.

Barry noted that Bethlehem currently has trash removal and a recycling program but does not have a food waste diversion program. He went to the recent Conservation Commission meeting and discussed with them creating a committee to negotiate with Casella on creating a food waste disposal program. One of the members indicated that she liked the idea. He is requesting that the TSC go to the Select Board with a proposal on this.

The benefit of having a viable food waste diversion program in Bethlehem is that when Casella closes the landfill in a few years it could leave behind some equipment or facilities that Bethlehem could use in its ongoing program.

Andrea asked if Barry had submitted the proposal to the Bethlehem Select Board. Barry said that he has not done so. Andrea believes that the word “negotiate” is a legal document. She wonders if this should just be a “discussion” with Casella in trying to coordinate a plan. Barry replied that NCES may not agree to a favorable plan, or they may be agreeable to it, in which the TSC could take the plan to the Select Board who would have a public hearing. Barry thinks that NCES’ obligations should be clearly set forth in writing. DES wants documentation of them.

Margaret Gale agrees that draft resolution is well worded and supports her feeling on the situation along with the requirement as it is set down in the DES permit Section 27(e). We need to do the right thing, and that is to decrease the amount of waste that our citizens generate. The easiest thing is to start working on is food waste. We should not wait for some other entity to set up a program.

Andrea asked why it needs to have a public “hearing”? Barry answered that one of the things in our charter is that we need to have public input, and the Select Board needs to make a final decision. We can call it “public input” instead of a “hearing”. We could ask if the Selectmen would allow public input just could be during a regular meeting of the Select Board.

Nancy feels that we have an opportunity for a win-win situation. The Town can start working with Meadowstone and educating people on separating their food waste. If Casella comes through in choosing Bethlehem to be one of their food-diversion projects, then we will have additional resources. She noted, however, that some of the experience with NCES has not been positive.

Barry said that Casella should offer its services for food-diversion for no cost or low cost since they currently collect food scraps with regular trash and put them into the landfill.

Katherine Darges said that she feels that Bethlehem should be tough in its dealings with Casella because, in the past, Casella has found ways to do less than was expected.

Barry said that the DSC’s order requirements are such that if Casella does not work in good faith, they can be in violation and be dealt with very seriously by the regulators.

Tim Wennrich left the Zoom meeting at this point.

Cheryl informed TSC members that the Conservation Commission will meet on November 19. There was support from the Commission on food waste diversion.

Cheryl also said that she does not want to work with Casella on composting because of past experience with them. She is stating her opinion as a citizen. She would prefer to work with Meadowstone.

Barry replied that he understands Cheryl’s concerns and knows that there is a lot of distrust of Casella. He also knows of their technical capabilities if they want to use them, and now they have been ordered to do so. There is no guarantee, but we should try to work with them.

Nancy thinks that this is an opportunity to work with Casella and have them pick up our compostables and deliver them to Meadowstone.

Andrea fears that if we get Casella to do something positive regarding waste diversion, they may get publicity for the great program, when it really is at Bethlehem’s instigation. People may see Casella as a “hero”.

Barry does not believe that this is a likely problem There are a number of safeguards that keep Casella from taking credit. The DES has made waste diversion a regulatory order for the landfill. The Bethlehem Select Board can comment on and make decisions concerning composting. The Conservation Commission already thinks composting is a great idea. If the Select Board approves of doing so, they can appoint a committee including a TSC member and a Conservation Commission member to work with Casella on waste diversion plans. The Selectmen can provide a platform for citizens to comment on what Casella choses to do regarding waste diversion. The Select Board may say “no” to the resolution and that will be the end of it.

Linda Moore, member of the Bethlehem Board of Selectmen, said that she thought that the resolution was a great idea at the recent Conservation Committee meeting. If the Selectmen send a meeting request letter to Casella the company may refuse to meet with us; or, even if we do meet, we may or may not work out something with them.

Andrea would like the resolution to cover more than just composting materials. She says that the waste-diversion program should be helping towns for the future; and have capability for diverting non-trash items like broken small electrical appliances and other non-landfill-friendly trash.

Katherine said that we should talk to NCES about having sorted recycling instead of zero-sort.

Barry then read a revised copy of the proposed resolution to the TSC members.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Katherine also said that she would like to suggest that we have a compliance matrix to keep track of how Casella is performing on its requirements. Barry said that it was a good idea. It would be useful to be able to document how many tons of food waste were diverted to composting instead of going into landfills.

Andrea suggested adding some additional language to broaden the concept of what should be diverted from the landfill. Nancy suggested the phrase, “food waste and/or other landfill diversion projects".

Nancy thinks that food waste is a good place to start with landfill diversion to get the Town to think differently and do something good.

Casella has experience with composting at their Unity, ME site, where they make some very valuable products from what they compost there. There is no excuse Casella can use to say they cannot help with composting.

There was motion to approve sending the resolution to the Board of Selectmen. It was seconded and carried by a 3 to 1 vote.

Nancy and Andrea went to the “Be Smart” meeting regarding “The Impact of the Election” on November 14 at 11 AM. The organization was started over a year ago to get people from the North Country and other nearby states to think about zero waste and how we can start educating people. It is a hopeful organization trying to unify people.

Barry reported on the Northeastern Resource NRRA annual meeting, saying that it was very well attended. They offer a lot of services and are sort-of a broker of places to take various materials for recycling. They have a good board of directors and are very prudent.

The TSC members discussed adding a new member or two. Nancy suggested that we stress education more on the TSC. Katherine Darges suggested that we specifically should try to attract a former or current teacher for expertise in developing educational programs regarding recycling, composting, and other landfill-related programs.

Nancy suggested that we spin-off a “zero waste initiative” sub-committee.

Barry said that we should publicize our activities in the Bethlehem newsletter. We could have a separate page “Brought to you by the Transfer Station Committee.” Nancy has created a mock-up of a page called “Trash Talk”.

The minutes from the October 23, 2020 meeting were approved.

Nancy will send out a reminder for the December 15 meeting,

The meeting was adjourned at 8 PM.

1. *RESOLVED, that the Transfer Station Committee recommends that the Select Board consider taking advantage of Condition 27(e) of the Stage VI expansion decision of the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, which orders North Country Environmental Services, Inc. (NCES) to provide assistance to a number of New Hampshire communities in establishing and improving landfill diversion programs. If the Select Board favorably considers this recommendation, it is respectfully requested that the Board choose a committee, consisting of at least one member from the Conservation Commission and one member from the Transfer Station Committee, to meet with NCES to discuss the establishment of a food waste diversion program, and to notify NCES of this intent by certified letter. Any proposed food waste diversion program agreed upon with NCES will be subject to public input and approval by the Select Board.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)