HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Tuesday, October 22, 2024 | **11:00 AM** | **Sullivan Chamber**

The Health and Environment Committee will hold a public hearing to review and discuss the updates to the Zero Waste Master Plan (ZWMP).

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Burhan Azeem	☐	☑	☐	
Patricia Nolan	☑	☐	☐	
Sumbul Siddiqui	☐ Remote	☐	☐	
Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler	☐ Remote	☐	☐	
Ayesha M. Wilson	☐	☐	☑	11:04 AM

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council's Health and Environment Committee was held on Tuesday, October 22, 2024. The meeting was Called to Order at 11:00 a.m. by the Chair, Councillor Nolan. Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023 adopted by Massachusetts General Court and approved by the Governor, the City is authorized to use remote participation. This public meeting was hybrid, allowing participation in person, in the Sullivan Chamber, 2nd Floor, City Hall, 795 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA and by remote participation via Zoom.

At the request of the Chair, Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.
Councillor Azeem – Absent
Councillor Nolan – Present/In the Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Siddiqui – Present/Remote
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/Remote
Councillor Wilson – Absent*
Present – 3, Absent – 2. Quorum established.
*Councillor Wilson was present in the Sullivan Chamber at 11:04a.m.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan offered opening remarks, which were not verbatim, and were as follows:

I'm glad we're here today to talk about the update to the Zero Waste Master Plan (ZWMP 2.0). Waste reduction and recycling are essential parts of our environmental work, our public health work, our quality of life improvements, and many other important facets of our city.

Overall our annual trash has come down, yet we still generate an unsustainable amount. I want to note that the ZWMP focuses on residential waste, and as a city we must address and understand non-residential waste (commercial, institutional). We haven't tackled that systematically yet. For us to reduce our overall pollution, since much of trash is pollution, we must include non-residential in the future.

As a city we have done a lot - it is amazing that we have: 4 different curbside programs stop at my - and every - house to pick up trash, recycling, compost and yard waste. And I'm excited about the work already done and the potential of the Zero Waste Master Plan. As an environmental advocate, I know how multi-faceted we have to be in our approach to reducing waste, and the attendant GHG emissions, and greening our city. We need to think about the big steps and the small steps that we can take - tackling the difficult problems and the simpler ones at the same time.

Trash reduction is a large part of that - in the best case, our trash ends up in landfills and adds to carbon and methane emissions. In the worst case, our trash ends up in our streets, our parks, and in our waterways - clogging up drains, causing many problems - not to mention adding other public health ailments to our city.

This Zero Waste Master Plan update is essential to reducing our trash output, increasing our ratios of recycled and composted materials, and protecting the public health of our city. As we review our trash includes organics - compostable material - some recyclable materials - and a host of detritus destined for landfills.

One part of that has to be not just recycling, but ZERO WASTE as in not using in the first place, especially reducing single-use plastics. Alex will summarize several options for starting to eliminate some specific single-use plastics over time. Single-use plastics are made primarily through fossil fuels and are designed to be disposed of as trash after use. These plastics then spend the rest of their lifespan decaying in landfills - adding to waste and as they decay over decades and decades, and depending on their composition, often end up as microplastics or emitting PFAS into our ecosystem. The myth that plastics can be or are recycled is one that has prevented programs to reduce plastic use. And it is largely a myth - funded by plastic manufacturers and fossil fuel companies.

By eliminating as many single-use plastics as possible, we can better protect our environment and our public health. We have had some success with our plastic bag ordinance and our ban of polystyrene takeout containers, but we need to continue: we can follow the example of state action to eliminate the purchase of plastic bottles by the city, we can limit the use of plastic utensils, and we can limit the sale of miniature liquor bottles. All these have the potential to minimize trash, reduce litter, and improve public health. We know this issue is important - this discussion has been ongoing for years - the city and council have discussed banning single use plastic many times. Envision had a task force dedicated to coming up with short and long term waste reduction goals, which we should review as well. In 2019 a policy was put in place to reduce the purchase of bottled water by the city. In 2021 a report in response to the council asking for an ordinance to ban all single use plastic items suggested some steps to take - which have yet to be taken. Today we'll hear an update on that, and hopefully move forward with a plan to accelerate our work.

Through the ZWMP which focuses on more than single use plastics, we need to create accountability in order to continue to make progress on waste reduction.

With that, I'd like to introduce DPW Commissioner, Kathy Watkins and her team for their presentation.

After opening remarks, Chair Nolan noted that the Call of the meeting was to review and discuss the updates to the Zero Waste Master Plan (ZWMP). Present at the meeting from the Department of Public Works (DPW) was Kathy Watkins, Commissioner, John Nardone, Deputy Commission, John Fitzgerald, Environmental Service Manager, Michael Orr, Recycling Director, and Kristen Kelleher, Community Relations Manager. Present from the Recycling Advisory Committee was Deborah Galef and Diane Roseman. Present from the Resource Recycling System was Rachel Pearlman and Amy Perlmutter. Chair Nolan noted that her intern, Alex Bradley, was present via Zoom. Councillor Zusy and Mayor Simmons were also present.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Kathy Watkins who along with her team gave a presentation titled "Zero Waste Master Plan Update". The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. The presentation offered an overview of an update on the ZWMP 1.0, data and status of waste, and strategies for ZWMP 2.0.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Alex Bradley, Policy Intern for Running Climate who offered comments on single use plastic waste. Alex Bradley stressed the importance of creating changes starting at the local level, with policies that can make long-term impacts and improvements. Alex Bradley shared how critical it is to revisit policies towards plastic waste reduction efforts to continue to help the environment and be leaders in waste reduction efforts. In addition, Alex Bradley reviewed current ordinances in Cambridge relative to single plastic use and provided suggestions on ways to amend the language to help reduce waste even more. Chair Nolan provided comments that were in support of the comments and suggestions made by Alex Bradley, sharing that it will help build on the work and efforts that have already been accomplished.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Deborah Galef and Diane Roseman who provided an overview of the duties and responsibilities of the Recycling Advisory Committee members and shared what the goals are of the Committee. Deborah Galef and Diane Roseman pointed out the importance of focusing on large buildings in the city and how much trash would be reduced if there was more involvement with them. Deborah Galeg and Diane

Roseman also provided comments and suggestions towards food waste diversion and promoting more reduce and reuse of certain items. In addition to being present at

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Janet Domenitz, head of MASSPIRG, who provided comments and suggestions related to the presentation from DPW, noting the importance of promoting good policies and public education. Janet Domenitz had a clarifying question regarding one of the slides that shared information on the percentage of trash, pointing out that they believed 45% was a high number. Kathy Watkins and Michael Orr responded and provided additional information related to the slide, highlighting how 50% of trash in Cambridge is already diverted, making that the baseline. Michael Orr shared how percentages can get complicated because of the different components that factor in.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan opened Public Comment.

Amy Waltz, 12 Blakeslee Street, Cambridge, MA, thanked everyone for their efforts and provided suggestions on ways to increase waste reduction.

Judith Nathans offered comments and suggestions on waste reduction.

Quinton Zondervan shared support for the proposed recommendations and encouraged the work to be done with more urgency.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who asked if there was any information available on Cambridge potentially having a pay as you throw program put in place. Kathy Watkins responded by providing an overview of the proposed recommendations and effectiveness of different diversion programs. Rachel Perlman provided additional information on hybrid pay as you throw program. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler asked if there has been any conversation about increasing options for small appliance disposal. Michael Orr explained the current schedule for small appliances. Rachel Perlman, Amy Perlmutter, and Deborah Galef offered suggestions on ways to help residents with small appliance disposal, with one suggestion being a mobile unit that goes around the city to different neighborhoods on certain days to collect appliances, which would make it much more accessible for residents.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Siddiqui who shared that she agrees with much lthat has already been said and fully supports changes to the ordinance language around zero use products. Councillor Siddiqui added that she loved the idea of having a mobile unit available to residents or having a second location available to residents to be more accessible. Councillor Siddiqui shared the importance of partnering with housing developers in regards to mattress recycling and ensuring that it is equitable to all residents. Councillor Siddiqui asked if data was collected at the textile event that happens in Cambridgeport. Michael Orr shared data is collected, and Councillor Zusy highlighted that it is an amazing community event and would be in favor of all neighborhoods of the City to have something similar, pointing out how much textiles are resold or recycled. Kathy Watkins agreed, but also pointed out that it is important to understand and recognize which events make sense to be run by neighborhood organizations versus the City. Rachel Pearlman and Amy Perlmutter also pointed out that in their draft plan, which was not mentioned today, was discussing a strategy on better tracking reuse and how it can be measured and improved.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Wilson who shared she appreciated the presenters and thanked them for their work. Councillor Wilson asked if more information could be provided on the process of composting and rodent activity in Cambridge. Kathy Watkinds responded and shared additional information regarding composting, composting schedule, and bins used to help prevent rodent activity. Councillor Wilson asked if the City could speak more to trash pick up as it relates to larger buildings and what is being done to understand the trash, recycling, and compost being removed in those buildings better. Kathy Watkins shared that because the City does not pick up trash at the larger buildings, gathering data can be challenging, and noted that there have been discussions on strategies on how to move forward with that type of data collection. Rachel Pearlman shared that getting that information voluntarily could be hard and pointed out that there is the possibility for the City to mandate it within its ordinance language. Councillor Wilson asked for more information regarding plastic versus glass in terms of recycling. Rachel Pearlman, Kathy Watkins, and Janet Domenitz responded, noting that there is a lot of misinformation about plastic recycling. Councillor Wilson

asked what type of education is being done in the community. The team from DPW provided the different services that offered to both young people and adults.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Zusy who thanked everyone for their work. Councillor Zusy asked if people can opt out of using the city trash and recycling services and why some people may not be a part of the system. John Fitzgerald responded by sharing that there is a certain criteria that needs to be met, and the City will provide services to any building as long as they meet the requirements. John Fitzgerald pointed out that usually with larger developments it is more of a challenge to meet the criteria to use City services. Councillor Zusy spoke in favor of larger retail stores being able to provide bulk products. Councillor Nolan pointed out that there is a national campaign where people are urging larger retail chains to reduce packaging. Councillor Zusy offered suggestions on ways to encourage residents to reuse and recycle more.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan spoke in favor of the proposed recommendations and believes the City is on the right track. Councillor Nolan indicated it would be important for this Committee to reconvene in the future to review and discuss the final recommendations before they go to the full City Council. Councillor Nolan asked for more information on single use plastics in restaurants, which is something that was discussed previously in recommendations presented in 2021. Kathy Watkins responded by noting that one of the challenges could be the impact on businesses trying to balance single usage, sharing that during COVID, many businesses went reusable use materials to single use disposable to be safe, and shared that every business is different, operationally. Kathy Watkins stressed how important it is to minimize impacts on businesses. Michael Orr provided additional information to support Kathy Watkins and pointed out that it is important to be mindful of all the environmental attributes as well. Councillor Nolan highlighted that it would be important for the City to work with businesses and collect data across the city to understand how it can provide support to move towards eliminating single use. Councillor Nolan asked if the City has audited City trash and what the contamination rate is in the recycling. Michael Orr shared that public waste has not been audited and agreed that there is a lot of contamination. Michael Orr stressed the importance of trying to implement the same rules across the city, for commercial, residential, and public use, so everyone can have a better understanding of the recycling system in Cambridge. Councillor Nolan offered closing remarks and suggestions on ways to continue to move forward to support residents and businesses.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Wilson who made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.
Councillor Azeem – Absent
Councillor Nolan – Yes
Councillor Siddiqui – Yes
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Wilson – Yes
Yes – 4, No – 0, Absent – 1. Motion passed.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 1:07p.m.

Clerk's Note: The City of Cambridge/22 City View records every City Council meeting and every City Council Committee meeting. This is a permanent record. The video for this meeting can be viewed at:
Attachment A – Communication from the Cambridge Recycling Advisory Committee.
Attachment B – Communications from the public.

https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/867?view_id=1&redirect=true

Dear Commissioner Kathy Watkins and Councilor Nolan,

The Recycling Advisory Committee (RAC) consists of approximately 18 members, and has been an active committee for over 30 years. We are Cambridge residents, university representatives, and industry experts who are passionate about moving Cambridge forward in the areas of waste reduction and more effective and accessible recycling through community engagement. We regularly speak to residents about composting (as well as other waste reduction efforts), encourage reuse through a Circular Business list, and have recently piloted move-out waste reduction via the Free Store at the Cambridge Community Center.

We have thoroughly discussed and debated which efforts would best position Cambridge to meet its goals and continue be a leader not only in the surrounding area, but nationwide. We urge the City of Cambridge to pursue the following initiatives:

1. Food waste is the #1 item in Cambridge's trash. The City should mandate the diversion of food waste by Fall 2025. Specifically focus on Cambridge's large buildings, as many are not participating in the compost program. Work closely with landlords, property managers, trustees, and tenants to maximize food waste diversion.
2. Create outlets to reduce move-out waste generated by the high turnover of students and renters, particularly during peak season (May - September).
3. Improve access to the Recycle Center, including location within the City, physical space, and extended hours. Create more options for residents to divert materials from the trash (e.g. satellite locations, mobile Recycle Center for residents without cars, etc.).
4. Require foodservice businesses to reduce single-use packaging (e.g. take out containers, utensils, condiment packaging, etc.).
5. Expand city outreach to the entirety of the Cambridge commercial sector (all business sectors) to improve waste reduction efforts.
6. Ensure any waste reduction efforts are accessible and inclusive for all community members. In setting waste reduction policies, consider how they might impact particular communities.

In order to meet the City's goal of reducing trash 50% by 2030 and to take meaningful steps to reduce our climate impact, it's imperative that the City take aggressive action to implement these initiatives.

Sincerely,

Cambridge Recycling Advisory Committee Members

Erwin, Nicole Attachment B

From: Amy Waltz <amyswaltz@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 22, 2024 10:39 AM
To: City Clerk; City Council; City Manager
Subject: ZWMP Updating our timeline goals is essential to success! Trash reduction can be achieved in months; not decades too late!

Dear City Council & Health & Environment Committee,

We must speed up our waste reduction goal time frame to meet climate objectives.

Trash reduction goals & progress is impeded by the inappropriate use of data averages.

On average, Cambridge residents produce 16 lbs of trash / week. Considering this number, you may think we should reduce trash by several lbs./year in a basically linear fashion - but this is wildly misleading for several reasons!

Trash observations, and resident's experiences, reveal that households that are composting food scraps have far less trash than those who are not! The 2022 Cambridge trash study indicates our current trash is made up of 29% food waste, 13% recycling, and 13% of other easily divertable items.* A total of 55% of our trash is headed to landfills & incinerators, rather than being diverted into existing waste reduction programs! Over-stuffed trash carts typically contain a mix of trash, food scraps & recycling. Households that are composting food scraps will often have somewhere between 1/2 & 1/16th of the waste of those who are not yet composting. One resident who reported greatly reduced trash after composting said her housemate did even better, adding only a teacup of trash / week to their trash bin. This is more common than you might think.

The reduction in trash weight is even more impressive than the volume among those who compost food scraps; as most remaining trash is nonrecyclable empty cartons, styrofoam, & plastics which adds crushable volume, as opposed to weight (pet waste is likely the most common exception).

Additionally, trash carts containing food scraps often have rodent holes. It is extremely rare to see curbside compost bins with holes.

Let's look at a common real life scenario.

One household with two adults who recycled and used yard waste, typically produced one & a half to two brown paper grocery bags of waste per week.
When they started using the city's curbside composting, everything smelly, and messy was diverted to the kitchen compost bin, leaving the trash clean & odor free.
It became easy to remove items from a clean trash bin for recycling and repurposing, which together with composting eliminated nearly anything weighty from their trash.
This household now typically places one partially full grocery bag of trash curbside per **Month** (weighing 2-4 lbs.) The weight reduction of the trash is even more dramatic than the reduction in volume, as in this instance all meals were eaten at home producing around 50 pounds of food waste / Month (including a large portion of coffee grounds).

Every household will be different. But the dramatic reduction of trash weight, odors, and contamination are pretty standard; resulting in fewer rodents, lower costs in exporting our trash as far as Georgia, more sanitary practices, and incalculable environmental & climate benefits!

The results of composting are that not only the heaviest food items are diverted from landfills; but many other items will also be diverted, and trash starts to rapidly disappear. This has been described over, & over, & over again as almost everyone's experience. Additionally, it is far easier to see which items are left in the trash, and to devise better waste reduction, reuse, & recycling systems both in the home & city-wide. When trash is clean, it just requires one member of a household to make sure things are disposed of correctly.

The 4 million dollar question; & Inestimable climate environmental impacts:

It is exciting that the city is considering restricting food waste from trash! The sooner we make this long awaited waste improvement, the greater its impacts. Because we rarely consider upstream & downstream effects on our climate and environment, trash disposal may seem like a small budgetary issue in such a wealthy city. It may offer a budgetary savings of 4 million to make the change of restricting food scraps from trash within a year, rather than 4 years from now. In terms of helping to move our city, the region, & nation closer to climate goals, the related reductions in climate warming methane, crucial in preserving a livable environment for humans and the host of interrelated species we rely on, (within one year, as opposed to 4 years), could be transformative!

Can Cambridge waste programs help meet the IPCC recommendations for rapid reductions in methane to avoid the worst climate outcomes?

Cambridge's amazing recycling staff, headed by Mike Orr (with the help of RAC volunteers, City Council, climate committees, community organizations, and concerned citizens), have **uniquely positioned Cambridge to make dramatic reductions in food waste & trash**. We now have the potential to lead in the exponential reduction of waste required to help meet IPCC & our city's climate goals. Our ZWMP can help bring this into being if we are courageous enough to aim for a climate rescue path rather than accepting escalating methane plumes in landfills which are largely from our food waste. **Outdated goals will not suffice**, as they do not encourage the systemic changes in our city operations which will help residents to change their habits and produce less trash. City resources and personnel must shift from trash collection, to trash reduction, recycling, and repurposing. We need our excellent curbside collection workers to help in this process, and they should have assurance that this transition includes greater benefits for them. While compost needs to be collected weekly, our reduced clean trash typically can be collected less frequently - with special collection for large apartments. This could allow for more specific repurposing efforts such as collecting used furniture, household items, scrap metal, electronics...on alternate weeks where our clean trash does not need to be collected.

Adjusting ZWMP goals to meet our climate obligations, and guide our planning.

This ZWMP goals are only a 50% decrease of trash from the benchmark from 2018. We have already reduced trash by 34%, so this is only a 16% further reduction in 6 years time!
We are considering implementing policies that will restrict food scraps from trash. Since food is 29% of our current waste - it is easy to see how inadequate this goal is. Further consider that 13% of our current trash is curbside recycling items which are supposed to be illegal to dump in refuse already, and an additional 13% is made of items which also have programs for waste diversion. **If a full 55% of our current trash is either illegal to dump or has easy diversion options, how can we only be aiming for a 16% trash reduction over 6 years?**

Additionally, when you consider that Cambridge has already reduced or diverted 34% of our trash from the benchmark year, our city zero waste goals should actually magnify these results! If we further reduce our current trash by 55%, that reflects as about a 70% reduction (not a 50% reduction) from our benchmark in 2018!

A huge added climate bonus of Diverting food waste; is Reducing food waste:
Most of us eat two to five times a day. It adds up to a Lot of food. We also end up producing a huge amount of food waste - typically around 30% in our homes! Our kitchen compost bin provides an opportunity to observe what is discarded, and adjust our habits. Many people discover that far more food was wasted than they thought. Personal food waste has shrunk from several compost bags to often less than a compost bag a week for 2 people. Because Agriculture is the highest anthropogenic source of methane (higher than fossil fuel); reducing food waste is reportedly among the best ways to reduce this methane source; and a close second is eating a plant based diet.** Fully implementing the curbside compost program offers an opportunity for everyone to consider their food waste, and adjust habits for the planet, with significant grocery savings as well!

These are simple changes with huge impacts!
Considering that we are already warming our vast oceans at unprecedented rates verging on climate tipping points, it is imperative that we drastically reduce methane sources which includes eliminating organic waste from our trash, and reducing and repurposing waste.

Thank you for your work on this important matter for our community and humanity!
Amy Waltz
12 Blakeslee St.
Cambridge

Erwin, Nicole

From: Amy Waltz <amyswaltz@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 22, 2024 9:48 AM
To: City Clerk; City Council; City Manager
Subject: RE ZWMP Goals: We will Waste Decades of Time if Cambridge Zero Waste Goals are inadequate!

Dear City Council & Health & Environment Committee,
Cambridge's current waste reduction goal time-frame does not meet our climate obligations, or even keep up with MA state goals.

This is deeply concerning!
Our world is rapidly heating up & food waste is a large contributor of methane (80 times more potent greenhouse gas than CO2). Plastics are piling up, precious resources are simply being thrown in landfills or incinerators. The environmental & climate effects are devastating. Rapid change is needed to ensure the survival of many species!

Cambridge has a unique ability & responsibility to help lead the region forward. We already have the majority of the infrastructure needed to meet 70-90% waste reduction goals from 2018 baseline - we just need to inspire our overwhelmingly cooperative citizens!
At the household level, this waste reduction is surprisingly easy to achieve within weeks or months of beginning composting, it does not decades!

When our goals are not aligned with what is needed or what is possible - they are actually a disincentive to change! It is a permission structure to keep on throwing out trash; and it prevents appropriate resources & personnel from shifting from trash collection to recycling and repurposing efforts.

Simply mandating no food scraps in the trash. And encouraging everyone to choose a household goal of less than 2 lbs/trash/person/week could get rapid results. Many people have already surpassed this goal, while many others simply do not know how easily this is achieved. There will also be some who find this a challenge due to the makeup of their trash (perhaps pet waste, diapers, a unique home business...); they can help move the city forward in addressing additional challenges.

Our Zero Waste Master Plan will only be successful if it helps us meet the rapid reduction of waste required by climate and the environment for the survival of species! We need to ban food waste as soon as possible (within a year). This should be accompanied by aiming for a **Minimum City goal of 70%-90% reduction** from 2018 baseline. We have already reduced city trash by 34%. The trash reduction potential accompanying eliminating food waste from trash is masked by relying on data that uses averages! It is clear at the household level, that reduction to 2 lbs/week/person has often already been surpassed.

70-90% waste reduction in 2 years is an attainable goal that will help inspire the change we need for our climate. We can reach Zero Waste goals of 80%-95% waste reduction within 5 years if we are courageous enough to try! These are attainable goals that will help inspire change that addresses our growing methane problem.

Please be courageous in aiming for meaningful waste reduction goals. We need city suport to reach our climate goals. Many species' survival relies on our success in drastically reducing methane & other greenhouse gases gasses.

Sincerely,
Amy Waltz
12 Blakeslee St.
Cambridge