



SUSTAINABLE WEST HARTFORD COMMISSION

November 27, 2023

6:30 PM, Room 407, Town Hall

MEETING MINTUES

1. Call to Order, Attendance 6:30 PM

- Jim Fishman Y
- Kimberly Hughes Y
- Aditee Madkekar Y
- Christy Matthews Y
- Ted Newton Y
- Alejandro Paiuk Y
- Bernard Pelletier Y
- Stephen Sack Y
- David Sagers Y
- Rachael Virgin N
- Patricia Wilson Y
- Town Staff: Catherine Diviney, Katherine Bruns
- Public: Erik Granstrand, Lucianna Granstrand, Johnathen Humphrys, Mike Cocca, Alex Williams (Blue Earth), Rick Bush

2. Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes – **Approved (10-0).**

3. Waste Working Group Report & Recommendation Vote – *Bernie read through the letter that would be sent to Town Council with recommendation to pursue unit-based pricing and co-collection of food scraps. Letter requests getting a presentation by Waste Zero and discussion about waste on the Dec 12 Town Council agenda. There was discussion about timeline and minor edits to the letter. Timeline would be to go to Public Works Facilities and Sustainability (PWF&S) Standing Committee first. The Committee meeting is on schedule for Dec 5. **Motion by Bernie for Commission to approve the recommendation letter (subject to grammatical edits and slightly more direct wording to request being added to Dec 12 Town Council agenda.)** Vote: Yes (11, Rachael Virgin in absentia); No (0). Letter and email attached.*

4. Public Comment – *deferred.*

5. Agenda for Next Meeting – *Next Commission meeting M Dec 18. Also, Tu Dec 5 (PWF&S Committee) and Tu Dec 12 (Town Council).*

6. Adjournment – *7:00 PM, for CRCOG Climate Pollution Reduction Grant multi-town meeting in Rm 400.*

Anyone requiring auxiliary aid or service for effective communication or modification of policies or procedures to participate in a meeting, service, program or activity of the Town of West Hartford, should contact Suzanne Oslander, ADA Coordinator, at suzanneo@westhartfordct.gov or (860) 561-7580, as soon as possible, preferably seven days beforehand.

Catherine Diviney

From: Bernard Pelletier
Sent: Wednesday, November 29, 2023 2:38 PM
To: Carol Blanks; Barry Walters; Mark Zydanowicz; John Phillips; Katherine Bruns; Catherine Diviney; Rick Ledwith; Todd Dumais; Leon Davidoff
Cc: Bernard Pelletier; Rachael Virgin; James Fishman; Nathaniel Goldschmidt; Greta; Kimberly Hughes; Aditee Madkekar; Christy Matthews; Ted Newton; Alejandro Paiuk; Bernard Pelletier; Stephen Sack; David Sagers; Pat Wilson; Rick Bush; Vanessa Borkowski; Lori Davison; Erik Granstrand; Johnathan Humphrey; Chris Nelson
Subject: Agenda item for Town Council December 12th meeting
Attachments: Letter to Town Council.docx

Dear Town Manager, Director Phillips, and Public Works, Facilities, and Sustainability Committee,

Attached to this email is a letter addressed to the Town Council. This document was authored by the Waste Working Group (WWG) which is one of several working groups reporting into the newly formed Sustainable West Hartford Commission. This letter was reviewed by and unanimously approved by the Sustainable West Hartford Commission.

The WWG has reviewed the results of the DEEP pilot project in West Hartford, reviewed options for continuing and expanding this work across West Hartford, and wants to share this work with the Town Council. This review has been conducted with DEEP staff, Waste Zero (DEEP's consultant), and town staff. Timing is important because DEEP bridge funding is contingent on Town Council commitment and because the town does not want to lose the momentum it has built during the pilot.

The letter "respectfully request(s) that the Town Council add the Sustainable West Hartford Commission's Waste Working Group and Waste Zero to its December 12th, 2023 Town Council meeting".

Can the PWF&S committee please review this letter and pass it on to the town council? All of us stand by to answer questions from the PWF&S committee. In addition we welcome preparatory questions from town staff and the Town Council in advance of the December 12th meeting.

Rachael Virgin
Bernie Pelletier

Waste Working Group:
Katherine Bruns
Vanessa Borkowski
Rick Bush
Lori Davidson
Erik Granstrand
Luciana Granstrand
Kimberly Hughes
Jonathan Humphrey
Chris Nelson
Ted Newton

Sustainable West Hartford Commission
James Fishman

Kimberly Hughes
Aditee Madkekar
Christy Mathews
Ted Newton
Alejandro Paiuk
Stephen Sack
David Sagers
Pat Wilson

November 26, 2023

Dear Mayor and Honorable Members of the Town Council,

West Hartford is facing a growing waste crisis. Options for MSW (municipal solid waste) disposal are narrowing and dramatically increasing in price. For the last seven years, the Town has diligently worked to address this crisis within the existing system, but at this point a paradigm shift is essential in how residential waste services are provided. The Town's new Sustainable West Hartford Commission has formed a Waste Working Group and we are writing to lay the framework for this discussion and to explore new options for handling residential waste. For now, we will focus on residential properties with three or fewer dwelling units, which comprises 83% of housing units in our town.

There is increasing public recognition of the problem, and towns across Connecticut are taking action. DEEP has piloted waste-reduction grant programs in 18 towns, including West Hartford. West Hartford has declared a Climate Crisis Resolution with an obligation to consider impacts to sustainability in every policy decision. The Town is also working within the Sustainable CT program to improve areas of concern. Pursuant to these efforts, the Waste Working Group has assessed our town's waste situation using three lenses:

- Impact on the economy
- Impact on the environment
- Impact on equity (both in our town, and where the waste is ultimately disposed of)

West Hartford's status quo fails on all three criteria. We face a 20% increase in tipping fees in July of 2024, with projections for substantial increases in the future. Our 32% recycling rate (percentage of potentially recyclable material) is below the State's 2024 target of 60%. Our failure to divert food waste adds disproportionate weight and methane emissions to our MSW. And finally, as Connecticut's MSW is increasingly shipped out of state, it shifts the burden of our waste to others in Georgia, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. The status quo is expensive, bad for the environment, and inequitable. The Waste Working Group has studied various available options and recommends that West Hartford explore "Unit-Based Pricing" (UBP) and "Co-Collection" of food scraps in an effort to mitigate these problems.

Unit-based pricing is accomplished by residents using specific types of trash bags that can be priced at a point that pays for the collection, sorting, and disposal of waste. This helps residents become more aware of their own trash volume by "metering" trash the same way that water, electricity, natural gas, and other utilities are paid for on an individual basis. The consumer only pays for the amount of "service" used, making this a more equitable approach. This simple step has been shown to dramatically lower trash volume everywhere it has been implemented.

With co-collection, food scraps would also go in a specific type of bag, and both trash and food scrap bags would be tossed together into the usual trash barrels provided by the Town. Co-collection is not only the easiest approach from a user standpoint, but DEEP and its consultant Waste Zero have modelled that trash managed in this manner would likely cause a food-scrap diversion rate of 24%, a recycling increase of 50%, and an overall MSW volume reduction of more than 50%. This model has the potential to reduce current and projected cost increases.

Within the UBP/ food waste co-collection paradigm, there are multiple ways to fine-tune how the trash bags are priced and distributed and to address the unique needs of various groups. For example, the Town could heavily subsidize the cost of the bags to some or all residents, either for a period of time or permanently, making it perhaps an easier model to adopt. This would still achieve large increases in recycling and food scrap diversion, and reductions in total waste volume, but with much more modest cost savings to the Town.

We recognize that in 2017 West Hartford worked on a similar program that was not ultimately implemented. We think this time can be different for the following reasons:

- The waste crisis in the State has increased dramatically and thus, whereas in 2017, we were forecasting financial problems – we are now experiencing financial pain.
- Other towns in Connecticut are taking action, and we can join with them in leading beneficial change. Middletown, for example, just transitioned to UBP earlier this month.
- Quantum Biopower, an anaerobic digester facility in Southington, is currently evaluating ways in which it might increase its receipt and processing of food scraps.
- The Town's recycling facility on Brixton Street has plans for further expansion of hard-to-recycle materials, including construction debris.
- The State and DEEP are considering developing new processing and collection options (e.g., co-collection) that didn't exist in 2017.
- The Town can now collaborate with the new Sustainable West Hartford Commission and its Waste Working Group on this issue specifically, especially around public outreach.

West Hartford should work to make this program both equitable and acceptable to residents, and we believe the UBP + food scrap co-collection model offers the flexibility to do that. We understand that significant work remains to plan and facilitate this complex change to MSW disposal. We respectfully request that the Town Council add the Sustainable West Hartford Commission's Waste Working Group and Waste Zero to its December 12th, 2023 Town Council meeting. We would appreciate the opportunity to highlight the benefits of the information within this letter and give Waste Zero the opportunity to explain the options they have helped implement in over 100 communities across the country

The Sustainable West Hartford Commission and the Waste Working Group commit to working with the Town to tailor its waste-reduction program to its residents' needs, as well as to offer outreach and education to help facilitate this process. Implementation should be the product of a thoughtful back-and-forth between residents, this Commission, and Town government in the coming months.

In the meantime, we welcome your comments and questions.

Yours Sincerely,

Rachael Virgin
Chair, Waste Working Group

Bernard Pelletier
Chair, Sustainable West Hartford Commission

Cc: Waste Working Group:
Katherine Bruns
Vanessa Borkowski
Rick Bush
Lori Davidson
Erik Granstrand
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Stephen Sack
David Sagers
Pat Wilson

Rick Ledwith, Town Manager
Todd Dumais, Town Planner
Leon Davidoff, Town Clerk
John Phillips, Director of Public Works
Catherine Diviney, Town Energy Specialist