

City of Boulder Zero Waste Requirements Working Group

Meeting #1

11/17/14

Agenda:

- 1) Introductions:** All
- 2) Existing waste systems in Boulder and national best practices:** Kara Mertz, City of Boulder and Kate Bailey, Eco-Cycle
- 3) Videos of zero waste business champions**
- 4) Existing zero waste service offerings:** Pam Milmoe, Boulder County Public Health
- 5) DISCUSSION: existing ZW services that are most valuable to Boulder businesses**
- 6) DISCUSSION: new zero waste services that could be offered by the city or its partners**

Kara Mertz gave a brief introduction re: existing Waste System in Boulder:

Boulder doesn't have municipally controlled trash or recycling; rather, it is a regulated, free market system with partnerships to work with businesses and haulers to help move forward toward zero waste. For residential waste generation, the City enacted an ordinance in 2001 that requires any hauler picking up residential trash in the city must also provide recycling and compost to single family homes, and recycling only to multi-family complexes. As part of the update to the Zero Waste Strategic Plan, we are finding there is a range of anywhere from 40-90% of businesses in Boulder that subscribe to recycle service, but 50-68% of what is still in trash is recyclable. Part of the problem is that some businesses don't subscribe, but part is that those that do subscribe are potentially not sorting correctly, employees don't know, customers don't know, etc. City Council has asked staff to develop options for requiring recycling for businesses in Boulder and composting at food-generating businesses like supermarkets and restaurants. The purpose of this working group is to give staff input into these options that will be recommended to Council in January or February. Council has also asked, as part of this requirement, to require composting at multi-family unit (MFU) complexes. Since MFUs are treated the same as commercial businesses from a hauler's perspective, it might make sense to have similar rules apply to MFUs as commercial businesses. They also have some similar barriers including space constraints and shared service so any requirement should take these into consideration.

Kate Bailey gave a presentation on best practices from around the country.

Based on research conducted by Eco-Cycle, looking at 8 cities around the country that are performing extremely well – businesses and community diverting over 60%. What makes the policies successful? What's required?

- 25% of the US population lives in a place where recycling is required.
- Ordinances typically begin with education & assistance for the businesses; then moves to financial incentives; and most get to the point where Boulder is now, where the recycling rates have stagnated and progress is stalled.
- Everyone and every sector in the community are involved.
- There are some opt-out exemptions, for financial hardship, space constraints, no recyclables produced, or desire to self-haul.
- Strong focus on education, particularly at the start of a program to get businesses on board.

- No “one size fits all” for different communities, sometimes partnerships with universities, haulers, non profits, city staff, in-house green teams – best approach is a combination, but in all cities the education element is key.
- With respect to enforcement, while it is important for businesses to know there is a process in which they can get a fine for a violation, we heard very loud and clear that most communities are not actually using the enforcement –
 - Seattle has had business recycling for 7 years, has never issued a fine. Instead talk to businesses, work with them, business just need a little help to get on the right track.
 - In Mecklenburg County NC, over 1000 inspections have been conducted with only a few violation letters, and no eventual fines. Everyone corrected the violation with a little extra technical assistance.
 - There is not a lot of digging into trash, policies are really looking at obvious contamination – focusing on large amounts of cardboard sticking out of a dumpster or no recycling bins around; by no way policing every little thing.
 - Cities take different approaches to initial inspections, sometimes walking in street, sometimes asking the haulers to report – it’s pretty easy to see who does or does not have bins.
 - Haulers may not want to be part of the reporting or turn over a list. So what you’re saying is important because there are two steps – do they have bins, and are they being used enough and properly.
- Jumping to compostables, we found similar policy elements. Compost is definitely new and upcoming, not as long of a history, but many cities are requiring it.
 - VT requires all businesses to compost by 2020
 - Some cities are requiring all large food generators to compost.
 - Similar to recycling, communities are looking at people both having bins and actually using them.
 - There are also opt-out exemptions.
- Boulder County throws away 170,000 pounds of food per day – any way we can get a business in a position where they don’t even need compost because they don’t throw away food, that is our goal. Again, number one is education as this is a pretty new program.
 - A program from Eugene, Oregon called “love food not waste” has great materials for free distribution.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

- Single family, owner-occupied homes are not required to subscribe to trash service but rental properties are. There is a significant number of homes in Boulder that don’t subscribe, and that is an issue because as we require containers at businesses we don’t want increase in illegal dump and contamination.
- Sometimes property owners provide service but tenants don’t even know it’s there.
- Density in downtown and shopping areas is an issue
- Businesses are busy, and need someone to help walk them through the process. It works in cities like SF that are very space constrained, or Aspen that is not on single stream and has a 4 cart system. But they make it work and that’s where the first contact with businesses are about getting creative, problem solving, figuring out what your obstacles are and figure out what we need to do to overcome those.

Pam Milmoe gave a presentation on existing services from Business Partners for a Clean Environment (PACE)

- PACE provides expert advisors for a “one stop shop” for energy, zero waste, water quality and transportation. We design and administer incentives, provide outreach, education, and recognition.
- For Zero waste often new bin signs make a big difference, The City has free downloadable signs and we can also make free customized signs for a business
- Background on PACE going back to 1994
- Since 2012, we ramped up services with EnergySmart; worked with 3200 of about 6500 businesses throughout Boulder County; issued \$2.5 mil in business rebates. We identified ZW opportunities at 970 businesses, working with 630.
- We also now have a bin incentive, contracting with a single provider Bush Systems, were able to negotiate bulk pricing for those bins to provide bins and up to \$250 incentive that the city is providing.
- On average, about 90% of businesses we work with increase diversion rate by 14% - not a huge number but are making progress and increasing tools to track that.
 - 11% achieve a 70% diversion rate, including 32 businesses certified in the last three years.
- From the zero waste advisors’ perspective, what’s working?
 - “One stop shop” is really paying off, a great way to build relationships,
 - The custom signs help reduce contamination and frustration,
 - New bin incentive is taking hold,
 - Bin placement is a big thing - to actually go through where bins need to be, etc, employee training is huge, purchasing plans that are less wasteful, supply chain inclusion, hard to recycle materials.

DISCUSSION ABOUT NEEDED AND VALUED SERVICES

The discussion revolved around what issues exist and the services that businesses need to help get started, with a recycling/composting program. Given that we have not yet narrowed down what that ordinance would look like; who it would apply to; and what the phase-in period would be after the ordinance is passed.

ISSUES

- Internal space
- Triple-sort bins are expensive
 - More than \$250/bin subsidy is often needed
 - May want a sliding scale
- Parking space trade-offs for outside bins
- Other land-use requirements like those governing dumpster enclosures
- Needs to be exemptions for those that either compost themselves or at a farm; as well as businesses that want to drop off their own recyclables
- Think through regulations and mitigations for any new trucks/noise/impacts
- Incentives focused on smaller businesses
 - If possible, the pricing structure for trash vs. recycling/composting should reflect the city’s goals
- Wildlife issues/rodents/insects

- Maybe there should be considerations for businesses west of Broadway who have been impacted by the bear resistant cart ordinance
- The City needs more information about the waste streams coming out of various businesses (e.g., supermarkets, retail, edible food, etc.)
- Purchasing policies affect the amount of waste in the first place
- There should be exemptions for hard-to-recycle materials
- Property Managers vs. Tenants
 - Who is responsible?
 - Who is warned/educated/fined?
- Everyone needs to subscribe to and pay for trash because of illegal dumping
- Multi-family complexes should be divided into condos and rental properties. Condos should be regulated first
- Shared service between businesses or curbside service for home-based businesses needs to be OK

DESIRED SERVICES

- The number one concern is education
 - Need it in English and Spanish
 - Have new people come in often who don't understand what we are doing – it needs to be taught systemically as to why we are doing what we are doing.
 - Materials provided by the city should include the “why” of what we are doing, and what happens to the materials (recyclables and compostables) after they are picked up
 - Also, a little bit about why to use the finished compost or to buy recycled content
- Training provided by the City should be periodic; need to also identify a champion in-house to carry it on between periodic trainings esp. for new employees
- Maybe the city could create a 4-5 minute video that's catchy to provide to businesses
- It needs to start from the top – it won't happen from an interested employee, has to start at top and work its way down. Make it a part of the company.
- But ultimately, it needs to come from both sides
- Materials should focus on the practical advantages of establishing recycling/composting; not be preachy (talking about how things “should be done”)
- Need to continue with some sort of advising service/consulting for businesses; help to market or promote green practices