

BRATTLEBORO SOLID WASTE COMMITTEE

Town Offices 230 Main St.

Brattleboro, VT 05301

March 5, 2010

Dear Town Meeting Member:

During the development process for next year's budget, the Selectboard, the Solid Waste Committee, and town administrators decided that implementing a utility type system for trash (pay for what you throw out) would help to keep the budget in balance. Those who were Town Meeting members last year will remember that such a system was proposed, but was not implemented due to Town Meeting's vote to place over \$300,000 back into the budget.

After last year's decision, The Solid Waste Committee distributed two types of surveys about the Pay-as-you-Throw system (PAYT) to Town Meeting (TM) members, one by mail and one at a meeting. One of the surveys was "multiple choice," allowing the responses to be easily tabulated. In that questionnaire, TM members were asked whether they supported the basic idea of PAYT and whether they thought the positive impact of PAYT on the environment was important. To both questions, over 70% of those responding (either yes or no) said yes. TM members, in their responses, were also encouraged to raise important issues that they felt needed future consideration if the program were to be proposed again.

During the intervening year, the Board, Committee, and Management have worked to respond to issues raised by TM members in their responses to the survey questions, in personal conversations, Town Meeting, and to those thoughtful questions raised in a handout by Moss Kahler. What follows includes our general reasons for supporting PAYT again and our town-specific responses to the important issues raised in the thoughtful responses by TM members.

The overall goals of a PAYT program are economic and environmental: saving the community money and saving resources by increasing recycling and encouraging thoughtful rubbish disposal. PAYT is the best tool for achieving those goals. PAYT has been successful in all the communities using it, both in New England and nationwide.

- o In Massachusetts, 127 communities have a PAYT system. The MASS DEP website provides information about the successes of the system. ([www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/reduce/paytfact.htm](http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/reduce/paytfact.htm)). As examples of program impact, Ashland (pop 14,645) increased its recycling rate from 13% to 39%; Hamilton (pop 8,374) increased its rate from 23% to 29%, and Wrentham (pop 10,554) increased its rate from 21% to 33%.
- o In Concord NH, which implemented a PAYT program in July, 2009, the first three months saw a 50% drop in their trash and a 75 % rise in recycling.
- o The EPA website ([www.epa.gov/epawaste/consERVE/tools/payt/index.htm](http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/consERVE/tools/payt/index.htm)) has a 2008 map showing nationwide the towns and cities that have adopted PAYT and a wealth of other information.

It is undeniable that the more material recycled the better it is for the environment and climate change. For example, every ton of paper we recycle saves 17 trees that are 20 years old, 4,200 kWh of energy, 7,000 gallons of water, 664 quarts of oil.<sup>1</sup> (Similar statistics are available for all of the other materials we recycle, but we have not included them to save space.) Massachusetts estimates that its state's recycling has reduced greenhouse gas emissions by almost 900,000 tons of carbon equivalent a year.

But in Brattleboro, we are not doing very well. Brattleboro can do much better. Our recycling rate, since the inception of the curbside collection program in the mid-nineties, has gone down and then stayed steadily under 20%. Opponents of PAYT have suggested that there are other ways of increasing recycling through informal methods such as the Recycling Challenge issued by our Selectboard last year, articles in the paper and presentations on BCTV. These have produced little demonstrable impact.

Because we need to save money and because we must recycle more, we turn to a proven tool Pay-as-you-Throw is:

- Equitable- those who produce less, pay less. You pay only for your own trash and do not subsidize others who do not recycle.
- An economic incentive to recycle
- Environmentally sustainable

As noted above, during the past year, many issues have been raised about PAYT at Town Meeting, in the Reformer, and in forums and discussions in Town. Following are the major issues and our responses.

- **Price of bags-** we will sell two sizes of bags, 30 and 15 gallon. The large one will cost \$2.00, the small will cost \$1.00. (We are able to provide more complete information about bag prices this year because the new curbside pickup contract had not been awarded by Town Meeting last year, and thus price-setting information was unavailable.)
- **Where will bags be available?** At a variety of local stores, both large and small, and at the Municipal Center. A list will be provided before the program begins.
- **Why plastic bags? Are they biodegradable? And why not use stickers?** First, very few companies offer a biodegradable bag option. Many bags are compostable but not biodegradable. Bags currently available will not degrade in a landfill. In addition, bio-bags are expensive to manufacture and would increase the cost of the bags. We are, however, looking into both bio-bags and printed paper bags as possibilities for those who want them. Second, it was decided to use bags because stickers are more easily counterfeited, and can also become detached. Current bag technology allows us to provide bags with at least 20% recycled content.
- **What about those with low/fixed incomes?** We looked into providing everyone with one free bag/week, but the cost of that proposal eliminated all savings. We also looked at providing free bags to income eligible residents, but the complexity and cost of that option made it impossible. To help, however, bags will be sold singly at the Municipal Center, so that residents do not have to buy an entire pack of bags at a time. In addition, residents concerned about helping lower-income families could purchase extra bags to take to the Drop-In center or other designated locations for distribution there. In addition, information will be provided to all residents showing ways to reduce trash by changing buying habits, composting more, and recycling more. (Much of this information is available now, but we believe that more will desire and use it when the program becomes operational.)
- **I now pay for trash through my town taxes. Will PAYT cost me more?** It is hard to predict because the current system is funded through broad-based taxes; and we currently do not pay directly for our trash disposal. This means that a useful base for comparison is not available.
- **What about illegal dumping?** Brattleboro has a written policy in place for enforcing against illegal dumping, and all departments have signed on to it. According to information from towns

that have PAYT programs there has been little increase in illegal dumping if employees and residents are educated and vigilant. Concord, NH reports that this did not happen when their program was implemented.

- **What about the bulky type wastes that won't fit in a PAYT bag?** There are definitely materials such as mattresses, couches, and other large items that homeowners need to dispose of from time to time, but which will not fit either in a trash bag or the trash truck. Solutions include getting the vendor of a new item to remove the old item being replaced, or taking it to WSWMD. However, some residents do not have either a vehicle or the capacity to move heavy items. For that reason, the Town is discussing a the possibility of a periodic "bulky waste pickup" with our hauler Triple T. The frequency and possible costs associated with this service have not yet been determined.
- **There are items we cannot recycle through our current program.** Yes, there are, particularly certain types of containers. The Materials Recycling Facility, or MRF, at the WSWMD at Old Ferry Road, as it is currently configured, is limited in the types and amounts of materials that it can sort and store. Sorting is limited because of the number of sorting stations at the conveyor belt where the material is processed. Storage is limited because of the size of the building and area available on site. WSWMD has chosen to process those materials most prevalent in the waste stream, as they provide the biggest "bang for the buck."
- **Composting is a great way to keep food and yard materials out of the trash- how will you promote it? Will the Town pick up compost at the curb?** Backyard composting is very easy, and the WSWMD has some great bins and good information available on how to do it. "Project Cow" is a program available at the District to which you can bring organic materials that are not good to compost in a backyard program. While not as easy as putting it out at the curb, Project Cow is a great program. Our hauler, Triple T, is hoping to be able to provide curbside collection of compostables within the next couple of years.
- **Education and timely information are very important, especially in a new program.** Yes, and we hope to have a part-time coordinator on board to do it. This is not a permanent position, but one which is intended to help the PAYT program start. Our volunteer Solid Waste Committee works very hard, but does not have the time and resources that a staff person would have. In addition, WSWMD provides a great deal of general information on recycling in its mailings and on its website.
- **What about the economic impact of this program on renters?** Landlords are required to provide trash containers and recycling bins for their tenants. Tenants should be responsible for their trash, just as homeowners are. Just because you rent doesn't mean that you shouldn't be responsible for the trash you create. Tenants can work to reduce their trash, just as homeowners should. Without PAYT, tenants have no control over the rising cost of rubbish collection which will get passed on through rent.
- **In some communities with PAYT, the trash amounts decreased by very large amounts. Where did that trash go? Did it go into the woods? Into others' dumpsters? Won't that happen in Brattleboro?** Information from those communities indicates that illegal dumping was not a problem, if education and enforcement were robust. No community with PAYT has stated that public or private dumpsters were used to avoid the PAYT program.

- **What should people do with trash bags that are only partially filled? Some people worry that, if they put them out, that will mean they lose money, and if they store them, that could mean odor.** The town is providing two types of bags. If you consistently have half-full bags, try the smaller size. If you use Project Cow or compost at home, odor should not be a problem.
- **Recycling is currently picked up every other week. What about having to store recyclables in an apartment?** It is possible to take a trip to the drop off site on Fairground Road, or the WSWMD site on Old Ferry Road.
- **Apartment Dwellers need to be able to compost too.** There are opportunities for apartment dwellers to compost now, such as taking compost to WSWMD. In addition, landlords will be encouraged to provide space for composting whenever possible.
- **How did you calculate the price of the bags? What if the predictions are right and the tonnage goes down- will the price of the bags go up?** Committee members and Town staffers have run pro-forma spread sheets, using scenarios showing up to a 50% cut in trash. Prices are calculated by taking last year's trash total (approximately 3200 tons), calculating the number of pounds, estimating possible percentages of large and small bags, and then calculating the number of bags needed. We assumed that the large bags would usually contain 30 pounds, and the small bags 15 pounds. To the cost of a bag, we added handling fees and education costs. The proposed bag prices are \$1 for small 15 gallon bags and \$2 for large 30 gallon bags. Bag prices will cover either an increase in the cost of disposal, or an unexpected change in the amount of trash. It is anticipated that the bag prices will not change for some time, barring unexpected complications.
- **Why do we not just enforce the existing mandatory ordinance? Why bother with PAYT?** Enforcement is a possible alternative, but it requires enforcers and a system. It would require that the Selectboard, Town Manager, Hauler, and Police all be involved and spend significant amounts of energy, time, and money. One system would be to use clear plastic bags, and to direct the hauler to leave any trash bags with recyclables in them. Any illegal dumping would have to be prosecuted. A coordinator would probably be a necessary position to oversee the beginning of such a system, just as PAYT requires the help of a paid staff member. Enforcement will be required to some degree with PAYT, too. As to why go the PAYT route, versus enforcement, the reasons are two fold: under enforcement only, the cost of trash disposal is paid for through taxes, so even if enforcement works, and trash were reduced by 50%, the Town would still have to pay the cost to dispose of the remainder. Under PAYT, the cost of disposal is born by those who create the trash. Strict enforcement of recycling ordinances also only encourages recycling of recyclable materials that might otherwise be thrown away. It does not encourage composting or reducing trash by other methods.

We hope that this helps you consider the issues involved as we work towards increasing recycling and reducing trash and trash costs. If you have any questions please come to the information meeting on Wednesday, March 10, at Academy School.

Sincerely,

The Town of Brattleboro Solid Waste Committee