

**MEETING MINUTES
RECYCLING AND SOLID WASTE REDUCTION BOARD
TUESDAY, January 12, 2021
Online Zoom meeting**

1) Call to Order

Marlow called the meeting to order at 6:03 PM.

2) Attendance

Members Present: Brown, Hairston, Jacobs, Marlow, Little, Mifflin, Sickler, Sheth, Stelzer and Swiger.

Absent: Castro

Also Present: Gerardo Barrera and Edward Orozco (West U Public Works).

3) Agenda Order

There were no changes to Agenda order.

4) Approval of Minutes

Jacobs motioned to approve the minutes of the December 2020 meeting and the motion was seconded by Sheth. The Board voted unanimously to approve the December 2020 minutes.

5) Board Member Reports—Business/Action Items

a) Food Waste Drop-Off Pilot Program

Stelzer provided a draft report on the data from the Food Waste Drop-Off Pilot program. A final draft of the report will be discussed with the Board members and once finalized will be given to Public Works. Public Works will handle the report with the City Council. 6 weeks of data had been gathered to date. Particular items of note:

- Over a ton of pumpkins were dropped off as food waste on the first day of the pilot program. Some of the citizens who dropped off pumpkins have returned, but a number of citizens have not returned since the first day.
- The total amount of food waste diverted through 6 weeks was 9.35 tons.
- The average amount of food waste dropped off is 20.75 lbs.
- Roughly 5% of West U households participated in the pilot program.
- 25% of the participants in the pilot program told the Board members that they compost at home.

After the completion of Stelzer's presentation of the draft report, Little made a comment regarding participant safety. Little suggested that the interaction of cars, people, pedestrians, and bicycles along with the distractions associated with the dropoff could lead to accidents. Sheth added that the ability of the volunteers to cope with the "waves" of cars has been a problem, as that has caused a traffic jam/backup. The conversation was tabled, but Board noted that these issues would need to be addressed if a permanent drop-off program were to be established.

Returning to the draft presentation, Stelzer noted that contamination has been low, according to Zero Waste Houston, the contractor. Stelzer suggested that an attended drop off is the most effective education process for food waste recycling disposal.

Marlow asked if the Board had gathered data on how many citizens were returning participants. Hairston indicated that only 51 citizens have not returned at all during the Pilot program. Sheth, Stelzer, and Hairston have been putting the participants into an Excel sheet.

Little voiced concern that the Board might get lost in the data, since the Pilot occurred during the holiday period with limited advertising. Sheth asked for Public Work's views on the outcome of the Pilot. Barrera indicated that Public Works had reached no conclusions yet; instead, Public Works would analyze the data and make recommendations to the City Council based on the data. Orozco suggested a very small percentage of West U residents used the Pilot, but a bar for continuing the Pilot had not been set. There are no plans to move forward with continuing the program until the data has been analyzed. Barrera emphasized that the current plan from Public Works was to complete the Pilot, analyze the data, and then determine whether a permanent program would be included in the 2022 budget discussion, based on direction from the City Manager. Barrera mentioned that a 5% participation rate was not sufficient to sustain a program in his opinion, but it was ultimately not his decision to make. Barrera is looking separately at curbside costs – per City Council's directions from the Food Waste workshop, as well as internal collection or 3rd party collection. Board discussed whether a 2nd trash day could be dropped saving the City money, if a substantial amount of food waste was diverted from trash.

b) Food Waste Drop-Off Educational materials

Board discussion of handout regarding vendors to interested residents after conclusion of pilot. Stelzer indicated that the contractor was not happy about publishing information about his competition. Stelzer suggested the Orozco notify contractor regarding a proposed flyer, and then see how the contractor reacts. Orozco agreed. Jacobs suggested letting contractor have an exclusive period during the pilot, and then sending out an email blast after the exclusive period (1/23/21). Barrera affirmed that City policy is to avoid any actions that promote a single vendor. Marlow voiced the view that the contractor doesn't have a say in what the Board does. Barrera agreed, as he believed that this proposal also smacked of favoritism. Marlow argued against an email to residents regarding a vendor list as he did not believe that participants' signing up gave the City permission to send the participants e-mails. It was also discussed if an e-mail went out to the participants who would send it.

Stelzer moved to have Public Works to ask the City Attorney regarding a potential email to residents. Jacobs seconded. Hairston suggested a social media posting as a third option, or handouts. Board ultimately decided in favor of Public Works seeking legal advice. Barrera indicated he would contact the City Attorney to get his opinion on whether there was any issue in sending out one follow-up e-mail to the participants. The plan is to hand out the Food Waste alternatives handout for curbside and drop-off for the last 2 Saturdays of the Food Waste event.

Discussion of survey for participants in Pilot program. Given the logistical difficulties associated with completing a paper survey while participating in the drop-off, Marlow suggests setting up an online survey. Jacobs agreed to email the Board a draft survey for the Board's consideration.

c) New Neighbor Program—Contents of Package

Board briefly discussed new materials to be included based on Jacobs' input. Barrera indicated that he would deliver new materials to Brown by the end of the week. Brown asked the Board to complete their 2020 New Neighbors List by the next Board meeting.

d) Survey Status

Barrera indicated survey questions are with the Consultant. The Survey consists of 19 questions as currently drafted. Barrera indicated that Consultant will likely cut down on the number of questions. Little said that the Board's draft was tight and to the point, unlike the recent Parks Board survey which was long and tedious.

Hairston proposed modifications to Survey Questions #13 and #15. Both were modified per Board discussion and agreement and approved for submission.

e) Tri-Sports—MOU and 2021 sports schedule

Marlow informed the Board that Tri-Sports just signed Memorandum of Understanding with City. Despite this late signing, Marlow said the sports leagues were still on schedule for a 2/28/21 opening day, with practices and games starting before that date. Marlow will send out an email to the Tri-Sports representative and the presidents of the 3 leagues regarding recycling issues.

f) Currents Articles Discussion

Marlow indicated to the Board that it was not clear when the next article must be submitted for Currents. He asked Board to review Susie's article on Food Waste to dovetail with Pilot. Orozco and Barrera indicated they would check to see if a deadline for submission of articles for the next Currents had been set.

g) Upcoming Events—Food Waste Drop-Off Work Schedules

No substantive discussion. Schedule was shared online by Hairston for Board members to pick dates and shifts.

h) Misc. Comments

Mardi Turner talked to Hairston and also Marlow regarding whether the Board can take over the Christmas tree recycling program that had been coordinated with the Scouts the past 2 years. Marlow indicated that Board was busy with existing matters and the Scouts should be able to continue with the program without the Board getting involved. Marlow indicated he would talk with Cub Scout Pack 266, Troop 266 and Troop 55 about continuing this project in the future.

6) West U Staff Report

Barrera indicated that Waste Management performed an independent audit of West U's trash and recycling, and therefore some of the prior percentages that appear on the monthly reports for each of the recycling categories (paper, cardboard, aluminum, plastic, contamination, etc.) have changed. Trash volume for the 2020 year increased by approximately 300 tons. Additionally, Barrera indicated that his participation in the Board's meetings would decrease over time as Orozco was now the staff liaison.

7) Adjournment

Hairston moved to adjourn. Little seconded. Motion carried unanimously. Adjournment at 8:06 pm.