

Minutes – Regular Meeting
Solid Waste Advisory Board
September 4, 2008
Approved October 2, 2008

Attendance: Jan Sassaman, Bonnie Norwood, Linda Bowerman, Al Vickers, Remus Smith, and Michelle Grunwald

Staff: Blair Pollock, Paul Spire, and Wanda McCain

1. **Adoption of Minutes from August 7 SWAB meeting** Norwood moves to accept. Vickers 2nd. Passes unanimously
2. **Board Member Comments** Smith states that I didn't want to say what I'm about to say at the last meeting because I didn't think it was appropriate. I remember when I was about six years old, Durham was burning their garbage. I remember the things came in a Model T or Model A truck and the men were shoveling it into the furnace—just a steel single wall pipe in the early thirties. Also some 30 years ago Hillsborough had a landfill. About every two years it would catch on fire by some mysterious way. The downwind neighbors didn't like that.

The gentleman [on the recycling truck] that comes by every Wednesday does a good job. I sit and watch him pickup about 4 or 6 different houses—he's hustling. Also, at the SWCC north of Hwy 86, I've been hauling stuff from my home and those three men are as helpful as they can be.

Last week you [Gayle] mentioned that the New Hanover [waste combustion] plant was going to close, can you tell me why?

Wilson states that the New Hanover County Board of Commissioners contains some members who have historically been hostile to the incinerator. Inside sources indicate that there are Commissioner relationships with private waste companies who have lobbied that landfilling is cheaper, etc. and that the incinerator should be closed and private landfills utilized. This issue has arisen several times over the past couple of decades. Now it would appear to make even less sense to close it as the debt service is being paid off this year I believe.

Norwood states that at one of the neighborhood meetings someone was complaining that they could not get the SWAB minutes. Can you mail Rev. Campbell the minutes?

Gayle states that we can mail him the last two and tell him how he can find future ones on our website.

Norwood states that occasionally everyone [at the Eubanks Convenience Center] disappears and one car will sneak into the SWCC and the guy will be sitting in the office thinking he is safe and that person will steal everything they can get their hands on because they think they are not being watched. So a heads up to pay attention to

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the single car that comes in and goes right to the TVs and computers and takes everything you don't want them to have.

Wilson replies that that is good information and we will follow up on that.

Grunwald states that I go to the SWCC on Hwy 86 [Walnut Grove Church Road] two or three times a week. The gentlemen that have been working there that came from Hwy 57 are really nice. There is a gentleman there by the name of "Johnny". He refuses to tell me his proper name. He tells me off every time I'm in there. I asked for help getting some garbage into the dumpster he gave me a dirty look and replied "I'm not going to hurt my back for anyone, that's on you honey". He will not let me put perfectly good furniture into the exchange shed. He said it is his job to keep the place clean and if he says you don't put it there, you don't put it there. I haven't told him who I am. I don't know who he is, but I've had a lot of people complain about him. He has even made snotty comments to other employees working there about helping elderly people. He's got everybody else sitting down. As far as he is concerned he is God. I don't know if someone needs to talk to him, he has got everyone cooperating with him and people that used to help don't help when he's around. They help when he's not around.

Wilson states that we will follow up and speak with Johnny to let him know what has been observed and reported and counsel him on how to improve his customer service.

Grunwald states that I've seen him sitting in a chair watching a man so old he almost fell over trying to get a bag of garbage into the dumpster. In a situation like that aren't they suppose to help? Isn't it dangerous?

Wilson states that they are not required to because there are people that come out there with extremely heavy things. How did they get it on their truck? We don't require them, but ask them to help if they can.

Grunwald states that helping a man get a bag of garbage out of the trunk, there is no reason for him not to get up. He has told many people "that's not in my job description, it's on you. You hurt your back; go ahead, I'm not going to hurt mine".

Wilson states that we will have a talk with Johnny. Give us some more feedback after a few more trips.

- 3. Landfill Alternative Technology Assessment Final Report** Wilson states that this item was presented at our last meeting. A similar but briefer presentation was supposed to take place this past Tuesday night to the BOCC but the meeting ran long and they didn't get to it. We are trying to reschedule it. Jan thought that this group may want further discussion on it or to see if the SWAB has any recommendation or

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feedback they want to convey to the BOCC to, or not to, pursue one or more of the alternatives, park it for ten years, or make no comment at all.

Sassaman states that Barry Jacobs asked the SWAB this past winter to look at the alternative technologies for handling waste. Essentially this report was done at our request in response to the request of the BOCC. I expected [at the Commissioners meeting the other night] that the Commissioners would ask me what the SWAB thought about it. I have my own ideas but I would like to throw it out to you all.

To summarize, the report indicates that there are two groups of technologies – those that are currently in use today, particularly the Mass Burn, and the RDF [refuse derived fuel] and then the emerging technologies, Pyrolysis, Plasma Torch, etc. In the U.S. the only technologies that are working are the Mass Burn and RDF technologies. However these technologies, because of the economies of scale, have an economic tipping point that requires a lot more waste material than we produce on a tons per day basis.

Vickers states that the report essentially states that demonstrated technologies would not be economic for the town the size of Orange County. The report also indicated the other technologies are being hyped again as they were hyped thirty years ago, but no one's made them work right in a real situation. It would not make sense for this community to experiment and spend a lot of money on development of untried technology.

Smith states that he is recommending to the Town of Hillsborough that they consider a consortium for mass burning with the surrounding counties, starting with Orange County. Orange, Durham, and Chatham will need this future process for years. No more than I know about it, I know the landfill is filling up. I also know that we will be producing garbage as long as there are two of us left and we will have to do something with it. Burning it is the only way with the strict clean air provisions regulations we have. I'm in favor of investigating it with some other help. Hillsborough cannot afford it, Orange County can't afford it, but maybe Orange, Durham, Chatham, and Wake could afford it. '

Norwood states that they will only look at it because a lot of people are making the comment about not wanting to dump our garbage on someone else but we don't have the land or the garbage to do it. We would have to seriously look at what type of offer to make to chip in. You'd have to start by stating how much garbage you have, how much would you supplement the building of it, who would want to build it? They would need to start now to make any real impact.

Grunwald asks is it feasible for Orange County to get into a project that big with a county as large as Durham without having control of the project. If we're going to

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start the project for the benefit of all the last thing we want is for someone to outvote and outstrip us. Is it even enough, I don't know.

Sassaman states that this is the very beginning of the discussion.

Grunwald states that it is an important consideration to move the discussion forward. Do we have the strength to keep it equitable for all parties?

Wilson asks how would you define equitable.

Grunwald states that I live in northern Orange County, this is Chapel Hill, and one out votes the other every time. Does one county have the ability to make all the decisions and run rampant over another? Can this be created in a cooperative way?

Wilson states that that is always tough. It's tough enough to agree on library issues. When you talk about multiple towns and counties, Durham doesn't have a lot of municipalities, when you're talking about Wake you're talking about twelve towns. The waste quantity from there makes one of these technologies economically feasible. Chatham is in the same boat as we are. I don't know that Durham would do any heavy lifting to pull it off, but if someone else advanced it, they might be interested in seeing what's in it for them. From a sustainable standpoint the logical place to put it would be nearest the largest amount of waste to minimize hauling. Taking a step back and looking 20 - 30 years forward, Durham will have been hauling for decades, Orange for 20-30 years, Wake County's new landfill will be closed in about twelve years. When you look out 20-30 years at what will people do with waste generated in the Triangle, you come up with a very short list of possibilities. One is to ship it further because the landfill in Virginia will be full. If you're going to continue landfilling, you're going to be shipping it further. The only thing that would make sense would be a technological answer. The answer is not pyrolysis. Only Mass Burn or RDF is tried and true, but the politics of pulling that together are hard to fathom. They don't make a lot of progress on transportation issues. There are few success stories on a regional basis and garbage is not on the list typically.

Grunwald asks would a recommendation be to say we are going to have to address this in the future but now we will have to sit back and see what's improving.

Wilson states that there is a vehicle to which the dialog could begin—the Triangle J Council of Government, but they have, not too long ago, essentially disbanded their solid waste section and expertise. They used to have a staff person dedicated to solid waste issues but she's been gone for five or six years now.

Pollock states that the last thing that segues from Gayle's point about regionalism is a few years ago the counties in the COG [Chatham, Durham, Lee, Moore, Orange Wake,

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not Johnston] said let's put a letter of interest out and see if there is some County that wants to be our partner, in a way where we'll capitalize and they site it on their land. They said it makes sense to go within a 100 mile radius two hours one way by truck. They didn't get any responses from anybody within a 100 miles radius even though they said 'we'll capitalize it, pay you a host fee and all you have to do is allow the hole there".

One thing that I saw interesting in the report, two of the three really successful ones they showed were right in the middle of cities less than ½ mile from where people live, not just the factory districts and no apparent problems. The technology has advanced further than the attitudes about the technology.

Wake County has a landfill for \$22 per ton. Durham is shipping to Virginia and is not concerned. Even if we were really ready to do the political lifting, there is no one to lift with.

Bowerman states that it is a good idea to do it. We would need more counties. This is not the time. I agree that it is something that eventually needs to be done.

Norwood states that because Orange County likes to be progressive, if I were going to sit down and talk to Barry face-to-face, I would suggest mailing out information that would explain that somewhere down the road this will be an issue and we want to remind you of it. We're thinking of it now and we have some good information we can pass it on to you.

Wilson asks who is the "them", the citizens?

Norwood replies Durham, Wake, and Chatham. They could sort of remind them every year so that it stays not on the top surface, but just under it and then Orange County would look good by reaching out.

Vickers states that what I'm hearing is that the SWAB endorses Mass Burn but doesn't feel that Orange County can do it on its own and needs to encourage the commissioners to look for an opportunity for when the major players are ready to play.

Sassaman states that there is a train wreck coming. There is just a little more track to go on for now as there is some landfill space around. The current climate is not in favor of landfills and this is what has started the concept of looking at alternative technologies. One of the criteria we asked the consultants to include was cost. The cost is the stumbling block to Mass Burn and RDF for a facility our size. In Table A2 in their report the RDF plant takes up to 750 tons per day and the modular Mass Burn takes up to 150 tons per day. The costs per ton for operating and maintenance for

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Mass Burn and RDF run \$50 –\$60 ton. The real cost is the capital cost for the installed unit. The facilities are expensive but there should be other factors that drive what we do in Orange County other than cost. One of the best things to do with garbage is to use it for something else. One of the things to use it for is to generate electricity. The ash at the end of the incineration process is quenched in water and is typically a sludge that has a water permeability that is less than concrete, when it sets up in a landfill it does nothing. The bag house dust that comes out at the end can be treated in such a way that it sets up like concrete. It is not a dangerous thing to have.

Grunwald asks if there is current research now in using the ash in actual cement.

Sassaman states that the problem at this point is regulatory.

Spire states that there is some fly ash in concrete. It is not a lot.

Grunwald states that prices may come down for this type of technology while other prices go up.

Sassaman states to summarize what I think is appropriate is that we suggest continued active evaluation of some of these technologies. One thing that comes to mind was if we had the RDF processing unit, to put it on a train to the University and retrofit the University facility would be a good solution. I don't know if it would be feasible.

Vickers asked if the power plant could handle that much garbage.

Bowerman asks where fuel prices [for long haul] factor into the balance point against building a plant.

Sassaman states that the costs are built into the contract to haul garbage but no one talks about the carbon footprint or the risk to human health of having all these trucks on the road. If you put enough trucks on the road, people will die.

Vickers adds that risk assessments show that transportation creates much greater risks than other aspects of technologies.

Pollock states that the tipping fees for transfer stations in Durham that go to distant landfills are \$42 at Waste Industries and \$40 at City of Durham which are far less than the costs shown in the report to build an incinerator here.

Bowerman asks how much expansion you can do if you build this. Can you double the tonnage and not have a problem if you need more capacity later?

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Wilson replies it depends on which technology you are talking about.

Pollock states that one of the things they talk about is modular units which are smaller and more costly, but you can essentially bring in another module. But when you build big water-wall mass combustors the throughput can be low initially but you can add more material to them. You can't readily expand them like building a room on a house.

Sassaman states that the modular ones are easier. In Orange County I'm not sure that within reason the actual dollar cost should be the primary driving factor if we want to be technologically in the forefront. We're doing recycling not because it's cost effective but because it's the right thing to do.

Grunwald asks if there is an environment now politically that would be open to the higher cost of this. It is not cheaper [than landfilling] but we are running out of landfill space.

Sassaman states that our role is to look at what is technically feasible, look at the economics of it and what might be the right thing to do. The political decision would be made by the elected officials.

Norwood asks why it would be attractive to UNC to refit their plant. Would they make a profit from the County's garbage or would the county have to chip in for the refitting? What would be the driving factor for them to do that?

Sassaman states that that would be the thing we would need to investigate. That is why I asked if there would be a carbon offset benefit. The carbon offset is what made the landfill gas so attractive to UNC. Is it better to burn coal?

Pollock states that Harvey Gershman and I took a walk to the coal plant; he stated, politics aside, one could do this, physically accommodate it. You could bring garbage into a coal bunker, if they wanted to do that. From the perspective of the carbon footprint issue of garbage vs. coal there is a politically driven split. The report GBB did for us they are saying yes it is a major carbon offset. By burning the garbage you are going carbon neutral against coal. There is another report funded by a variety of groups including the Global Anti Incinerator Alliance, where their conclusion is the opposite because of all the up stream energy that is embodied in making the things by burning those things you're doing worse carbon wise than coal. There are grounds for debating the carbon footprint. That is not so with landfill gas everyone is in agreement that is a carbon offset. The world is changing regarding the evaluation of carbon offsets.

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Wilson states that the cost of a rail transfer facility is exorbitant and for the amount of waste we would have to deliver for 2-3 miles using the landfill as the source I don't think UNC would allow all those trucks on to campus with the waste. You have to have some serious volume, one car every three days is not enough. Rail haul for the quantity of waste generated in Orange County is not realistic. Regarding construction of a siding and transfer mechanism, Durham looked at this 10 years ago with four times the waste we have and it was twelve million dollars.

Science and cost are not the main drivers. The science is irrelevant. Incineration is looked at unfavorably and would be a tough sell. You don't hear of any modern landfills in the state polluting anything. They're pretty safe but if you mention the landfill they will run you out of the room.

Long term the only option [for smaller areas like this] is regional cooperation. The State regulation is pushing for several large landfills in the state that everyone would use. The carbon footprint of that would be very negative. You can't ignore the hauling. I do believe they would receive carbon offset by burning garbage. They might be willing at some point to look at some stand-alone facility in Chapel Hill North. I don't know how feasible that is within the structure of the University, but they may want to talk about it as they may achieve some carbon offsets.

The Sharon Harris nuclear facility probably vents enough heat in a day to burn all the garbage in a 5 - 6 county area. You would think they could zap a little garbage while they do that. That may not be technically feasible or politically feasible. Or maybe, since they own a large piece of property that is very secure, that could be the site for a regional burn facility. In the short-term, there are no short-term possibilities other than some quiet discussions with the University and we should get our waste reduction and recycling house in order through the work group and get the transfer station sited and focus on that before we move on to long term issues. But do convey the sense that long-term the County is going to have to look at some of these technologies.

Bowerman states that since we are at the far end of this generating energy, is there a way to work with an energy company and have them use the energy? They get energy from lots of other sources so why not garbage?

Pollock states that in the [GBB] report, the big RDF plant they look at in Minnesota is a consortium involving the public power entities. There is a plant where they're making the garbage into a fuel where you buy the coal from one and the RDF from another.

Vickers states that one issue that Gayle alluded to even if you make the RDF here our quantity would be a major issue. He also makes the point that the State tried to be in

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the lead on a hazardous waste incinerator and a low level radioactive waste site that were disasters.

Pollock notes that the companies who might have used the hazardous waste incinerator found it cheaper to eliminate hazardous wastes. The economics of reducing waste may become more favorable than burning it too. One point that Gershman made is that you should make less garbage rather than invest in an incinerator.

Vickers states that if building and operating the transfer station affects the tax rate they may pay more attention.

Sassaman states that the question is still what sort of answer if any do we wish to give to the BOCC.

Grunwald states that we need a lot of future discussion but right now there are too many very important issues that need to be finalized. We are almost in an emergency situation with the transfer station we don't need to be wondering off on things that will come up 10 – 20 years from now. We have to stay focused.

Vickers states that the Commissioners have to know that there is no immediate solution other than doing the transfer station for the next 5 – 10 years. We cannot say 'the sky is falling' when it's not. The time is not right, now.

Sassaman asks how long it took the landfill gas issue from first mention to get serious.

Pollock replies 1997.

Sassaman states the first issue is do we recommend that this issue of alternative waste processing technologies stay on the table? Or take it off and let them take it up again ten years from now?

Norwood states that because of how long it takes to teach us or the commissioners things, since it is going to be the issue down the road, the more we expose them to this [idea], the more easier and educated they will be. I think we should keep it on the table.

Sassaman states that assuming it stays on the table the next question is do we think the glitzy technologies may become viable and the way to go by the time we are going to need to do something or do we focus on the tried-and-true like Mass Burn and RDF?

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Vickers states that we should not eliminate technology but say any technology down the road that they decide to go after should have to be demonstrated and proven in at least one or two major facilities not a demonstration unit.

Bowerman states that it should state here is the best of now and barring some huge improvement in any of the others, at least measure it against this.

Sassaman states that the next issue is, is it more appropriate for Orange County to strike out on its own or do we want to go in with a joint jurisdictional group. Is Orange County in the lead? Should we build it and hope they'll come. We ought to suggest an approach. We won't have enough garbage ourselves to make it go.

Spire notes that if we become the taker of the product, then we become responsible whether we're operating or not.

Bowerman asks what happens in the small area site, like the one in downtown Arlington.

Sassaman states, they take it only from themselves, not others. The economics are better if they take garbage from others.

Vickers states that even with a transfer station, landfilling is not a long term solution and it's something they need to think about. The small size of our waste stream is important and affects the economics.

Pollock notes that the transfer station may be needed even if we're transferring to an incinerator.

Wilson states that it seems that you are saying [we need] to focus on short-term priorities now while at the same time pursuing any opportunities that may come up in the meantime and perhaps initiate some preliminary discussions with the University to examine any potential. Then refocus on these issues in three or four years once the priorities are taken care of. Should we re-examine the tried-and-true and set aside those proven not to work? Have some kind of Triangle Regional Waste Summit and try to examine this issue and bring it to the forefront and we know this crisis is coming and we should examine our possibilities and try to get some motivation.

Norwood states that that wording is good. We should say to the commissioners we will keep our ear to whatever is going on, but this is what you need to do – try to get someone on the same page with us so others in the area have the same information and someone with money and land wants to fund it, someone may want to set up this Triangle Regional Waste Summit.

Smith states that the Hillsborough representative to the COG may be interested in this. I would think the Chapel Hill representative might too.

Sassaman states that there are a lot of ideas. I don't think we need to have a [formal] resolution. What I would like to have is a very brief memo ready for the commissioners when they finally deal with it at a meeting where it's presented. What I'd like to suggest is to have staff to condense this portion of our discussion into a page or so with some recommendations and pass it around electronically and see if we are happy with that.

Norwood moves to ask staff to do as Jan suggests in developing the summary memo.

Vickers 2nd with the understanding that staff will do a summary of our discussion of the interpretation of what the report means as a one page item to the Board.

Motion passes – 6-0.

4. Solid Waste Management Plan Work Group Process – Detailed Status Report

Pollock states that the next meeting [of the Work Group] is September 18th at 11 am. There are two things that will be on the agenda. The future of the SWCCs and drop off sites and the way that intersects with the unincorporated area waste collection by franchise. I will talk more about the next six to nine months of the solid waste plan then.

5. Programs/Services Update -- Deferred

Solid Waste Operations Center

Transfer Station Siting Process

Landfill Gas Recovery Project Wilson states that at the next meeting the University will come and make a presentation on the landfill gas project.

Landfill Leachate Sewer Project

Comprehensive Plan

Other

6. Other None

Norwood moves to adjourn.

Smith 2nd.

Adjourn: 9:10pm

Next meeting October 2, 2008

Chapel Hill Public Library