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Solid Waste Advisory Group Meeting Summary

DATE: September 18, 2023

LOCATION: Solid Waste Administration Training Room

MEMBERS PRESENT: County Commissioner Amy Fowler, County Commissioner Earl McKee, Carrboro Council Member Randy Haven-O'Donnell, Carrboro Mayor Damon Seils, Hillsborough Commissioner Rob English, Hillsborough Commissioner Matt Hughes, Chapel Hill Council Member Adam Searing, Chapel Hill Mayor Pam Hemminger

MEMBERS ABSENT: UNC Healthcare Dan Lehman

STAFF PRESENT: County Solid Waste Director Robert Williams, County Solid Waste Assistant Director Bruce Woody, Chapel Hill Public Works Director Lance Norris, Chapel Hill Public Works Staff Wendy Simmons, Carrboro Public Works Director Kevin Belanger, Carrboro Public Works Staff Kristen Benoit, Town of Carrboro Environmental Sustainability Coordinator Laura Janway, Town of Carrboro Staff Greivin Ulate, Hillsborough Public Works Manager Dustin Hill, County Staff: Cheryl Young, Isaac Jones, Caroline Hausler, Wanda McCain, and Dena Brown
GBB Staff: Chris Lund, Jennifer Porter, and Rachel del Campo Gatewood

Call to Order

Approval of January 31, 2023 Meeting Summary – Approved

GBB – SW Master Plan Presentation

Hemminger states that the recycling fees are not covering recycling costs, correct?

Williams answers that's correct.

Hemminger states that raising the fee by the amounts listed would be a pretty big shift. What would be the real number?

Williams says I can get you that number.

Hemminger says they haven't been raised in a long time, although she advocated for them to be raised incrementally. So, you're using the general fund from the county, right?

Williams says no, we are using the fund balance from solid waste.

Hemminger states raising the fee such a big amount affects people in the lower housing categories more than businesses or expensive homes. It's something to really think about because the fund will diminish at some point.

Williams states we will get those numbers to SWAG.

Hemminger asks GBB if they considered how much compost is collected by the private companies many have partnered with, as far as diversion numbers?

Porter answers yes we have. Part of the recommendation is reviewing this annually and doing an assessment again in 5 years. And part of that is tracking the additional efforts beyond the county. The private sector is important in this picture.

Hemminger states that several businesses are saving money on trash collection because they are composting more and maybe we can educate more businesses on this. Garbage has gone way down in our Town Hall and Library just from composting paper towels in the bathrooms. So are you tracking that?

Porter says yes and it's included in the projection.

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Hughes states most of what he has seen has been residential waste and asks have we factored in commercial waste in the net zero plans. He also asks what impacts franchises have on that. Hillsborough eliminated their exclusive franchise for commercial solid waste, and no longer have to manage and dictate costs. A lot of businesses have enjoyed letting the market do what the market does, which might introduce some different variables in terms of net zero. Did you factor that in at all?

Porter replies yes, definitely commercial. We estimate in terms of overall waste that residential is up $\frac{1}{4}$ and multifamily commercials are up $\frac{3}{4}$. So it's significant.

Hughes states it seems like mostly residents picking up the tab for this program, although multifamily commercial is almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the total. I don't know if I can ask residents to pay another \$100 a year for a solid waste fee.

Porter states the 25% residential model is how we based the solid waste program fee, and the additional funds at 75% are on the private sector. Some of the costs do impact the commercial sector. The residents wouldn't bear the entire cost, the commercial and private sector would share in that cost.

Searing asks for an explanation of how the solid waste program fee is calculated.

Williams states the fee is charged per habitable structure on your property.

Searing asks so it is the same for everybody, whether the structure is a gazillion dollar house?

Williams says yes it's the same.

Hughes asks if there's not a structure on the property, they are not assessed a fee, correct?

Williams replies that's correct.

Hughes asks how that works for businesses. You have Wooden Nickel in downtown Hillsborough, is that considered a habitable structure separate from Antonia's a few doors down?

Porter answers yes.

Fowler asks if GBB will come back to the next SWAG meeting.

Williams states that if SWAG doesn't have any changes they recommend or updates, the next time GBB will be back, will be in front of the Orange County Board of County Commissioners seeking approval.

Fowler asks who will decide which scenario?

Williams says it will be the board. I'm thinking we could start hybrid, start small...but we can talk about that some more.

Operational Updates

Fowler says now it's time for operational updates.

Recycling Drop-off Site Replacement

Williams says let me update you on the recycling drop off replacement center from the university. The location is going to be Jones Ferry Rd Park and Ride Lot thanks to Town of Chapel Hill, UNC, and Orange County. The document is going out for authorized signatures. We're thinking in 60-90 days, we can start dropping off equipment in the area and then we'll have another drop off recycling site.

English asks if this will be a permanent site or once things get settled or constructed at University Mall?

Hemminger says the owners of the mall are not inclined to say so. The site at Meadowmont has actually picked up.

Williams states we'll look some more at keeping that...I don't want to say permanent site. But University will start up. It's where we are right now, we do have an agreement with UNC and TOCH.

Hemminger says this to explain the construction will be in place for the next five years, so it's just not conducive to doing anything in that time frame. We looked at many options, and this one seemed to have the best fit.

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Bradshaw/Ferguson Waste & Recycling Center Consolidation

Williams said regarding the Bradshaw Ferguson Waste and Recycling Center consolidation. We just informed SWAG of what Orange County was doing. We finally found a location. We went through the first steps according to our Planning UDO requirements. We've had 2 neighborhood information meetings, and the public was engaged and shared their thoughts, likes and a whole bunch of dislikes. They were passionate about why they were there. We are consolidating all the questions, looking at the information we got back today, and answering those correctly and I'm looking to have those questions posted on the Orange County solid waste site by probably Friday.

Orange County Recollect App and Recycling Stars Program Update

Young says we put in the Recollect App, which can be downloaded on your phone and is also embedded in our website. People can also look up different materials. We started outreach in December of 22. To date, we have had 7810 calendar views, 3100 printed calendars, and 42000 material views. It's been very successful. We are evaluating the ability to add the town's trash collection, which there is no cost for. I also need to update you on the Recycling Stars program. It's been nominated by the NC DEQ for Public Recycling Championship Award. We're one of two finalists and we will find out if we won next month. The Stars program has been very successful. 59% of carts have shown improvement over the course of 4 inspections. 35% had plastic bags on their first inspection, and that has been reduced by 51%. On the food waste program, the commercial participants are up to 63, and we hope to keep going.

Next Meeting

Fowler says we need to schedule our next meeting.

Williams states we are trying to get back to meeting quarterly. So three months out...December, January. More likely January time frame after the holidays. That will be after BOCC has heard about zero waste master plan. If there's anything SWAG has for us to research or look into, that gives up time to start the leg work into getting that done.

Hemminger replies that normally at SWAG we have a discussion about if we're supporting that recommendation or not or what our support would be before the BOCC would hear it. They usually want us to have submitted what we recommend and we haven't had that discussion.

Williams says right. It's up to you guys. We can discuss it online or discuss now, or we can talk about it later. You can make recommendations on changes.

Hemminger says we normally give a recommendation before the BOCC hears the presentation. They look to us to do that and we're not meeting again until after they meet and that makes no sense.

Williams says so we're going to have to have another meeting before they go back in November.

Hughes states that some of us are campaigning for office, so probably after Nov 7 would be best.

Williams states that we will try and get you guys together after Nov 7.

Hemminger adds and before it goes to the BOCC.

Hughes says another reason that it would be good to meet then is because Damon is leaving and Pam is leaving by not running for reelection and it would be good to have this group that has already been talking about it.

Williams agrees to have the next meeting hybrid.

Hemminger says we are going to need that number of what the \$145 is not covering.

Williams responds ok.

Public Comment

Fowler states that next up we have public comment and that this is the solid waste advisory group rather than Orange County itself. So if your comments have to do with the recycling

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center, just be aware that this group will not be the deciding group. So we have six people here to speak and each person will get 3 minutes. So first we have Susan Walsar followed by Mary Lawrence.

Walsar says good evening. I had prepared comments about the solid waste vision for 2045, but I'm not going to do that because I'm just stunned at the zero-waste presentation. I am amazed at what you're thinking about, amazed at the cost increases, amazed at the plans, and totally amazed at the survey that was talked about. I've lived in the rural part of the county for 20 years and I'm really interested to see who got the survey. None of us here knew anything about the survey. The population in the county is 140,000, so 1% or less got the survey. I'd like to see what the actual county residents of the townships that surround the towns actually think about this because we don't agree with anything that you said on those slide presentations. Are you aware that Wake County charges households \$20 a year for their programs and we're at \$142 and you want to increase that. I want to thank Matt for commenting about the cost of this, this is crazy. I was going to talk about a presentation where you would think about reducing the cost of the program rather than increasing it, and taking funds and moving them out of solid waste department and moving them to the schools because the schools need it way more than solid waste department does. Back when the county was thinking about a transfer station out in rural county, I attended about a year's worth of SWAB meetings and all they thought about was the biggest equipment they could have at the best sites and spending money, money, money to the detriment of the costs of the town residents in our taxes, we don't want all this fancy stuff in the county. We are perfectly happy the way things are and you're going to hear that tonight. So please think about maybe this is good for the towns, maybe it's great for commercial stuff, but maybe there's two different needs in the county and you need to consider that. Thank you.

Fowler says next up Mary Lawrence.

Lawrence states I live at 9215 Charles Lane, and I have deep concerns for the proposal to build a waste and recycling center on Orange Grove Rd. Our home is the closest to the site. I am of course personally concerned about the noise, smells, traffic, and toxic runoff that would devalue our home, property, and quality of life. But it's more important to me to make sure that swag is aware this proposal carries significant environmental justice concerns. In 2010, our BOCC unanimously adopted a series of social justice goals, including the following statement: fair treatment means that no group of people should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, governmental, and commercial operations or policies. 70 homes are within 2000 feet of the proposed site. 35 homes are within 1000 feet. Of these 35 homes, 80% are within 1000 feet of another solid waste operation...the land application of biosolids by OWASA. 60% are mobile homes in the Bingham Woods community. 60% of those households are Hispanic or Latino. I have personally visited neighbors in Bingham Woods with a Spanish speaking friend, these families didn't receive any information from solid waste in Spanish. We've been translating material for them, and we've been speaking with them and like us, they don't want the proposed site. Unless us, they don't feel comfortable speaking with you. Anytime one community is asked to accommodate multiple waste management activities, questions of disproportionate burden should be asked. This is especially true if that community shares a specific demographic or socioeconomic trait. Why should our community be burdened with not one, but two potential sources of odors, noise, truck traffic, and contaminated runoff? We're requesting that SWAG advise Orange County solid waste to step back from this proposal and come up with a more equitable proposal that doesn't adversely impact residential communities. Thank you.

Fowler states next is Joyce McGuire followed by Mary Bratsch-Hines.

McGuire states me and my husband have lived in Orange County next to the OWASA property, down from the biohazard site for 35 years. I am a retired Chapel Hill Carrboro City School teacher, and I taught environmental science for many years. I used to take my 6th graders to the OWASA facilities and to many of the waste depository facilities so that they can learn the

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hazards that these facilities did to the environment and to the neighbors and their community. I walk daily on the trails that have been created along the property lines. My home is down slope from the proposed site and the biofield. Everything drains through a system of drainage ditches to our property and to that of my neighbors. During a hard rain, the drainage eventually ends up 10 feet from our house which then flows into Collins Creek which flows into the Haw River. Anything that drains from the new waste proposed facility, will naturally pollute our well water. As I mentioned before, I am a former teacher and I would like to invite anyone to let me take you on a field trip. As Randee Haven-O'Donnell knows, she was my former teaching partner, that we love field trips. Hand on science is what we're going to do. This is the way you learn. You don't learn by looking at a photo and not seeing it in the meeting. You have to be there to see exactly what we're talking about. And I've actually got photos if anyone wants to see them, but you know, you have to have a good hard hurricane rain and we're serious, all you have to do is give us a call. And I find it strange that the 35 years my home and sewage system have been constantly monitored by Orange County because they want to make sure that we are doing what we're supposed to do because we're in the Haw River drainage basin. But suddenly Orange County can build a hazardous waste facility that drains over my property and that of my neighbors in the same Haw River drainage system. We were told that we could not build anything near the biohazard because of it being in the 100-year floodplain and it appears that no one seems to care. There's been a lot of talk about the protected Cane River sites, but what about the Haw River? Do we not care about the people who get their water from the Haw River? I have photos as I've said. I find it reprehensible that Orange County would even consider carving out a waste facility immediately surrounded by 5 residential homes among the other 70 that we're talking about that are nearby. If we were to get a new waste facility, the noises would make it impossible to enjoy any outside activities. We would no longer be able to sit outside and enjoy the peace of country living. Anyway, the buffer was ridiculous. These homes are an investment and our retirement, and what would be done to our home values is unbelievable. Thank you.

Fowler says next is Mary Bratsch-Hines.

Bratsch-Hines says thank you. I also live within 1000 feet of the proposed site. We understand that SWAG is not making the decision about the proposed site. We will be at the BOCC meeting tomorrow and every other meeting that you have here on until there is a vote on it. My neighbors are passing out a letter that we sent to OWASA. It's on their website along with the signatures that we received as part of that letter, and it basically asks OWASA to reconsider the sale of the property. I'm sorry, I didn't realize so many people were going to be online, but we can send out a link for that. Basically, asking OWASA not to sell the property to Orange County Solid Waste for a number of reasons. You've already heard some concerns. Citizens talked about some of those reasons, really centered around the fact that our communities in that area are already under a waste burden. We already have a water waste burden with the biosolids applications. We really do not need another waste burden that has a significant amount of safety concerns. The number of homes within 2000 feet of the proposed site is up to 2.5 – 4 times greater residential density than exists within 1000 feet of any of the other waste and recycling centers in Orange County. Other Orange County waste and recycling centers are generally sited along commercial or industrial use properties. For example, the Orange Grove facility, which is similar in size to this proposal, shares property lines with a towing company, a tire shop, and a gas station. This is far more appropriate than next to multiple neighborhoods in residential areas. There are numerous health and safety concerns. Some of our neighbors will be talking about these as the weeks come on. Orange Grove Rd and Hwy 54 are already both busy roads as the BOCC are going to be discussing and studying and looking at that. I bike down Orange Grove Road and on weekend afternoons, dozens of cars pass me in that area where the proposed site is 55 miles an hour. The entrance to the proposed site is on a blind curve. It's almost directly across from the bus stop where my children's schoolmates get picked

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up and multiple buses go by there. We're talking within feet. That's how close the bus stop is from this proposed facilities entrance. The plan to consolidate the two existing sites that were fine, they don't collect everything, but they could. It just doesn't make sense for the rural community. Not one person has asked for this proposed site. Not one person has asked for consolidation. It places a burden on the rural neighbors that we've talked to. It's really something to consider that we have not asked for this. Ok I could go on. Thank you and I will be seeing you again.

Fowler says next is Les Chaffin followed by Joshua Setzer.

Chaffin says thank you for having us here today. I live with this fine group of folks out at College Creek neighborhood. I just want to take a little time to ask the same questions I asked at the second community meeting. The first one was what other sites have you considered besides what looks like taking a line between Bradshaw and the other one, and doing this, and saying ok that's in the middle. What other sites have been looked at, that's question one.

Williams replies that that question will be answered when we post the answers to the rest of the questions on the site.

Chaffin says ok let me ask you another way, have other sites been looked at.

Williams says yeah four sites along that corridor were looked at and evaluated by our engineering firm, our engineering consultant and the one that we are considering, that we're talking about now, was the one that they came back to us with and was recommended to meet all of the needs to place a suitable site, a hybrid site at that location.

Chaffin says I would like to ask the second question again, which is what was the decision criteria that made you select a site that has a population of four times more residential density than any other site.

Fowler states that the purpose for this is public comment and we don't usually provide answers at this time.

Chaffin says I understand. I just want to make sure you have those because we asked before and never got an answer.

Williams says yes sir, and like we said, we want to get everybody's questions. We listened, we wrote them down, we answered them, and I have a couple more that came in and we got those answered. I'm looking to have those posted by Friday.

Chaffin says ok I appreciate it and I appreciate you mayor saying we need to have another meeting to put our recommendations in before you take to the BOCC because it sounds like we've asked a lot of questions. We've got the petition out there, but you're going to the board next month or in November for it. And the third question is what are the next steps? What are the steps we can see going through this approval so we can make sure we're voicing our opinion at all of those steps. And I'm really surprised, I think you mentioned when we were asking about permits at the meeting, that the permit to put in this recycling center is not much different than a permit to put just one bin out in a lot, that's sort of the permit required nowadays. You don't have to get any permits basically you just go get this approved. We asked about road studies, we asked about pollution studies.

Fowler states we have heard your questions and hopefully you guys have written all those down and we'll be able to answer them on the website. Finally you'll hear from Joshua Setzer.

Setzer says hello I live in rural Orange County as well, a little over 1000 feet from the proposed new site. I attended the two neighborhood information meetings that were mentioned and listened to the rationale for the proposal to close the waste convenience centers at Bradshaw Quarry and Ferguson. I encourage the SWAG board to take a look at those recordings if you haven't had a chance. They were kind of strange meetings. So around 100 citizens showed up each time. All of them were concerned and it felt a little bit like we were being pitched on a sort of elaborate solution to a problem none of us had actually articulated. We were told about the need to modernize waste centers, which sounded nice, that makes sense. But then we were told that instead of upgrading the two like Walnut Grove and High Rock, we were actually

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closing both of those. And so to the point that was made earlier to kind of take a line with two points and you take the end points off the line and put a new point in the middle, now some people have to drive twice as far in some cases to get to the convenience center. So for a lot of people a 15-minute trip becomes 30 or half an hour round trip. And we know when these centers aren't nearby, a lot of people end of illegally burning and dumping on the roadside more, because it's not convenient. So I'm curious why we're making it harder for people to do the right thing. Someone in the meeting also said it would reduce emissions, which I couldn't quite make that math work in my mind. We were told this is better for the environment. The proposal is to abandon 2 sites that have already been polluted so that we can now clear 6 acres on a third site, pave it over, remove all the trees and then make an even bigger one. So I struggled with that aspect. We asked why the existing sites couldn't be upgraded and we were told that they're too small and you can't queue cars well, you can't get trucks in and out, you can't fit compactors, you can't have waste type bins, but then I look at the dozen or so convenience centers in Wake County, which is where I grew up, and they're all on a small footprint. They're using the same amount of acreage as Bradshaw or Ferguson or less, and they're paved, and they have compactors, and they have waste level bins and they have better traffic designs. And in a lot of cases, they're doing this on an acre or an acre and a half at Deponie Dr and an acre and a quarter at Durham Rd and New Hill-Holleman, less than an acre Aviation Parkway and Battle Bridge. And we've got two acres to work with at Ferguson and Bradshaw and could probably grow a bit if you'd just ask. This is starting to feel like some of these arguments just aren't quite credible. This feels like an internally generated project. It's become a little bit detached from the actual needs being articulated by residents, at least in the rural part of the county. The last I'll say on the topic of the new facility is we've had this talk about kind of shifting focus for waste reduction. So why are we trying to justify a multimillion-dollar 6-acre center. And I struggle to understand why we're paying \$142 a year and they're paying \$20 a year in waste. I worry that we're getting better at overspending and over engineering than we are at recycling waste management. Alright thank you.

Fowler says that's the last speaker. Any other comments here tonight? Otherwise, meeting is adjourned.

Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at: 8:26pm

Name of Minute Taker: Dena Brown