



Zero Waste Advisory Commission

Regular Meeting Minutes July 13, 2016

The Zero Waste Advisory Commission convened in a regular meeting on July 13, 2016, in Council Chambers in City Hall in Austin, Texas.

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Acuna called the Commission Meeting to order at 6:33 p.m.

Board Members in Attendance: Gerry Acuna, Cathy Gattuso, Shana Joyce, Heather-Nicole Hoffman, Amanda Masino, Joshua Blaine, Kaiba White, Stacy Guidry, Rick Rojo, Kendra Bones

Staff in attendance: Bob Gedert, Michael Sullivan, Erin Benoit, Jessica Frazier, Jessica King, Emlea Chanslor, Jennifer Denton, Ron Romero, Mike Turner, Richard McHale.

1. CITIZEN COMMUNICATION: GENERAL

One member of the public signed up to speak on this item.

Andrew Dobbs, Texas Campaign for the Environment, spoke on the issue of sewage sludge, noting that proposals using these for land application have been withdrawn in 2 other TX counties. Mr. Dobbs noted that this does not meet the Zero Waste International Alliance peer reviewed definition of zero waste because it involves considerable discharges into the air, water and land. Mr. Dobbs stated that in future meetings this body may want to clarify that land application of sewage waste is not a zero waste strategy.

Bob Gedert, ARR, noted that he had contacted the Director of Austin Water to inform him it didn't meet the definition of zero waste or diversion. Mr. Dobbs recommended that the ZWAC communicate this to Council so as to improve operations going forward.

Commissioner White asked if Dillo Dirt was the same type of waste. Mr. Dobbs noted that the Dillo Dirt program does not compost everything and noted that why it doesn't is a good question to pose to city staff. Mr. Dobbs sent communication to elected officials expressing concern with this matter recently.

2. APPROVAL OF June 2016 MEETING MINUTES

A motion was made by Co-Chair Gattuso and seconded by Commissioner Hoffman. The minutes from June meeting were approved 8-0-2-1 with Commissioners Guidry and Bones abstaining and Commissioner Jampietro absent.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

5a. Staff Briefings - Parks and Recreation Department Recycling

This item was taken up out of order.

One citizen signed up to speak on this item.

Jessica King, ARR, introduced the item and Marty Stump, PARD, presented a slide show on efforts around recycling in public parks.

Ms. King and Mr. Stump took questions from the commission.

Co-Chair Gattuso asked about sponsorship and park adoption. Mr. Stump mentioned there had been numerous conversations about branding and building enthusiasm around this possibly within existing sponsorship relationships.

Mr. Gedert noted the ARR master plan contains a mandate for departmental partnerships, and mentioned trying to loan at no interest to PARD but the state did not allow it due to restrictions on use of municipal funds.

Commissioner Blaine asked what the timeline is to get to 50% coverage for recycling in parks.

Ms. King noted that many parks may not even have a trash container nor have a litter issue. ARR's evaluation of pocket parks is that they are not experiencing litter. She noted ARR has a dedicated staff for PARD to examine certain targeted facilities for recycling.

Commissioner Blaine mentioned recycling in the parks was number 26 on the list of prioritized unmet needs addressed within their budget process, and asked why PARD was not requesting more. Mr. Stump responded that the estimates provided address practical methods of deployment to avoid overreaching, but that PARD does want to get to that point comprehensively.

Chair Acuna mentioned previous efforts to partner with PARD to create a diversion plan seven or more years in the past and asked that we might revisit ARR collecting at some of the larger parks.

Jessica Frazier, ARR, noted that money was the issue, meaning services ARR provides need to be paid for by the department consuming them. If ARR provides services under its rates, ARR has to be clear where the funds are allocated. She explained ARR is funded by rates charged to customers for services, whereas PARD is funded by General Fund, so if ARR provides services to them, then PARD is required to pay for said services.

Commissioner White asked about total number of trash receptacles in public spaces. Mr. Stump noted that he had the info in a GIS system and agreed to produce a map of the trash and recycling carts and provide it to the commission.

Commissioner White asked if composting could be provided as the City is currently looking at organics expansion. Mr. Stump noted this is being done with wood matter, to which Commissioner White noted that food was not being addressed. Ms. King noted that a top priority was in the home right now, and contamination level in compost is far lower in tolerance than recycling. Ms. King added that in areas where ARR can dedicate staff and see a high use of food, then that conversation could be had, but at this point there are not many opportunities for this. She noted ARR does compost at special events.

Commissioner White asked if there were ideas for possible pilot locations. Ms. King said yes but they aren't city owned and therefore she did not have oversight of them. Commissioner White asked about the bags idea mentioned in the presentation - is it mostly an idea for trails? Mr. Stump said yes, at trailheads, PARD is seeing more use of the trail and more trash on the trail and the head. PARD is thinking broadly about it as they move forward.

Commissioner White noted she agreed with this idea for greenbelt trails but was more skeptical about it for parks. Commissioner Hoffman asked for numbers of receptacles where costs might have been reduced by adding recycling, and if diversion rates were available for the parks that had added recycling?

Ms. King noted we might have to look at PARD diversion rate as a whole. Info could be from a variety of sources that could be comingled. To clarify: pocket parks containers can be collected and taken to other dumpsters which can interfere with rate tracking due to no dedicated dumpsters, which may skew the numbers slightly in terms of sources. But ARR will do their best to figure out where there is an ability to get more precise info and provide it to the ZWAC.

Commissioner Hoffman asked if containers have to match, or if perhaps they could be painted based on sponsors customized to the park?

Ms. King noted that based on previous commissions and stakeholder input, consistency was asked for to keep overarching goals in mind. Sticking to blue for recycling is recommended based on this, she noted, but we can look at options, and to bear in mind that purchasing under city procurement is often best price.

Commissioner Hoffman asked if there was any knowledge of contamination rates in PARD recycling containers. Ms. King noted that downtown has a low rate at first but it moved to 50/50 later and of course that our goal is to have it lower.

Commissioner Guidry noted progress and asked what the top line diversion rate for PARD was as a whole? Ms. King noted she can find this out. Commissioner Guidry wants a priority reflective of the URO in terms of progressive diversion and asked if ARR sees this mapping out PARD's progress toward diversion rate, like toward 50%. Ms. King stated she deferred to PARD on this since goals depend on staffing and resources available and an assessment of this would take time and resources, noting that ARR is ultimately striving to get to 50%, even though we are behind as a city. She stated that the rate would include items the community is bringing in, and illegal dumping may occur in the dumpsters involved so it's not simple to quantify; blanketing everywhere with dumpsters is not possible but it would give clean data. Ms. King clarified that diversion rates attached to specific facilities are not going to be possible.

Commissioner Guidry asked what efficiencies are being implemented or examined to possibly free up funds to address expanding recycling efforts. Mr. Stump noted that the overall system is being looked at to best utilize existing staff and equipment, and that in addition to infrastructure improvements we need to address education as well, as some bad habits are developing by parks users.

Commissioner Guidry asked what the top reason was for illegal dumping in parks. Mr. Stump replied there is no clear answer but high use is likely related to this, and as a site builds with dumped items it can attract other placement of items there.

Co-Chair Gattuso asked if PARD is partnering with any other departments to confront litter. Mr. Stump noted an ongoing working team with Watershed Protection and Austin Police Department has been regularly meeting to discuss parkland resources, and litter control was discussed.

Commissioner Blaine noted that open spaces are not in the URO and whether the ZWAC can look at that via URO committee. Commissioner Blaine asked also to see the overall diversion rate of the parks department, even if it was not specific to any facility. He offered a second to Commissioner White's recommendation to look at organics now to do in tandem with recycling expansion, noting visibility is important to promote a shift in the culture. Lastly, he asked if ZWAC should recommend that Council allocate more funds to PARD in order to prioritize these issues.

Ms. King clarified that the URO deals with commercial properties and that a city would not choose to cite itself, as would happen if the URO were amended. With composting, she noted, staff are constantly looking at containers and at a grievance system, and that composting is not off the table, but that priorities are not there right now.

Commissioner White seconded the funding gap noted by Commissioner Blaine and requested a ballpark estimate to put recycling and/or composting with each existing receptacle in the PARD facilities. Mr. Stump noted concurrence and agreed to provide the info to ZWAC, and stated that PARD wants to be a leader here.

Andrew Dobbs, Texas Campaign for the Environment, thanked staff for the presentation but noted this would not be tolerated at commercial businesses. He noted that we had the same briefing 2-3 years ago, and you can prioritize anything, so this is clearly not a priority. Mr. Dobbs stated we aren't sending a positive message when the city park doesn't recycle, and stated although he thinks everyone believes it's an important priority why then isn't it prioritized?

The discussion ended and no action was taken on the item.

3. OLD BUSINESS

a. ARR FY2017 Budget Process Update

Bob Gedert introduced the item. Chair Acuna introduced a new Commission member Rick Rojo, representing City Council District 3.

Jessica Frazier, ARR, discussed latest steps in the process for forming the departmental budget for next fiscal year and noted that a formal presentation could not be made until budget is published. She noted the staff liaison would send the documents on July 27 when published for Council review, and noted that there would not be much change in content from the approved budget previously presented in the 5 year forecast. ZWAC was reminded to try to get any questions or concerns about the documents to the staff liaison prior to the meeting, the Monday before week of posting. The commission asked for a counts of trash containers be sent to them by July 27 to review with the budget.

4. NEW BUSINESS

a. ZWAC Internal Annual Report – annually required report (covers July 2015-June 2016) pursuant to Section 2-1-46 of the City Code, due July 31st

Commissioners discussed and reviewed the item and made suggestions for edits. The staff liaison agreed to combine the edits in the final document and deliver to the City Clerk.

A motion to approve the document as edited was made by Commissioner Masino, second by Commissioner Blaine on a 10-0-0-1 vote with Commissioner Jiampietro absent.

b. Committee Appointment – a vacancy exists on the Organics Management Committee

Commissioners discussed the item and Commissioner White asked to join the Organics Management Committee. The vacancy now present on the URO committee due to Commissioner White leaving her position on it was filled by the appointment of Commissioner Rojo. The changes to Committee appointments were unanimously approved to no objection from the Commission.

5. STAFF BRIEFINGS

a. Curbside Organics Collection - Outreach & Education Efforts

Emlea Chanslor and Jennifer Denton, ARR, presented a slideshow on education and outreach efforts related to the proposed expansion of organics collection.

Commissioner Masino asked how many customers were surveyed among the pilot group. Ms. Chanslor answered with data from the program. She noted that out of 7900 customers in the first group of the pilot 724 responses were received in English and two in Spanish in the pre-pilot survey, and 6-10 months later there was another survey sent in which 430 responses were received in English and 1 in Spanish. The same method for phase 2 of the pilot produced a pre-survey response set of 683 in English and 3 in Spanish and post-survey set of 547 in English and 4 in Spanish from a base of 6500. Commissioner Masino inquired if these were from the “A” students involved in the pilot, the best performing group. Ms. Chanslor said the survey was used as feedback rather than for statistical measure. Commissioner Masino wondered how it matched up with adherence to the pilot, and if these respondents were only the most passionate, and asked staff to factor this idea in as the base of participants grows more diverse. Commissioner Masino how pilot neighborhoods were identified and whether staff consulted operators. Ms. Chanslor noted they were looking for neighborhoods with certain characteristics and did have a cross functional team including operators. Commissioner Masino noted that operators have an on-the-ground sense of what is going on and to keep that in mind.

Commissioner Guidry noted interest in giving feedback on community partnerships and stated she would send over a list to staff liaison via email.

Commissioner Blaine noted that Council Member Houston sought education to involve church groups, and that cultural familiarity would be taken into account when the contract for outreach is developed, and noted that Vietnamese is a language that should be taken into account. Commissioner Blaine asked why so few Spanish language responses were received. Ms. Chanslor did not know the reason for the difference in the participation rate. Commissioner Blaine asked about participation rates – a refresher and if what the goal was if there was one.

Richard McHale, ARR, explained 18-38% was noted in June, and stated that this is not unusual for summer as food was less likely to be set out. He noted staff has additional audits planned and are looking at pre-rollout and post roll-out audit for comparison.

Commissioner Joyce asked if ARR has a second wave of the rollout map. Ms. Chanslor noted 39,000 and 50,000 customers were to be added in successive years. Chair Acuna asked for the implementation map and Mr. Gedert said it is still being developed but the ZWAC would be able to see it when it is developed.

Commissioner Hoffman asked whether a 3 year rollout of the expansion is off the table. Mr. Gedert replied no, but that the current plan presented to council is for a five year sequence, and if success is found in first year staff can request an accelerated program.

Commissioner Hoffman asked if staff did refresher training, and Ms. Chanslor answered that yes staff did in summer as results dropped lower.

Commissioner White requested financial figures on a 3 year option and Mr. Sullivan resent the numbers from a previous June 8 email. Commissioner Rojo asked about languages used in outreach, to which Ms. Chanslor answered all documents are provided in English and Spanish and other languages were being examined, most notably Vietnamese and Chinese. Commissioner Guidry asked that we keep in mind cultural sensitivity in outreach, that persons being addressed in the material be reflected in the promotional and educational material.

Mike Turner, ARR, noted that when routes are being developed, ARR tries to connect them to existing routes and try to include customers who have made note that they are interested in participating.

Guidry asked if there is a way for people on routes with less disposable income able to get services first, that this is something to keep on radar.

Commissioner Guidry wondered if we could work with community leaders to see who wants the service first, and noted that comments from the Joint Sustainability Committee Materials Management subcommittee could be obtained from Lewis Leff or Zach Baumer in the Sustainability Office.

Andrew Dobbs, Texas Campaign for the Environment, noted he was happy to meet with ARR staff earlier and noted that strategic focus is important, that we should start with end in mind and develop a strategy to accomplish goals toward accomplishing them. Mr. Dobbs noted that the process should be community driven and more voices at the table were better than not.

b. Director's Report - Recyclables Markets; City Council Actions, Statistical Reports and Performance Measures

Bob Gedert, ARR, discussed the items in the Director's Report.

Commissioner Guidry asked what municipal governments can do to even out the highs and lows of market fluctuations. C&D deconstruction waste recycling is involved in her suggestion, and to require new projects to use recycled products in construction.

Mr. Gedert said on a municipal level we can increase quantities collected but must be concerned with quality. If contamination scales upward there can be a negative impact, and noted a need to drive the purchase of the materials both locally and nationally. He stated some municipalities have set quantity levels for procurement, like copiers must use recycled paper etc. and this can drive production of 100% recycled paper upward.

Commissioner Hoffman asked whether there are there numbers on financial savings when contamination goes down. Mr. Gedert noted he would look into this and would come back with that information.

6. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

The following items were discussed as future agenda items: Projected route implementation of organics program; Projections used to come up with \$5.40 total for organics expansion (Mr. Gedert noted he would see if more info on the expenses for processing could be disclosed if possible); Organics committee update; Staff briefing of URO phase 2, would need to be moved to September, or October; PARD baseline – Diversion numbers Baseline of where recycling is now; Budget; Recommendation related to sewage sludge; Organics committee meeting update; Update from Joint Sustainability Committee;

Commissioner Gattuso asked if bulk collection could be discussed, she noted learning some small items are not being recycled. Mr. Gedert noted that September or October could be best meeting for this item.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Commissioner Guidry, seconded by Commissioner Hoffman, and the meeting was adjourned by Chair Acuna at 9:09 pm to no objection.