Twenty-five Years of Local Laws Impact on our Changing Climate

2017 NYSAR³ Annual Recycling Conference

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Town of Bethlehem

Bethlehem is located in Albany County, NY with a population of over 35,000 and total area of 52 square miles.

Incorporated in 1793, the town is situated on the west bank of the Hudson River, bordering Albany to the South.
Chapter 97: Solid Waste

Article III Mandatory Recycling

- §97-17 Legislative declaration.

Believing that a significant amount of recyclable or reusable material can be removed from the solid waste stream being generated within the Town of Bethlehem and in order to facilitate the conservation of vital and natural resources through recycling and in recognition of the established public policy of the State of New York to encourage local governments to implement comprehensive materials recycling programs as part of their solid waste management strategies, the Town Board hereby finds that it is in the general public interest to implement environmentally sound, yet economically feasible, recycling programs to complement the Town's solid waste management system. In so doing the Town Board acknowledges those findings and recommendations of the Town of Bethlehem New York Solid Waste Task Force, contained in its Recycling Plan, revised July 25, 1989.

...This chapter shall take effect September 1, 1990.
Chapter 97: Solid Waste

Article III Mandatory Recycling

§ 97-19 Mandatory recycling requirements.

- A. The use by a resident, pursuant to a resident permit issued pursuant to Article II of this chapter, of any solid waste facility within the Town shall be conditioned upon said resident having separated recyclable materials as required herein from the solid waste to be disposed of.
§ 97-19 Mandatory recycling requirements.

C. In all instances, except where the commercial waste collector shall itself perform waste separation as defined herein, said commercial waste collector shall require its customers to separate recyclable waste at its source or generation point. Each commercial waste collector shall provide its residential customers with at least one Town-approved plastic bin or container, minimum 14 gallons in capacity, for the placement of recyclables prior to their collection by the commercial waste collector. Each commercial waste collector shall provide its commercial customers with Town-approved and appropriately sized dumpster(s) for the placement of recyclables prior to their collection by the commercial waste collector; these dumpsters must be physically separate from, and clearly labeled and distinguished from dumpster(s) designated for the collection of other solid waste. [Amended 1-26-2011 by L.L. No. 1-2011]
§ 97-19 Mandatory recycling requirements.

Each commercial waste collector shall, as a condition of maintaining a permit required by this chapter, file with the Superintendent of Highways written reports, at least every 90 days, containing any requested amendments to the collector's recycling plan, which shall be subject to the approval of the Superintendent of Highways, and also report concerning the amount of solid waste collected or transported by the commercial waste collector and further quantifying the amount of each recyclable collected and the location and manner of the disposal of such recyclable materials. [Amended 1-26-2011 by L.L. No. 1-2011]
Bethlehem’s Recycling Law Successes

- Residents are generally engaged with and active participants in recycling.
- Town has achieved a current estimated waste diversion rate of approximately 65% (fluctuates year to year).
- Yard waste accounts for nearly half of that diversion (recycling rate was 32% in 2016 without yard waste).
- Rate was 50% already by 2003 thanks to the efforts of my predecessor, the late Sharon Fisher.

Governor’s Waste Reduction and Recycling Award for achieving 50% recycling rate, October 21, 2003.
Successes Continued

- Recycling options have continued to expand beyond Transfer Station and curbside collection.
- Community Recycling Stations have collected over 1.2 million lbs of materials since 2014.
- Partnerships with School District, Farmers Market, Vendors and charities like Grassroot Givers on collection events allow for 4 Annual Collection events for reuse and recycling of textiles, secure documents (shredding), books, electronics, scrap metal at very low cost to the town.

“Community Recycling Stations” provide free 24/7 recycling for cardboard, paper, and clothing/textiles at two locations.
25+ years of the Local Recycling Law has had significant impacts on climate change even for a community the size of Bethlehem.

For example, in 2016 alone just the paper/cardboard recycled in Bethlehem reduced GHG in town by over 632 MTCE. Equivalent to removing 496 passenger cars from the road, or not burning over 2.5 million pounds of coal. (US EPA GHG Equivalencies Calculator)
Over the past 18 years that Bethlehem has operated our yard waste collection and composting program, the composted yard waste has saved a minimum estimated 260,000 tons/520 million lbs of CO2 equivalents.

(Rough estimate of yard waste collected. USCC conversion factor.)
Challenges

- Enforcement: Commercial enforcement is “hit and miss” at best. Getting haulers to consistently turn in quarterly reports is an onerous task.
- There is no current residential enforcement effort or mechanism.
Recycling rates have largely plateaued in recent years, with notable spikes when curbside haulers went to single stream in 2010, and with creation of the community recycling stations and expanded collection events in 2014-2015.
Challenges Continued

- Downturn in recycling markets, including very recently with “National Sword” scare, have created a situation where cost to recycle materials is in some cases nearly equal with landfill tipping fees.
Possible Next Steps

- Focus on commercial recycling outreach and enforcement.
- Review existing local law and complete revisions as appropriate based on food scraps law and other changes since 2011.
- New education and outreach efforts to residents that fully incorporate tools like social media, video, peer ambassadors, etc.
Contact

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