

Ulster County Legislature



UC RRA Reform Committee

Meeting Minutes

February 15, 2024 at 1:00 PM

KL Binder Library, 6th Floor, County Office Building, Kingston

Committee Members:

Mike Baden, Chair

President, Ulster County Association of Town Supervisors and Mayors

Tracey Bartels, Vice-Chair

Legislative Chair Designee

Legislator Manna Jo Greene

Energy, Environment & Sustainability Representative

Laura Petit

Minority Designee

Comptroller March Gallagher

Ulster County Comptroller

Deputy County Executive Amanda LaValle

Ulster County Executive Designee

Jim Gordon, Vice-Chair

UCRRA Board of Directors

Other Attendees: Regis Obijiski, Chair of UCRRA

Call Meeting to Order: 1:05 PM

Chair Baden expresses relief at low recycling contamination rates in municipalities.

Members of the Committee were trying to figure out what KCMIX was on the report, Committee Members agreed that it was referred to a unique type of commingled recycling in the city of Kingston, possibly including fibers and paper.

Former Legislator Petit notes low contamination rate in recycling despite large quantity diverted.

Chair Baden explains that when a town receives recycling, any contamination is charged to the town's monthly bill, regardless of the type of contamination.

Comptroller Gallagher asks if there is a more granular analysis of contamination by waste stream type, but Chair Baden is unsure if this information is available.

Chair Baden and Legislator Greene discuss paint contamination in Rochester, NY, with a focus on improving diversion and addressing problem materials.

Vice Chair Bartels expresses frustration with the state's paint recycling program, which is not good and not working, and advocates for a broader program that includes all stores that sell paint over a certain square footage.

Former Legislator Petit agrees that education is needed to inform people about the limited number of municipalities that accept latex paint at hazardous waste events and mentions the village of New Paltz's exchange program as an example. She also suggests adding a product stewardship law to require manufacturers to take back their products, like paint, for proper disposal.

Vice Chair Bartels mentions a successful paint recycling program in New Jersey, where paint is reused and sold at a discount.

The group discusses the need for easier access to paint recycling programs in New York State, with some members suggesting that elected officials should be vocal about the issue.

Former Petit mentions a paint collection program in the village hall, with volunteers collecting latex paint and a list of other drop-off locations provided by the paint stewardship program.

Vice Chair Bartels notes that the public must be New York State residents for a collection site within a 15-mile radius, and that big box stores like Lowe's and Home Depot do not have to accept the paint for recycling.

Vice Chair Bartels advocates for broad, easy, and secure drug take-back locations to address concerns about disposal restrictions and safety.

Residents may not realize that flushing medication can lead to environmental contamination.

Companies take proactive steps to properly dispose of sharps due to potential health risks.

Towns in the Rondout Valley area are implementing a plastic bag recycling program, with mixed success and challenges.

Vice Chair Bartels expresses frustration with the slow collection of plastic recyclables, citing a lack of confirmation that they are being recycled.

Chair Baden mentions that collecting plastic takes a long time, and the town had to wait several months before starting again.

Vice Chair Bartels emphasizes the need to reduce and avoid plastic use, while Mike Baden suggests focusing on recycling efforts despite potential lack of market.

Comptroller Gallagher expresses concern about operations staff at OCRA not being encouraged to consider capital investment for better separation and less contamination.

Vice Gordon highlights the danger of using plastic screws and suggests educating the public on their risks.

Former Legislator Petit suggests upgrading the Murf recycling facility to handle single-use plastics.

Chair Baden credits RA team's education efforts for lower contamination rates.

Manufacturers prioritize cheaper packaging over sustainability, leading to increased plastic waste.

Chair Obijiski suggests a market for AI-assisted source separation, with a focus on local production and consumption.

Vice Chair Bartels questions how contamination is measured in recycling, with Mike Baden suggesting it's only tracked when it exceeds a certain percentage.

Chair Baden notes that contamination in the commingled recycling stream is a significant issue, with glass being a particular challenge due to lack of tracking and education.

Vice Chair Gordon suggests tracking contamination levels every three or four months to monitor progress and identify areas for improvement.

Refrigerator disposal methods vary, with some taking whole units and others removing Freon on site.

Vice Chair Bartels and former Legislator Petit discuss the issue of people cutting refrigerator and air conditioning lines and disposing of them in scrap metal bins, despite the dangers and illegality of doing so.

Chair Baden, a recycling expert, suggests a solution where the town hires an outside person to collect and properly dispose of these items, which could break even or even make a profit.

Former Legislator Petit mentions a local vendor providing energy efficiency services more frequently due to a change in location.

Legislator Greene highlights the importance of stakeholder input in the drafting of laws related to refrigerant management, citing the organization New Yorkers for Cool Refrigerant Management as a resource.

Chair Baden mentions that pizza boxes are difficult to recycle due to grease contamination, but some communities are successfully doing it.

Vice Chair Gordon and former Legislator Petit discuss the potential for composting or shredding pizza boxes to reduce waste but note that it would require additional operations costs.

Vice Chair Bartels questions the reliability of a Domino's Pizza-funded study on recyclability of greasy pizza boxes.

Chair Baden suggests using clear plastic containers for takeout food instead of black or white plastic, as optical sorters can't distinguish between them.

The group discusses the feasibility of regulated recycling and the potential for AI to help sort materials more effectively.

Vice Chair Bartels discusses the need for flow control regulated recycling in Ulster County, despite state law prohibition.

Vice Chair Bartels emphasizes the importance of flow control for regulated recyclables to ensure enforcement and financial sustainability.

Former Legislator Petit expresses concerns about changing recycling policies without a market or infrastructure in place.

Legislators debate regulating recyclables, including scrap metal, in local law.

Vice Chair Bartels expresses concerns about the financial burden of implementing a countywide recycling system, potentially leading to push back from towns and municipalities.

Former Legislator Petit suggests considering free electronics recycling as a way to increase participation and make recycling more accessible to residents.

Legislator Greene emphasizes the importance of contamination rates in recycling.

Chair Baden suggests scheduling additional meetings in March, potentially on the 1st, 14th or 28th, and discusses the possibility of moving the meeting time earlier or later.

The group discusses the contract and the need to provide the legislature with an extension on the time, with Comptroller Gallagher suggesting they focus on the hardest part first.

Chair Baden seeks to schedule a meeting for the 1st, 14th or 21st, with a time change to 9:30 am.

Repair and reuse initiatives discussed, including organization "Repair Cafe."

Deputy County Executive LaValle shares a 1970 comprehensive solid waste action plan for Ulster County and newspaper clippings.

Next Meetings:

Friday, March 1, 2024 @ 9:30 AM
Thursday, March 14, 2024 @ 9:30 AM
Thursday, March 21, 2024 @ 9:30 AM

Adjournment

Motion No. 2:

MOTION TO ADJOURN

Motion Made By:

Former Legislator Petit

Motion Seconded By:

Vice Chair Gordon

No. of Votes in Favor:

7

No. of Votes Against: 0

TIME: 2:41 PM

Respectfully submitted: Lizvett Bost, Legislative Administrative Assistant
Minutes Approved: March 1, 2024