

RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS ON CURRENT PLANS TO EXPAND PLASTICS RECYCLING WITHIN THE CITY OF ANN ARBOR

A number of important questions have been recently raised by Ann Arbor residents about the potential for expanding the types of plastics collected in Ann Arbor. I appreciate the opportunity to provide some context regarding Ann Arbor's recycling program.

The City of Ann Arbor contracts with FCR, Inc. a subsidiary of Casella Waste to process and market the materials recovered from the Ann Arbor materials recovery facility (MRF). FCR markets approximately 1.2 MILLION tons of material/year nationwide. Our facility generates about 30,000 tons of recyclables per year.

The City of Ann Arbor values maximum recovery, and our household recovery rate is over 50% (including composting and recycling)! We are currently looking to expand our commercial recycling efforts, to get beyond the approximate 20% recovery rate in this sector.

The Ann Arbor program does include a wide variety of materials in its program, and has greatly simplified sorting into two recycling bins--one for mixed papers and one for mixed containers. Over 90% of our citizens recycle at some level of intensity. Ann Arbor dedicates approximately \$2.5 million/year to our recycling efforts.

We have, however, been quite conservative in adding new materials to our program, and for a number of reasons. The primary reason for our caution is long-term market sustainability for a given product. We need to know that there are solid, long-term markets for a given commodity before we will add it to our mix. You can imagine the problems we would encounter with the public if we added a material only to remove it six months later. Once a material is deemed "recyclable" it remains recyclable to the public forever thereafter. Second, we need to assess the volume of the commodity in the waste stream, and gauge the importance of removing it in competition with other materials and the overall "loading capacity" of our processing facility. Third, we need to evaluate the shipping frequency of a given commodity and the ability to store materials on-site for indefinite periods of time.

Currently the City of Ann Arbor accepts only plastic bottles labeled #1 PET, commonly used for water and soda; and #2 HDPE, commonly used for milk jugs, laundry detergent bottles, and personal care products such as shampoo and lotions.

Looking at plastics #3-7 (including yogurt tubs) we have not been able to justify this addition given the criteria listed above. Specifically, we are hearing about the 1-7 plastics recycling program at SOCCRA (www.soccra.org). Although the Southeast Oakland County Resource Recovery Authority (which includes such communities as

Birmingham, Royal Oak and Troy) has accepted 1-7 plastics for the past year, they have not have secured, long-term markets for this material. SOCCRA's plastics buyer is currently shipping this material on a sporadic basis to China via Vietnam, for hand sorting of the delivered materials, with the ultimate percentage recovery rate unknown. In addition, these plastics comprise only 11% of their total plastics recovered (the rest being PET and HDPE plastics that Ann Arbor also recovers), which is only 1/2 of 1% of their total recycling stream.

Ann Arbor has chosen to push for the maximum possible recovery of our core recyclables as the key to increased recovery, rather than adding new materials which don't ultimately have much of an impact on the waste stream. Oakland County is currently shipping this mixed plastic off-site only four times/year, having to store the material on-site until adequate volumes are achieved. Providing such long-term storage at the Ann Arbor site would likely displace storage of higher volume/throughput materials.

All of this is not to say that Ann Arbor is not interested in pursuing the addition of new materials, including plastics. We will continue to work with FCR in assessing opportunities in this regard. And please understand it is in Ann Arbor and FCR's mutual interest to increase our recovery of recyclables overall, because both parties get a share of the revenues generated from the sale of materials. However, we will continue to assess opportunities that will meet our long-term interests, providing long-term, sustainable and predictable markets for our recovered materials.

Thank you for your interest and support of recycling,

Bryan Weinert
Solid Waste Coordinator
City of Ann Arbor
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