

## *Local Political Processes*



Many communities today must decide how best to deal with waste. Most states still manage waste primarily by landfilling it. Many disposal sites, however, don't have adequate safeguards to prevent water seepage through the waste into the rivers. Further, some disposal sites also breed rats and other vermin. Many of the sites have reached capacity and new ones are needed.

Opening a new landfill is very difficult, time consuming, and costly. New landfills generally are much more expensive to build, operate, and maintain than older landfills because of the added expense of several environmental safeguards.

In addition, landfills tend to remove valuable land from productive and recreational uses.

One way to reduce the disposal problem is to increase recycling and composting. While recycling and composting are usually voluntary activities, across the country a growing number of cities and towns are facing mandatory recycling and composting ordinances.

In many states, the legal authority to require recycling and composting rests with local governments. Village, city, and township boards regulate collection and solid waste handling. Therefore, local boards can prohibit people from discarding recyclables and compostable materials in the trash. In many cases, the local government will hold public hearings to gain a sense of public attitudes and to allow people to participate in the decision making process. As county waste plans are made, public hearings are required by law.

### Scenario:

To reduce the waste going to a landfill, the local solid waste authority or district has developed a waste management plan with the assistance of a consulting firm. The plan follows the general direction given by the state, and calls for a bi-level trash collection fee to encourage recycling. Trash will be set out at the curb in clear plastic bags, and if any recyclable materials are found in the bag, the fee will double. Recycling boxes will be provided to each household. Residents are asked to separate out recyclable materials and set them at the curb. A completely voluntary recycling program has been in existence for some time, but recycling rates are still low. However, this nonprofit operation will be expanded to handle collection, processing, and sale of recyclables. Yard wastes are also banned from trash bags. They may be composted in the back yard, or picked up once a month at the curb by the local government to be composted in a rural area nearby.

The local government board has called a public hearing to review the new ordinance. You will play the roles of local politicians, public officials, and interested citizens at the public hearing.

### **Public Hearing:**

1. Will the city adopt a new mandatory recycling/composting ordinance?
2. What possible fines will be associated with this possible adoption?

### **Who's Involved:**

1. City Chairperson
2. Engineering Consultant
3. President of the Local League of Citizens Against Taxes
4. Solid Waste Director
5. Environmental Activist
6. Local Property Owner (of site next to existing recycling center)
7. Leader of the Sanitation Workers Local Union
8. Local Wastepaper Dealer
9. Scrap-metal Dealer
10. Representative of the Michigan DNA
11. Owner/Operator of Local Landfill
12. City Board Members (3)
13. Local Reporter

### **Things to Consider:**

- × Good of Community
- × Community members involved
- × Possible fine issues/proposals
- × Enforcement of program if adopted

### **To Do:**

1. Obtain a role from Ms. Alan...students assigned to the given roles will make presentations on the day of the hearing.
  - a. Local reporter and board members...you have a modified assignment. Please talk to Ms. Alan
2. You are preparing for a simulated hearing, so write out a presentation outline that you will follow on the day of presentations. This is due the day of the hearing. Be convincing...remember that you want the local government to vote in your favor!
3. All presentations must have at least one visual to support them.

### **Format:**

This will be run as a local hearing. Each person will be given 1-2 minutes to speak, and rebuttals are allowed after the final presentation as long as order is kept. The board members will decide the order of presentations and will run this hearing. All members involved are to listen to each other and be respectful.

Upon the conclusion of the presentations and rebuttals the class will vote on the two most convincing arguments-one that is for the program and one that is against. They will have the opportunity to face off in one final debate and the winner will receive extra credit.

Upon conclusion of the hearing the council will meet and make their final decision.

### **Board Members:**

- Must decide order and exact format of hearing
- Must keep meeting organized
- Develop questions to ask those that are speaking at the board meeting
- In your final decision, what do you think the people of the community will want?

### **Chair of City Commission:**

Your area has a severe problem with escalating costs of waste management. Your current landfill is about to close and a new one is about to open soon. Calculations have shown that recycling will result in lower waste management costs. However, many people do not understand the details of these calculations. The majority of people favor this ordinance and want it to be implemented, but you know that it will be successful only if there is widespread support, including local news media and community leaders.

### **Engineering Consultant:**

You have been selected by the commission staff to do the engineering and economic studies for the expanded recycling program. You have recommended the ordinance as a way of increasing levels of recycling. You have also prepared the detailed implementation plan. Opponents have claimed that there are errors in your calculations and your plans are unrealistic. You are nationally known for your work, but opponents criticize you because you are from another state. Supporters of the ordinance have praised your work and find no major errors that would affect the conclusions you have reached.

### **President of Local League of Citizens Against Taxes:**

Increased recycling will result in higher local government expenditures. Your organization has found many instances of government insufficiency that wasted tax dollars. Many of your members are retired, on fixed incomes, or are low-income families. Your members would experience hardships from higher taxes. You favor more recycling and educational programs to stimulate reuse and waste reduction. You don't believe there's a solid waste crisis. In any event, government subsidies to non-profit organizations are not appropriate until private enterprise is given a chance to do it for a profit at no cost to taxpayers.

### **Solid Waste Director:**

You are faced with a mandate from the commission to reduce the solid waste disposed in your city by 25% in five years. Voluntary recycling has been moderately successful, but participation has not been high enough. One workable choice seems to be an ordinance requiring that every household separate its trash.

**Environmental Activist:**

You are an *outspoken* supporter of this program, but you think that it does not go far enough. You believe the goal for reducing waste should be 50%, not 25%. You are critical of the plan because it does not require more materials to be recycled, and are in favor of stiffer penalties for violators. You feel that the world is being destroyed by pollution and that recycling and composting are important ways to help save our planet.

**Local Property Owner:**

You own property next to the existing recycling center and are currently leasing it. The proposed ordinance will triple the amount of materials processed at the center. Your present tenant is an upscale auto paint shop that specializes in luxury cars. They are concerned that the increased traffic at the recycling center will make the property unsightly, introduce blowing paper, and create a generally objectionable appearance. They have already said they will not renew their lease if the ordinance passes. You expect to have trouble renting the property in the future with a large scale processing center next door.

**Leader of the Local Sanitations Workers Union:**

You are concerned that the 25% of the waste now collected by the members of your union will be directed to recycling and composting, or simply not be collected because of waste reduction. This could possibly cause unemployment. You will support the recycling program only if you are guaranteed that none of your members will lose his or her jobs *and* that the recycling workers be members of the union. If there is a reduced need for workers collecting waste for disposal, they should be eligible for transfer to the recycling program.

**Local Wastepaper Dealer:**

You've been buying paper from the recycling center for 10 years. You have good markets for the paper, and look forward to buying wastepaper in greater amounts. The recycling center operation can collect the paper cheaper than you can, so you see the non-profit/private business partnership as being very good for you. You have strongly supported the mandatory ordinance all along and believe that recycling paper will reduce the overall cost of waste management to the community because: 1) revenues will be generated by the sale of the paper; and 2) the recycled paper avoids the very expensive new disposal costs.

**Representative of the Michigan DNR:**

You strongly support increased recycling and composting. You can describe successful mandatory recycling and composting programs in other areas. The old landfill is a potential health hazard and the community will benefit from its closure. Recycling is quite desirable from an environmental point of view. It saves land by reducing disposal, saves energy, and lessens pollution of all kinds.

### **Scrap Metal Dealer:**

You are adamantly opposed to government subsidies to recycling centers in any form. You say it's an example of government interference in private enterprise. You feel that the government subsidy to non-profit recyclers takes scrap metal away from you. You previously recycled some paper, but now people take it to the subsidized recycling center, and they sell it to someone else. The local government has no right to use your tax money to set up a competitor. The expanded program may cut into your scrap metal business by recovering cans and selling them elsewhere.

### **Local Landfill Owner/Operator:**

You favor recycling and composting, but fear that less waste coming to your landfill may decrease your profits, forcing you to raise your disposal fee for the remaining waste. This "economy of scale" problem will be difficult to "sell" to the public and you feel that your public image will be damaged. You have told people that you do not believe that high levels of recycling can be sustained because it markets for recycled products will not absorb the increased quantities.

### **Local Newspaper Reporter:**

You write the most read column in the paper, and your opinion matters to the people of this community. You have not fully formed your opinion yet, though you do not like the idea of someone "forcing" you to do something. Further, you have a hard time believing that this policy can actually be enforced or that people of the community will actually pay the fines. Your job is to enter the meeting with an unbiased opinion, something you are *usually* good at.