

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENERGY COMMITTEE
REGARDING INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS IN LRSWMD
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016

INTRODUCTION TO LRSWMD

The LRSWMD is a 12-town union municipality covering all of Lamoille County and two towns from Orleans and Washington Counties with a year-round population of approximately 27,000. The District includes towns like Stowe which has a robust 4-season tourist and 2nd home economy and it also includes towns like Belvidere which boasts a general store and just 297 residents. We exist at the intersection of where Chittenden County meets Northeast Kingdom providing for a wildly diverse socio-economic demographic. While we lack the route density that provides an economy of scale in Chittenden County we have towns with the same high standards and expectations for services. Our smaller towns suffer for their rural nature lacking hauling services as in the NEK and yet are held to the same standard for diversion as large urban communities.

WHY FUNDING IS NEEDED FOR THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF ACT 148?

The overall mantra of this bold, progressive and yet unfunded mandate otherwise known as The Universal Recycling Law was: convenient, consistent, and cost-effective services. That was the promise Act 148 was to deliver. Two years into implementation, we continue to drift further and further away from those concepts.

CURBSIDE COLLECTION SERVICES

Six years ago there were 19 licensed solid waste haulers in the LRSWMD and today we have just 11. Most notably, in the past year the LRSWMD lost two of the six licensed solid waste haulers that provide residential curbside service. One of the remaining four haulers one of them has just 20 customers, and another services just one of our 12 town. ***Therefore, the existing hauling infrastructure is currently not sufficient to collect all of the materials required by Act 148.***

The curbside collection haulers that have remained in business have increased prices, dropped outlying customers, and reconfigured their services in response to Act 148. Here are the two common scenarios: for those who had curbside recycling before Act 148 their haulers have “jacked up their subscription rates 15 to 20%” and reduced recycling pick up from every week to every other week. Those who did not have curbside recycling service before Act 148 now have it offered but only once every 4 weeks which is inadequate and their decks, porches and garages are overflowing with recyclable materials. So when that happens they bring the overflow to drop-off facilities which cannot charge to accept them. So the privately operated facilities simply refuse those people service because they are not bringing in trash with them to offset the cost to the facility for storing, shipping, and tipping. In some cases haulers have given their customers difficult specifications for collection of curbside recycling such as cutting all their cardboard into 12” x 12” pieces. ***There is nothing convenient, cost-effective or consistent in any of these systems.***

ORGANICS

Since the enactment of Act 148, the only permitted composting facility in the LRSWMD went out of business. What remains are 2 very small chicken-feeding operations and according to a report prepared for the LRSWMD by CTS in 2014 those were already operating at full capacity. Two years ago the CVSWM, our neighbor to the south, collected food scraps along the Mountain Road in Stowe. Last year they ceased providing out-of-district services and GrowCompost took over some of those accounts. This year GrowCompost is for sale and the owners have relocated out of state. While some of the largest food scrap generators back haul their food scraps

(grocery stores) or transport them long distances to facilities outside the LRSWMD ***we have no reliable infrastructure for collection, hauling or processing of food scraps for the remaining 98% of the population.*** There is just over 1 year left figure out collection, transportation and processing....none of that will be free...it will require an investment in kitchen containers, backyard composters and green cones, collection vehicles and facilities for composting.

According to Act 148, leaf and yard waste must be managed according to the organics hierarchy provided. Both facilities and haulers are required to collect leaf and yard waste as of last July. Our current practice is to collect this material at our facilities and transport it to a site where it is stockpiled until winter when it is pushed into a long-defunct gravel pit. While our certification allows this on-site management, we are in danger of being out of compliance with Act 148 because this does not meet the intent of the hierarchy.

Clean wood will be also banned from the landfill on July 1, 2016. While small DIY operations may be able to separate out their clean wood, the nearest C&D recycling facility from Stowe, the largest generator of this material, is 40 miles away. The LRSWMD recently met with Myers to work out a diversion program but the cost of hauling and tipping C&D would run approximately \$120/ton compared with \$72/ton for that same material to be sent to the landfill. ***C&D recycling infrastructure is neither convenient nor cost effective for those who live outside Chittenden County.***

WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE US?

Ideally, infrastructure and planning funds would have preceded the deadlines for implementation of these mandates. Those who say Act 148 is doing just fine without an infusion of money are not basing this on statistically defensible numbers across the board. ***We have lost haulers, we have lost composters, and we have no evidence that suggests this situation will turn around ever.***

While we support the goals of diversion and beneficial reuse it comes at a price. We rely heavily on the private sector to provide collection, storage, hauling and processing. We have not seen any significant investment from the private sector in the LRSWMD to meet statewide diversion goals and the mandates of Act 148. They simply cannot afford to. Where the private sector fails to act or cannot act the District is compelled to fill in the gaps and yet we have no funds for feasibility studies or infrastructure.

However, funding for Act 148 would provide haulers with trucks that collect MSW and recycling in one run, it would provide landscapers and property managers with chippers for managing leaf and yard waste on site, it would pay for a composting facility to be developed in the LRSWMD so that our organics do not have to travel long distances burning up diesel fuel, it would provide municipalities the funds to place recycling bins next to every trash bin in their towns, it would provide for compost bins for those who can manage organics on their own property. ***It would allow the intent of the Universal Recycling Law to be realized: convenient, cost effective and consistent services statewide and a diversion rate that is expected of the Green Mountain State.***

Respectfully submitted,

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