



Zero Waste Advisory Commission

Meeting Minutes

June 12, 2020

The Special Meeting of the Zero Waste Advisory Commission convened through Video Conference on Friday, June 12, 2020, due to COVID-19 Disaster Declaration for all Texas Counties. The following are the meeting highlights. For detailed information please visit: <https://austintx.new.swagit.com/videos/63251>

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Acuna called the Commission Meeting to order at 1:03 pm

Board Members in Attendance: Gerry Acuna, Cathy Gattuso, Ian Steyaert, Kaiba White, Lisa Barden, Amanda Masino, Jonathan Barona, Melissa Rothrock

Staff in attendance via WebEx: Ken Snipes, Jaime Germany Terry, Victoria Rieger, Gena McKinley, Tammie Williamson, Richard McHale, Mike Turner, Jason McComb, Donald Hardee, Amy Slagle

Staff in attendance over the phone: Marcus Gonzalez, Blanche Quarterman

Speakers: Scott Pasternak, Seth Cunningham, Jeffrey Jacoby

Chair Acuna opened with comments,

1. APPROVAL OF May 15, 2020 SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

Chair Acuna entertained a motion. Commissioner Jonathan Barona moved for approval. Seconded by Commissioner Cathy Gattuso. Item passed Unanimously

2. NEW BUSINESS

2a. Master Plan Update Burns and McDonnell—Scott Pasternak begins the presentation with opening remarks. With these unprecedented times, as an Austin resident for going on more than 30 years now, thank you to all of the operators, for the City of Austin, within ARR as well as on the private sector. I appreciate your services. The presentation starts with an overview and a progress update. We started with extensive research, analysis, and recommendations, ultimately we will develop a master plan with goals and objectives. We've already developed an outline of the update for the master plan and later we will provide multiple drafts to the city. The first key finding communicates that of these 13 cities, Austin's Diversion Rate only trails the west coast cities like Los Angeles, Portland, San Diego, and Seattle in terms of where they are with their Diversion rate. These cities have with higher rates have been doing this longer. These other cities also mandate and have enforcement efforts. One of the more interesting findings is that cities that consider multiple generator types have a generally higher diversion rate.

Regardless of whether you're at home, out at a restaurant, or at a business you have the zero waste opportunities for diversion. A number of these cities that have higher diversion rates we'll require a recycling mandate and or enforcements and also material bans. One challenge for Austin is the lack of detail on commercial waste generation but this is a very common data gap amongst other cities. How Austin frames your waste as a vision is very much consistent with other industry and municipal definitions. In a later slide, we will provide you with what our perspective is in terms of what zero waste means, not only for the City of Austin but from many of the institutions we get. Some of the key findings and recommendations from our analysis are: it's our opinion that complementary measurement methods, ideas like a disposal rate, and a capture rate as possible in other words, rather than only looking at the big picture diversion rate, what we're seeing is that some cities are looking at other types of measurement efforts like disposal rates and capture rates. Examples of this would be both Seattle and San Francisco. While San Francisco has one of the most sophisticated zero waste program, we placed them at the bottom because they've decided they're no longer going to publish a diversion rate. After all, from their perspective, we do think that they don't think it's indicative of the progress that they're making. We believe that it's an important piece of information to share as a benchmark. Some other key issues here is that there's a need to evaluate options to obtain more detailed data from haulers. That's going to be a part of what we're presently doing under the task of research. Also, the city is embarking on a waste characterization analysis, so we've provided detailed recommendations for the city on how to complete this most effectively by looking into capture rates.

We are also recommending that we do evaluate the contents of the residential set outs through efforts like cart audit, data entry, as well as notices for contamination. Mike Turner and his team are leading the effort for that. He also has a lead role in waste characterization efforts. We hope that our analysis has provided some key benefits to Mike and his team in the work that they're doing. ARR identified 16 research topics, as part of the task to research. We developed an outline provided to ARR that communicates specific aspects of that plan. We are very much still in the research and analysis phase of this work. Zero is not a static defined benchmark of eliminating landfill disposal of waste, but rather it is a vision or a philosophy around which communities and society should develop and adapt their materials management systems and culture. Zero Waste is a vision of continuous improvement for aggressively working toward maximizing the use of resources and minimizing adverse environmental impacts and material disposal. In 2011, the plan had very lofty goals, we think that those goals are very meaningful, but we wanted to put them in perspective relative to 2020. Diverting seventy-five percent of solid waste from landfills in 2020 was the goal, however, the current diversion rate is 42%. While it's significantly lower than that 75% number, it still only trails the west coast cities. Those cities have a much longer zero waste focus. We think that it's really important to maintain the long term vision for zero waste. We might consider setting some interim goals on a five-year type of basis. We will continue to work with ARR as well as ZWAC and other stakeholders to consider refining metrics as part of this master planning. One thing we wanted to communicate to ZWAC is to consider setting goals utilizing alternative or complementary metrics that will capture progress towards your waste goals. We are looking to focus on continuing to reduce landfill tonnage, increasing the capture of program materials, then for some other categories involving the commercial sector, or other city departments looking at goals that are focused on topics like increasing access as well as participation.

We've been able to calculate what the capture rate is present with various types of materials and then work with ARR to develop goals in terms of how to look to increase those capture rates over the next course of the next five years. If Austin is going to look to make continued Zero Waste progress, there may be a need to consider multiple policy decisions. With the rollout of the URO there are some reporting requirements on the commercial sector, but looking to enhance what can be done from a reporting perspective could be very meaningful to help the city better understand their progress and what programs are successful, and what programs could essentially be updated or changed. If the city does what it works to achieve goals similar to some of those west coast cities, all of them do have activities like mandatory recycling participation enforcement efforts and indoor bans. This may be a topic that the city needs to explore further to achieve some of those goals.

Chair Acuna asks for questions. Commissioner Lisa Barden asks, in the stage of the presentation where you referred to the current diversion rate of 42% when you say current, is that based on 2015 numbers or is it still 42% in 2020?

Response: That's based on 2015 numbers. The reason why we did that is when the City of Austin completed the detailed characterization analysis. So right now the city is in the process I believe of starting that next stage of the characterization work.

Commissioner Barden: 2020 was one of the years that was earmarked for a 70% diversion rate so it would be nice to know where we are concerning what was projected or proposed at the very beginning.

Chair Acuna asks for additional questions. Commissioner Amanda Masino states the first questions are more detail-oriented about Seattle, when did Seattle implement their fees? Is that 2002, 2003? There's a slight uptick in the diversion line, I'm wondering if that matches up right? Seth request to have Jonathan (staff member) provide details of the case study later in the meeting. Commissioner Masino asks another question, when you mentioned getting more information from haulers, to get more detail on the waste characterization, could you talk a little bit about how much of that would require a process change versus how much might require the purchase of equipment or additional personnel?

Response: It's more of a change in the processes or requirements rather than an increase in personnel or equipment. Concerning the characterization work, our understanding is that Austin is hired or is hiring a contractor to do that work. There are requirements in the URO in terms of data that can be provided. Some of that data is meaningful, but in other cases, there are gaps in that data.

Mike Turner from Quality Assurance responds: In a previous meeting, you may remember I introduced the RQS team part of Quality Assurance, the Residential Quality Services team that's dedicated to looking at how citizens are using their carts. That analysis that we're talking about here introduced in the master plan update is part of different types of analysis such as the capture rate. This is an area where we're expanding and will continue to expand our current analysis by looking at the set-out rate. We're also implementing a Customer Partnership Program where we're looking directly at the individual carts and communicating with customers at that level. We are also looking at ways to expand looking at the commercial side of waste collection which is a little bit more challenging because that's a portion that we don't control. Burns and McDonnell are recommending that we implement specific processes so we can get a better view of what commercial haulers are doing as well.

Director Ken Snipes: Quickly I'm going to add in comparison to the system in Seattle one thing that's important to remember is that with any system you're going to hit a point in which diversion kind of runs into a wall. One thing that Seattle was successful with was implementing bans and pushing the bar where you identify those critical items that are remaining in the waste stream. We're going to have to be a little bit more creative in how we push the bar and push the envelope in some of those areas. The education component is a huge understanding where we are, what gaps are what people are responding to or not, will all be crucial aspects that we have to pay close attention to. We'll continue to work as we go forward to dig into the data and the numbers to see what would be the best approach going forward.

Commissioner Cathy Gattuso: When you say mandate does that mean it's law and people will be fined?

Response: Scott Pasternak, I think that's just a part of the planning process to make those decisions. Anytime you're looking at putting the ordinances in place enforcement actions could also be a part of that discussion. To look at making significant changes, those could be some of the tough decisions that the city would need to make. Our role is to help ARR staff, ZWAC, City Council to understand if you want to reach certain goals, what are the types of programs that need to be put in place.

Chair Gerry Acuna asks: On the actual Master Plan, item number 25, the financial responsibility scope right now, what exactly will this scope include?

Response: We didn't have a task within pass number two to evaluate the effectiveness of various ARR programs. A complete financial analysis of what it costs for several of the key programs, as well as a city being able to provide us with diversion data for those programs, we're going to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of those programs to look at what's the return on investment in terms of funds diverted relative to the cost to the extent that data is there, we'll be able to provide that more detailed financial analysis.

Chair Gerry Acuna provides a reminder, we have a hard stop at 2:30 so we have about 30 minutes left, having said that I would like to make a quick decision here, do we want to address item 2B which is the Economic Impact Study on C& D Diversion requirements which would be Scott and Seth again.

Response: Scott Pasternak our presentation for the C&D Economic Impact is shorter, so I will defer to Seth Cunningham who served as our Project Manager on that work.

2b. Economic Impact Study on Construction and Demolition Diversion Requirements Presentation-Burns and McDonnell

Seth Cunningham—We're doing the Economic Impact Study for C&D Diversion Requirements, I will cover everything on time given our time constraints. You all have goals and objectives of the study as follows:

1. Look at the impact of the ordinance on household affordability to go from 50% Diversion which is the current requirement to go up to 75% requirement.
2. To assess the capacity of the local reuse markets as we assess the material market and processing capacity for addition recycling in terms of going from 50 to 75% requirement,
3. To provide a recommendation on whether that should occur on October 1, 2020

In terms of the outreach and data analysis, we interview several of different types of entities, city departments, haulers, processors, and associations. We also analyzed data that we collected from Austin Resource Recovery as well as Austin Green Building and the City's Development Services Department. We took the data to quantify what the cost per square foot by project factor would be for both disposal and diversion. We could compare the economic impact of increasing diversion. A lot of the projects were already nearing the 75% diversion requirement. The issue that we uncovered with further discussion with the city as well as looking at the actual reporting rate was that the ordinance program was relatively low or has been relatively low. Our concern with that data is that it may not completely paint a picture of what those projects are doing from a diversion perspective. To give you a sense of what we say, the number of projects reporting was 163 projects in 2018 and 73 projects in 2019. Our concern with the data is that are only good projects reporting due to performing well? The bulk of the analysis that we did was in early 2020, the demolition part of the program had only been in place for a lower six months. There's not a lot of data yet on the demolition side of the C&D Ordinance.

In terms of Economic Impact, we looked at Single-Family and Multi-Family non-residential which covered a range of commercial industrial type facilities. The average number of our generation from projects total amount of material generated. If you looked at diverting 50% of that versus diverting 75% of that the net cost impact per square foot was a pretty small amount relative to the overall cost of construction and demolition in the Austin area. Single-family homes might be in a \$100 to \$200 square foot range. The net cost of going from 50 to 75% diversion is a few cents per square foot. As we transition into reuse markets, typical types of projects, or typical types of materials that were targeted for use generally things like windows, doors cabinets, light fixtures, some bricks, and plumbing fixtures. In some cases, some of these materials are not suitable. As an example in new construction if you have single-pane aluminum windows they don't have the same type of energy efficiency as newer windows. It just depends on the project by project. There is a limited number of reuse outlets in the city. Habitat for Humanity is the dominant outlet. They've been expanding but they've got the volume to handle an increase in reuse. If the city were considering mandatory deconstruction, their stores would be sufficient for our larger-scale mandate on deconstruction. In general, demolition created additional challenges for recovering material. If you've got buildings that are 30-50 years old you're dealing with things like asbestos, LED paint, and other materials. In dealing with new construction, there are fewer scrap materials. Some additional challenges with material handling in an ideal world you'd have a roll-off box from a construction project.

Our role is to provide more technical assistance, education outreach related to best practices about configuring job sites, ways to reduce contamination, and also guiding what is recyclable and what is best to go in the landfill containers. Demolition projects have only been part of the C&D Ordinance since October 1, 2019. We've got a limited amount of data collected from demolition projects. Overall the percentage reporting is relatively low for the overall C&D Ordinance project. I think having the opportunity to have that enforcement program in place and review that data would be great. On October 1, 2020, the City Council needs to decide whether or not to have that be a time where projects would have to be increased from 50% to 75% diversion. Our recommendation would be to consider delaying and to factor in a phased approach where the city has time to implement its enforcement program and have a chance to better see how projects are performing when more projects are reporting.

Chair Acuna asks for questions.

Commissioner Ian Stayert: Since we're going to recommend a delay partially at least to the fact that we got a report there's a drop in the number of projects reporting but didn't mention what percentage is that. Is that 1% reporting:?

Response Seth Cunningham: My understanding is that it's I think somewhere in the 30-40% range. It's not 1%.

Commissioner Ian Stayert: If we're going to ask for a delay, we should probably just have more of a concrete action plan as to what it's going to take then to make sure we don't delay it again.

Commissioner Kaiba White: I have a question when you say how, how much of it goes away?

Response Seth Cunningham: My understanding is on the enforcement side. That program is under development and would be implemented sometime late this year or early next calendar year 20201. I would think it would be reasonable to have a year's worth of data. At what point will projects have to comply when the enforcement program starts.

4.FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

Chair Gerry Acuna requests Budget update and Household Hazardous Waste Re-opening

Commissioner Kaiba White request an update on in recycling capacity

ADJOURNMENT Chair Acuna entertains a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Ian Steyaert moves for adjournment. Seconded by Commissioner Jonathan Barona. The meeting was adjourned by Chair Acuna at 2:36 pm.