

Gustavus Disposal & Recycling Center (DRC) Quarterly Staff Report
Ian Barrier, DRC Manager/ Operator
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General Operations and Management

The DRC and its staff have been busy this quarter with the peak of the summer season coming and going and the many large projects that are currently in development and construction at the DRC such as the landfill expansion and new building project. This quarter the DRC's operation permit and operation plan was due for renewal and our new permit became effective on October 2nd, 2025 and expires on October 2nd, 2030. The operation plan was updated to include any changes I have made since I became manager. Some of those changes include how public salvaging is handled, details on scrap metal limitations, how we handle hazardous waste now that we have a hazardous waste shed, uses for the new white shipping container, and mound management to name a few.

Fish Waste Bins

The city installed fish waste bins by the boat harbor a few years ago and it has taken awhile for the locals to realize it is there and available for use. I am happy to report it was used frequently during the summer season and the fish waste will contribute to some healthy compost. I also want to mention the fish waste bins were used during fall hunting season for waterfowl and I thought this was completely acceptable. I personally think it should be noted on the bins that disposal of waterfowl is okay.

Tours

The DRC gets requests for tours from time to time and this quarter I had two notable groups/individuals request tours. The first notable tour was a group of folks that were from the Juneau Garden Club and they mainly wanted to learn about our compost operation. It was fun to show the group how we handle food waste in Gustavus and we were able to exchange some knowledge on composting in Southeast Alaska. Most of the questions I was asked was related to the differences in large scale composting operations and composting at home. The biggest differences we discussed is how a large scale operation can handle a wider variety of organic waste without issue; such as dairy, meats, and corn based plastics such as compostable bags, which in comparison to composting at home you likely would want to restrict these kind of things from ending up in your compost pile due to smells and how it can attract rodents and other animals. I also learned that the Juneau Garden Club was founded in 1927, I had no idea they have been active for almost one-hundred years. At the end of the tour they gifted me a copy of their third edition book, Gardening in Southeast Alaska. Another notable tour which I had the joy of giving the day after Halloween was for Tom Begich, so on Saturday November 1st Wayne Howl brought Tom to the DRC for a tour of the facility and to learn more about our waste program. We introduced each other and Tom made it clear he wasn't his brother Nick Begich and we had a laugh. I then showed Tom around the facility. He showed interested in just about everything I showed him and was very knowledgeable in the field of solid waste and recycling. Tom was excited to see how dedicated we were to our recycling program and how thorough we were in separating and processing our materials. I also explained to him how the Community Chest is apart of the DRC and how it contributes to our operation. He asked me about some of the challenges we face in Southeast Alaska related to solid waste and I mentioned shipping and the weather as some of the biggest challenges. At the end of the tour I felt as if we earned a new ally.

New Main Building

Progress on the new main building has been underway with a site survey being completed by RESPEC which is a company that works in many different fields including but not limited to energy, data management, and environmental technology and development. With this survey completed; John Berry was able to complete the RFP for the new building which outlines basic details that engineers are to follow and consider if they are interested in generating a proposal for the job. This covers everything from how the construction will be inspected, ensuring proper permits will be acquired, the basic details and specifications for the size of the building package, and its foundation. The building itself is going to be large unheated building with ample electrical infrastructure in place to power all of our equipment. The large size will allow us to set up stations for

processing some of our materials indoors without clogging the building. Stations inside the building could be used for processing and packing e-waste, processing non-ferrous metals with our alligator shears, a section to stage refrigerators and freezers for evacuation, and a section for stripping wire is what I have imagined. The building will also be designed with the idea that things could be reorganized from time to time as our operation grows. An existing building in town that I have to compare the size to is the school gym. I have spent some time in the gym trying to imagine how all these things will look.

Labor

The labor situation has not changed since my last report. The DRC being staffed by myself (Ian Barrier) as manager and Syd Glasmann as my solo member of the “temporary” labor pool and she has returned for her third season. As of this writing Syd has plans to stick it out through the winter with a desire to live in Gustavus full time. Considering these facts I think it is time for me to briefly discuss my thoughts on the City promoting her to fill the DRCs second regular position as stated in section 6.03.050 (a) (2) of the city's code and ordinance. If this change could occur before the end of the calendar year it would be good timing as the probationary period has a typical length of six months and it would end in the beginning of FY27. Although this period could be shortened or preferably voided as it was when I was first promoted to a regular position considering Syd already meets the employee qualifications and readiness to perform all the duties and responsibilities of the position; which in turn satisfies the purpose of the probationary period. Another good reason to promote Syd into a regular position is the fact that I have seen seven separate employees come and go in my four years working at the DRC, as a member of the temporary pool and as manager; with three of those member of the pool leaving in the same fiscal year. With a change such as this it would mean a pay increase to at least match the next lowest paid regular employee of the city to be fair and consistent across departments; though it could be argue it should be higher considering the physical and psychological demands that this job consists of. The mental and physical demands of the DRC is the main contributing factor to why the facility has had such a high turn around with employees. This also plagued Paul Berry especially towards the end (maybe his whole) of his career where the flow of material has increased, and has continued to increase making the job more involved as time goes on. I'm well aware of the popularity of the topic of adding regular employees and our pay rates are, but the DRC and Gustavus is growing and evolving constantly and the way the DRC is staffed by the temporary labor pool is outdated and doesn't leave employees feeling as important or satisfied with the lack of career growth opportunity other city staff members have. Another factor to consider is that the pay rates for the temporary labor pool hasn't been adjust since 2017, although I was able to get Syd a \$1.00 for FY26 and that was very much appreciated.

Landfill Expansion

Currently the expansion of the landfill is underway with Chuck Schroth winning the bid for the job. The area inside the fence has been cleared and the ground located where the fence has been installed was built up above the surrounding grade to gain some extra height. I was happy to see ample coverage from the remaining trees to help camouflage the majority of the expansion. Chuck used a pneumatic pile driver to install the fence posts and this part of the job was completed quickly. As of writing the fence isn't 100% completed with October being incredibly windy and wet making the work difficult and unpleasant. Considering the weather it seems logical for progress to be somewhat delayed. When Chuck installed the first chunk of slatted fencing it blew very hard that night and we noticed it was pushing on the posts causing them to lean. Chuck decided he is going to be pouring concrete on more of the posts to counter the wind. Once the remaining concrete and mesh is installed Chuck is going to scrape off the topsoil inside the area with his bulldozer which will make excavation of new cells much easier for us. Our skid steers are fast and efficient working in most situations but they are fairly light and digging out top soil can be tedious since roots from trees and shrubs can be enough to stop the machine; due to the lack of traction to push into the top soil and get a good bite. I am also happy to report I have not heard anything negative from the public regarding the landfill expansion.

Community Chest

The Community Chest has experienced some stress this quarter with most of it being in the last six weeks of writing this report. The situation started out with an over abundance of low quality donations (stopping short of calling it dumping) that has been discouraging to the volunteers and myself to see. It has been common for the Community Chest to get dumped on in the fall when seasonal workers and lodges shut down, often with people dumping their last belongings at the chest before they leave Gustavus on a flight for example. This has led to the volunteers and I disagreeing on how to handle the situation with some volunteers not wanting to accept any donations while others don't view it as a real issue. This led to Annie Mackovjak stepping down as lead and taking a small break from the chest, which she often does in the fall anyhow and visits family down south. As far as I know she still wants to be involved in the Community Chest and is in communication; and is just stepping down from the leadership role. This caused other volunteers to step up and make some decisions on their own which causes a disruption between the rest of the volunteers and amplified the situation in a negative way. To help mediate and move the Community Chest forward I told everyone that there is currently no active lead and all volunteers have to be involved in decision making and then run through me or Syd Glassman for a final decision; essentially we are now the leads for the time being. I have also made the decision to send Syd to the Community Chest on Wednesdays to assist whoever is at the chest and gain some insight on the operation. I have also been working on a handbook for the Community Chest so all volunteers can be on the same page and remain consistent regardless of who is active or leading. This will cover everything from opening and closing, what to do in an emergency, behavioral expectations between other volunteers, towards customers, and the standards for what the chest can and cannot accept to name a few examples. Considering all the fuss, it has encouraged me to become more active in managing the Community Chest and making sure the volunteers are going to get what they need to improve the place and stay happy. Up until the present, I was letting the chest manage itself for the most part. Looking forward I think good things are going to come from this experience. If anyone has any questions, feedback, or general comments on the Community Chest please don't hesitate to reach out to me or speak with a volunteer on the subject matter. We also want to send out some surveys to get some community input on the Community Chest and how it could be improved.

The End, thank you.

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