

Gustavus Disposal & Recycling Center (DRC) Quarterly Staff Report
Paul Berry, DRC Manager/ Operator
Monday, August 9th, 2021

My last quarterly report was at the May 10th General Meeting. My next quarterly report is scheduled for the November 8th General Meeting.

General Operations and Management

Labor

As mentioned in my May report, the DRC was not fully staffed going into the busy summer season. Normally I like to have at least three active DRC temporary labor pool members (the "Pool") going into summer and with the hiring of Heleen Buttram in early May I had two Pool members, the other being Paul Dzubay. But in early June Heleen was out because of complications from an old injury and about a week later Paul injured his wrist on his four wheeler. In a very short time I was down to just myself for staff.

Twenty years ago I was able to work solo during the summer at the DRC but the communities waste stream is much larger than before and I am that much older (and wiser). I put out a call for help and thirteen different individuals volunteered to help run the DRC. I would like to thank Artemis BonaDea, Jeff Irwin, Melanie Heacox, Mike Atkins, Chris Gabriele, Karen Platt, Ilana Guttmann, Kelly Vandenburg, Nina Zarat, Deb Johnson, Mike Gephart, Eric Syrene & one anonymous for putting in over 69 hours during June to help keep the DRC running. While those 69 hours were very helpful it was still a struggle. For comparison in June of 2020, a comparatively light June waste volume wise, the Pool put in 186 hours. A better comparison is June of 2019 when the Pool put in 295 hours for June. In 2019 and 2020 I worked 120 and 137 hours respectively during June. This June I worked 205 hours.

By the end of June I had three good applicants for the Pool and by July 1st Mike Atkins and Ian Barrier had been hired by the City and had started working at the DRC as Assistant Operators. I am very grateful to have a viable Pool again and we are catching up waste wise.

This episode illustrated several things to me. The DRC cannot even store one days worth of non-recyclable waste in the summer. What flows in to the facility has to be processed during the day or the building plugs with waste. Our under-sized building only works when staff is constantly processing the non-recyclable waste that flows into it. Likewise with recyclables, if there are lots of empty one cubic yard bins then materials can be stored in the in-flow storage yard if there is no one to bale them, but if you run out of bins then there is no where to put recyclables. I was patching together every bin I could find in June and I was very close to running out of bins.

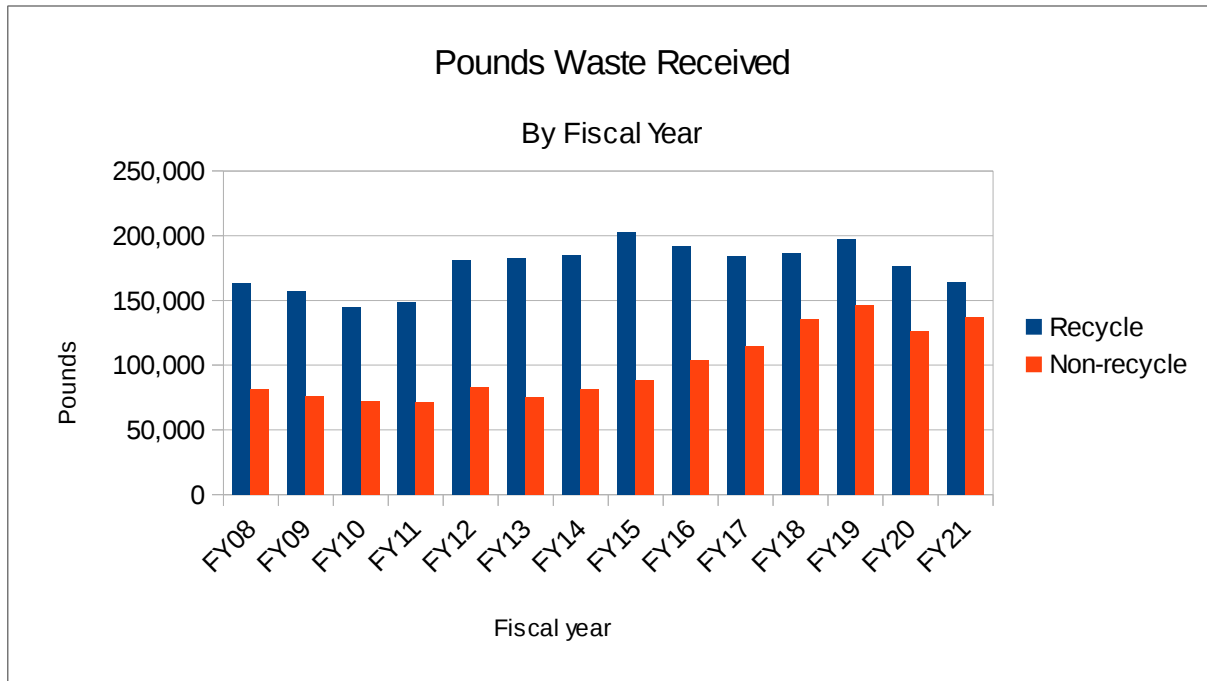
The DRC needs to have the Operator position I described during the most recent budget cycle/ struggle. I believe it is in the City's best interest to have two regular positions at the DRC, especially during the peak season and shoulder seasons. Maybe the general public doesn't know or understand this when they write to the Council and say no new city positions. And maybe some Council members don't understand just how busy the DRC is when they say they would like to see the City step back and do less. The Council is lucky that I am as dedicated to the DRC as I am. Had I thrown my hands in the air and walked off during June it would have been that much more difficult for someone else to eventually come in and try to return order to the facility. The Pool is an "as available" system. A Pool member works if they are available, whereas a regular position has a set expectation of hours and availability.

I gave up on having a new regular position at the DRC for FY22 but I will bring all of this up again when the FY23 budget cycle starts next year. We all need to understand that the DRC

staff needs good training so they know why they are doing the tasks they are doing and to develop a sense of professionalism about their work. Staff also needs benefits like paid time off, sick leave, retirement and subsidized health insurance to help with their retention. These are things that come with regular positions and do not come with temporary positions like the Pool.

Annual waste numbers and pandemic impacts

While the pandemic rages on, the volume of the waste stream is more like it was pre-pandemic. The accompanying 5 year facility statistics report and the graph below show that the waste stream is picking up again after slowing down in late FY20 and early FY21.



One unfortunate trend I am seeing is the decline of this communities waste diversion ratio – which is the ratio of what is recycled vs what is landfilled. This is a very important ratio for the facility and is what makes our communities operation so different from all the other Alaskan landfills. For FY21 our diversion ratio is 54%, this is the lowest level since FY08 when I started collecting weight data. It has been below 60% since FY18. It peaked at 70% in FY13 through FY15. There are a number of plausible explanations for this trend - perhaps people are separating out their recyclables less and I have seen evidence of this with food waste and recyclable paper products in the trash. Or perhaps having less options for recycling our waste is a factor too like when we lost mixed plastic recycling in FY18. It could also be that people are using the DRC for all their waste now where perhaps in the past they just brought what was recyclable and disposed of their non-recyclable waste at home. Or perhaps it is a combination of all the above. Whatever the reasons I hope to see our diversion ratio go up in FY22.

Some interesting projects in the future for the DRC

Landfill safety and composting training at the DRC

As most of you know I have a second job with the Zender Environmental Health and Research Group out of Anchorage. We primarily work with villages to improve their landfills and recycling programs. We do this by providing assistance with grants, trainings and other support. This coming spring we are planning to do a training here in Gustavus. The course will be about landfill safety, re-use (like the Community Chest) and composting. Zender

wanted to use the DRC because it is a good example facility and I am very proud to be able to host the training. I hosted such a training with Zender before, which was way back in 2001. For that training there was a dozen or so people from small villages all over Alaska and a representative from ADEC's Solid Waste Program. The workshop was put on by Zender Engineering and the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes. For the training next spring I am hoping to get interested folks from Hoonah, Yakutat, Kake and Prince of Whales Island as well as other villages in Alaska. There will be no cost to the City for this training and I am hoping to use this occasion to draw more interest from our community to our operation. The training is funded with part of a USDA solid waste grant that the Zender group was awarded. This is an exciting opportunity for the DRC and could improve networking with solid waste issues for our region.

A pilot study for turning low-grade plastic and wood waste from the DRC into usable construction material

On July 1st I met with Chet Hovey and Dave Lore of Advanced Environmental Engineering/ AE2 (www.ae2eng.com) to discuss a pilot project they would like to conduct at the DRC in 2023. The purpose of the project is to take non-recyclable waste, like the material in our construction/ demolition "pit" and turn it into building products. The process would involve setting up a shredder and other processing equipment, housed in two 20-foot storage vans, that would take select materials from our waste area, shred and combine them in such a way as to make dimensional lumber or paving stones. This is a pilot study to see if the process is viable and if it could be used at other small, rural landfills.

There would be no cost to the City for the pilot project. AE2 will need a letter of support from the City this coming fall/ winter if the City is interested in supporting this study. I have asked Chet to produce some kind of document to explain their project.

I first met Chet and Dave last summer when they came to Gustavus to learn more about the DRC. They were looking at ways to support the DRC with training or engineering support so I asked them about sampling for PFAS/ PFOA compounds. In October Dave returned to Gustavus to sample water from one of our monitor wells but was unable to draw a sample because the water in the well was not deep enough for his sampling device so he took a water sample from the Salmon River. The results of the sampling were non-detect for the seven compounds that were measured.

Community Chest

With the purchase of the wall tent last summer the Chest has a lot more retail space and has been able to display a lot more clothes and other items. Resulting sales have been strong. As described in my May report the operation of the Chest is led by Vicki Bender with additional support from Annie Mackovjak who has been active in the Chest since its inception in 1998. Penny Cook continues to put in a lot of time going over the donations in building 301. She checks the electronic items, does some repairs and help set pricing. We are so fortunate that these women donate so much of their time so we might have a viable thrift store.

Recently Vikki Garret has organized volunteers so that the Chest can be open on Monday evenings 4 – 6 PM. This will be a seasonal schedule.

Since my May report the front desk sales staff has been: Annie Mackovjak, Vicki Bender, Vikki Garret, Maribeth Jarvis, Becky King and Connie Darnell.

Sorting, stocking and purging: Penny Cook, Melisa Gomb, Joyce Lupro, Adreema Lupro, Joyce Gallagher, Vicki, Vikki, Maureen Moore, Mary Moore, Judy Hardy, Debbie H, Iris White and Georgia. My apologies to any individuals I may have missed

Be sure to say thank you when you are next at the Chest and remember that with the exception of what work I do there, the Chest is entirely run by volunteers and that we are all fortunate to have their services.

Solid Waste Management and Facility Planning Process (“SWMP”) & SEASWA the Southeast Alaska Solid Waste Authority

I have dropped the ball on trying to get membership into SEASWA on this October’s municipal ballot. Amending our city’s charter is a big deal and while I would like having more tools in the solid waste tool box I have had pause in my effort to promote SEASWA. Part of this is a realization that if SEASWA membership is to benefit us, say in the form of lobbying AML for getting barge service to Gustavus once a year to move recyclable and non-recyclable waste – it would take a lot of effort. At best SEASWA membership will only provide results that are proportional to the time that was put into formulating those ideas and gathering the needed support. I will come back to SEASWA but for now it can wait.

The labor situation in June has inspired me to work more on the SWMP. I don’t want the next operator to have to deal with what I have dealt with. I want them to have a larger building and better baler to deal with the larger waste flows we are now experiencing. One or two properly trained people could do a lot more to manage the waste Gustavus produces if they had a better facility to do that work in. Most of my work in this regard now is covered in some of the Capital Project summaries below.

Capital Project Summaries

New Composting Facility/ Quonset replacement

Project description:

As described in previous reports, the objective of this project is to replace the failing Quonset structure with a more robust composting facility capable of processing greater amounts of material in a more temperature controlled manner than our current facility can. This project also seeks to pave more of the composting yard with concrete and install concrete push walls behind the piles of wood chips, sawdust, overs and curing compost.

Project status:

In an effort to restart this project Mike Taylor met with me in May and we discussed some new options for this project such as coming up with a much simpler conceptual plan and then finding an Alaska based engineering firm to take our conceptual plan and help us make it into a cost effective, appropriately engineered structure. I have not had a lot of time to do this work in the past two months due to the labor shortage but now that the Pool is functioning again I am working on the planning documents again.

In-flow Storage Area Project

Project description:

More information about the purpose of this storage area can be found in earlier reports or in the DRC’s General Operations Plan.

Project Status:

When the completion of the fencing this spring, this project is complete. The amount of remaining funding for the project is about \$20,000 I would like to be able to use some of the funds to purchase one or more tent structures to house cardboard cargo boxes that we use to collect and ship e-waste. I would also like to be able to use some of the remaining funds

to purchase a dozen more collapsible one cubic yard storage bins and increase the amount of material that can be stored in the yard. I will work with the City Administrator and Treasurer to put forward these proposals to the Council.

Household Hazardous Waste Facility

Project description:

This project is the specification and purchase of a 20' long x 8' wide & 8' high container designed for storing equipment fuel, used lead-acid and dry-cell batteries and other miscellaneous hazardous materials. The unit includes spill containment, ventilation, lighting, shelving, and signage. The proposed container will be fully-constructed at a facility in the lower 48 and is ready to use upon arrival in Gustavus. In the interest of flexibility and convenience, I have determined that the facility should be designed as a 4-hour structure so that it can be placed anywhere on the DRC property, even right next to the main building.

Project Status:

Three different manufacturers submitted quotes for the facility and Environmental Compliance Products of Huntington Beach California was the lowest bidder. They are very busy fulfilling orders and our delivery schedule is November/ December 2021. The unit will be installed either during the winter if conditions allow or next spring. Electrical connection to the new unit may not be complete until the spring of 2022.

Year-round running water

Hot & cold running water in the changing room of the office building came into reality this May. The project included an exterior cold water tap. I have sampled the water for PFAS/PFOA and if the levels are low enough, the water will be available for use in the composting operation.

New main building

Conceptually this project has been supported by the Council with the adoption of the Capital Improvement Plan COG_CIP 2021-2025 document and the scoping document for the new building which was adopted last year.

The project is now in the pre-development phase where conceptual ideas or layouts are being drafted. The minimum size for the new building is around 5,000 square feet which is almost three times larger than the existing building. The placement of the building will be set up around two things: first, vehicle traffic flow to and from Boat Harbor road; secondly, expansion so that it doesn't have to be built all at once but is designed to grow.

The next step will be to collect the names of at least three engineering/ architectural firms and present them with a request for proposal for the building project.

The end, thank you.

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