

Meeting: Regional Waste Advisory Committee (RWAC) Meeting
Date: Thursday, March 27, 2025
Time: 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Place: Zoom meeting
Purpose: *The purpose of the Regional Waste Advisory Committee is to provide input on certain policies, programs, and projects that implement actions in the 2030 Regional Waste Plan, as well as to provide input on certain legislative and administrative actions that the Metro Council or Chief Operating Officer will consider related to the implementation of the 2030 Regional Waste Plan.*

Members in Attendance:

Vice-Chair Christine Lewis, Metro
Audrey O'Brien, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
Beth Vargas Duncan, Oregon Refuse and Recycling Association (ORRA)
Bill Kent, City of Roses – Material Recovery Facility
Chieko Yoshihara, Communities of Color
Daisha Tate, Communities of Color
Fiona Conneely, Environment & Health Advocate
Commissioner Pam Treece, Washington County – Local Government
Kristin Leichner, Pride Disposal – Transfer Station
Mayor Lacey Beaty, City of Beaverton – Local Government
Laura Tokarski, System User

1. CALL TO ORDER & MEETING OVERVIEW**2. Regional Garbage and Recycling System Facilities Plan**

Vice Chair Lewis introduced Estee Segal from Metro.

Key points of the presentation included:

Staff presented an update on the Regional Garbage and Recycling System Facilities Plan. Metro Council adopted the plan on March 20, 2025. Staff sought input from the Regional Waste Advisory Committee in February. Input included:

- General support for Phase 1 project sequence with exception of reuse mall
- Prioritize existing gaps for depots
- Support public-private partnerships
- Evaluate costs and impacts to fees in current economic landscape
- Importance of organics investments
- Complete policy work on wet waste tonnage and private facility regulation

Final edits to the plan included updates to the Reuse Mall description and timeline. With the adoption of the plan Metro staff will start work on project implementation. The committee will be engaged on refined project proposals as work progresses. Final decisions will be evaluated annually through Metro's budget and fee development process.

Member Discussion:

Bill Kent, City of Roses, commented that the plan is sound, but a lot depends on how resources are allocated as it is implemented. There will be economic and environmental impacts that should be tracked through collecting data on things like green-house gas emissions and more.

Kristin Leichner, Pride, asked how the committee would be making formal recommendations that go to Metro Council and how varying (minority) viewpoints will be shared? Vice-Chair Lewis replied that she would advocate for using a red-yellow-green voting method. When consensus can be reached the committee would share that consensus recommendation, and if consensus cannot be reached items can be further discussed depending on their time sensitivity. Estee Segal added that regarding input from the committee provided on the Regional System Facilities Plan in February, meeting notes that included all committee member's comments were included in the council staff report.

3. Solid Waste Fee Setting

Vice Chair Lewis introduced Cary Stacey, Brian Kennedy and Patrick Dennis from Metro.

Key points of the presentation included:

Cary Stacey recapped Metro's budget process, key areas of progress and investments in target areas for Waste Prevention and Environmental Services 2024-2025 budget. Brian Kennedy explained Metro's regional garbage system and market drivers that impact fees and Patrick Dennis explained the policies that guide Metro's fee setting process.

Member Discussion:

Mayor Beaty expressed that this presentation was very high level. She finds it disproportionate that the cost of Metro's services are almost the same cost as personnel. She is interested to see what Metro is categorizing as core services. She asked when the committee would be presented more details. Mr. Dennis replied that Metro could provide line-item detail by program area.

Vice Chair Lewis confirmed that budget law prohibits the committee from viewing the FY25-26 budget until it is posted by Metro's Chief Operating Officer. She shared that this presentation is a high-level overview to build understanding of fees. The fees connect directly to different buckets of spending in WPES's budget.

Chair Nolan confirmed what she was hearing Mayor Beaty request - that in order to make specific and well-grounded recommendations on the fees and budget the committee needs access to the details of the fees that the budget is based on.

Mayor Beaty said it was difficult to conceptualize a tipping fee without understanding what that included. For example, are there 27 people working on youth outreach. As cities and counties are facing extreme cuts their communities will be impacted. Garbage services is one of these areas. If services are being reduced everywhere else, then increasing services in garbage should be too (?). It is not Metro that has to answer to the voters it's local governments. City and county budget are very difficult to read so focusing on the budget specifics would be helpful.

Kristin Leichner, Pride, asked for a break down of the larger buckets of funds and a copy of the slides. She also asked about PaintCare. She believed that a goal from the product stewardship bill was to have full cost recovery. Is there work being done to resolve the cost of PaintCare so rate payers are not paying for it. Mr. Dennis replied that he can provide more details for the reference slides. In regard to MetroPaint – it is not self-sustaining based off its revenue. Metro hired a consultant last year to help identify areas where costs can be made up. Ultimately Metro will have to decrease expenses or increase paint revenue. The contract with PaintCare was renegotiated to receive higher prices and are exploring ways to

make operations more efficient. Unfortunately it is a highly personnel driven industry and costs of labor continue to rise which makes recovering costs more challenging.

Ms. Leichner urged a legislative fix to resolve the PaintCare issue. If a contract negotiation has not resolved the issues than the original piece of legislation is not serving its purpose.

Bill Kent, City of Roses, asked about slides of projected tonnage. He asked how Metro would be looking at its forecasting process in the future and how excess tons that wouldn't go to Metro would be allocated and how that would impact fees. He has seen an approximate 3-5% overage of tonnage coming to Metro. How is Metro looking to improve its projections. Brian Kennedy replied that forecasting is generally a science that has a lot more art in that actual science. Metro uses some fairly sophisticated forecasting models that try to use economic activity to project tonnage, but they are often wrong, and we try to get as close as possible. Metro has tended to have a conservative approach to the forecasts to try to make sure that we're not basing budgets on unrealistic projections of waste generation. The last several years has not seen a large problem with excess waste generation. The WPES policy team would rely on fairly allocating those tons through the wet waste tonnage allocation program. In years where Metro generates surplus revenue, those funds go into reserves that goes to capital, but then Metro will try to adjust rates the following year to recognize the accumulation of unanticipated revenue and make sure that we're not over collecting in the future.

Mr. Kent replied that Metro's forecasts do seem fairly accurate, but he sees that some transfer stations aren't getting all the volume they could have gotten, and those tons end up back at Metro.

Beth Vargas Duncan, ORRA, shared that in the past staff have answered many questions regarding the cost of service related to Metro's fees. Her question is has Metro been able to get to cost of service? She wants to make sure this was brought forward and thought context about the history of the information shared about the cost of service charges should be shared with the whole committee. Mr. Kennedy replied that fees for the current fiscal year were set at the cost of service. Direction from Metro Council has been to set fees at cost of service going forward. Ms. Vargas Duncan clarified that there are no longer any RSF funds supplanting that. Mr. Kennedy replied that is correct for transfer station operations, but Metro did decide to subsidize the cost of commercial food waste at Metro Transfer Stations. The number of tons effected is very small relative to the span of the transfer station operations. Ms. Vargas Duncan requested details on the food waste subsidy costs.

Chieko Yoshihara, Community of Color Representative, asked what do we do when our landfills are full? She also asked for details on the St. John's Landfill management – what are the costs to maintain that facility? Mr. Kennedy replied that Metro does not own or operate any landfills. Waste goes to privately owned landfills. Metro does have a landfill capacity policy which influences what landfills we use, but in general the private sector manages the capacity of those facilities. Metro manages the closed St. John's Landfill; this includes ongoing responsibilities for pollution remediation, but it no longer accepts waste. Ms. Yoshihara confirmed that these are ongoing costs? Mr. Kennedy replied that was correct. Audrey O'Brien, ODEQ, added that the St. John's Landfill had environmental impacts from when it did operate and Metro took over the management of its closure and corrective action for it. The state does have plenty of capacity for landfills for some time because many

landfills on the eastern side of the state are quite large. Much of the waste from the Metro area goes to those landfills. Mr. Kent added that he had always heard that we have two-three decades before Oregon's landfills are full. This is why Metro is doing such great work like the food program which will reduce waste to landfills. We must focus on improving our recycling system and pushing for innovative solutions to keep material out of landfills.

Ms. Leichner asked at what level Metro sets its reserves? Is it set by a percentage of revenue, or operating budget or a certain amount of time or set dollar amount? She also asked that when Metro does have a capital project that those are added to the budget individually as projects are approved. Mr. Kennedy replied that Metro has a variety of reserves that are planned for. Metro has an operating reserve, which is required to provide 45 days of operating funds. Metro has legally required reserves for St. John's landfill and other environmental compliance requirements, those reserves are based on analysis we get from outside consultants. There are multiple project reserves that are size based off the capital improvement plan that is provided by WPES which projects how many capital projects they expect to complete in a given time frame. When building those costs in the fee model, Metro must make sure there is enough fund balance each year to meet those requirements. For capital projects Metro assumes a certain level of activity in a given year. If there is an unusually large requirement Metro will judge if more funds need to be added or if funds already collected can cover the cost. The fees and budget are analyzed each year to ensure Metro is only recovering dollars to fund those capital projects.

Mayor Beaty asked what staff were hoping to get out of this engagement with the committee? What is the intended outcome? Vice Chair Lewis replied that since we can't talk about the FY25-26 budget yet, we are seeking to hear if the committee still feels the values prioritized by the Waste Fee Policy Task Force are still correct, if not what is new, and what can be improved from the process last year to make it more transparent?

Mayor Beaty shared that transparency can be many things. In rewatching these meetings in the last two months it appears that transparency means giving the committee 80 million documents and they could go through it - that's a version of transparency. She thinks voters want accountability, they want to make sure that their money is going to the right things and that is hard for me to defend alongside Metro when she doesn't know what's intimately involved in the decision making. As Metro frames its budget, as the mayor of one of the region's largest cities, her hope would be that Metro recognize the moment, recognize the financial shortcomings that cities and counties are facing. Her hope is that Metro's budget reflects these shortcomings. If there is suggestion that fees will be raised exponentially higher her council cannot adopt them. She feels it is a farse that we say that local governments pass the fees. Local governments have to pass the tipping fee from Metro and it leaves virtually no room for them to do any programming on their own. Beaverton was not the only city that gave feedback on how difficult it was for them to pass last year's fees, and this is a year in her opinion of must haves not need to haves - no extra FTE's. The committee should be looking at everything with fine tooth combs. The budget should be reflective of the moment and based on that our residents can't afford food, they're getting hit in multiple areas and trash is a utility and we see people in Beaverton dropping their trash services because of the astronomical costs for single family users.

Chair Nolan encouraged the committee to focus on the two steps of the establishment of fees. The first is what activities are funded, which establishes how much money needs to be

expended in each program and services that WPES provides. The second part is the decision Metro Council makes, and is advised by RWAC, is after a dollar amount is established for the services we must and want to provide, how do we allocate that among the users of the system. Her expectation is that this committee dig into what expenditures are being required for approval and are there expenditures that could be delayed because of pressures on the system. Chair Nolan advised that they will be sitting down with Marta McGuire, Patrick Dennis and Brian Kennedy to identify the information that would be helpful for the committee to weigh in on what expenditures should be approved, and then from that how you allocate costs to the solid waste fee and regional system fee.

Ms. Vargas Duncan shared that when she was a civil servant it was helpful when faced with difficult choices, that staff present options for reductions. Maybe it is more things that staff see as nice to have versus critical to delivery of the system. She is also interested to see how the system facilities plan will impact this year's budget. Does that mean a staff person will pause work on previous work and work on the SFP instead?

Mr. Kent shared that this committee is to provide rigorous insight on this process, focusing on how to keep costs lowest and focus on environmental impacts. He requested to see past years budgets to help prepare.

Daisha Tate, Community of Color Representative, asked if there is a garbage assistance program for people who cannot pay their garbage bill. Vice Chair Lewis replied that that would be a city decision. Ms. Vargas Duncan added that Washington County has an assistance program as well as Gresham, and the City of Portland is working on creating one. Ms. Tate wanted to acknowledge that when people can't pay their garbage bills, they are violating their lease agreements which can create a negative spiral or consequences as costs and damage continue to rise.

Commissioner Treece, Washington County, agreed that the four priorities that were developed by the Waste Fee Policy Task Force should be foundational to this year's discussion. In addition, she agrees that the committee needs to know what the essential services are. This reflects how cities and counties are considering their budgeting processes. Her staff encouraged that we focus on fee predictability and consistency in fees.

Mr. Kent wanted to make sure that this group can understand how much the fees increased last year and why, to understand this year's fees. It would be great to understand if fees went up a lot or a little. Do they always go up, or do they go down?

Laura Kutner, Community Member, shared that there are many members of our community that are part of an informal economy, but also participate very frequently in the system by collecting garbage and bringing it to the publicly accessible transfer stations. It is really important that they be accessible. She also thinks the committee needs to think about the future of what we want for a system, prioritizing waste reduction and how we can look at garbage as a revenue generator rather than a constant cost. We want to focus on waste reduction but the pay as you throw model affects other people differently. We should consider how we can make the system more beneficial with subsidies.

Fiona Conneely, Environmental & Health Advocate, asked what the major cost investments have been since the adoption of the 2030 Regional Waste Plan, whether that is in personnel,

system improvements or programming and what have the impacts and benefits been? Vice Chair replied that we can see some programs track through the budget and can provide more information.

Final Remarks

Vice Chair Lewis called for a motion to approve meeting minutes from the January and February meetings, with edits from Beth Vargas Duncan in February's minutes. Beth Vargas Duncan moved to approve the minutes and it was seconded by Commissioner Treece. All members raised their hand in favor of approving the minutes.

Public Comment Period

Terrell Garret, GreenWay Recycling, commented that, "looking back to the facilities plan, it says that if an alternative shows up or presents itself for commercial dry waste and or wet waste around Metro South, that Metro South will then stop taking those materials. Today I've heard multiple people talking about overcapacity in the system. We have four commercial dry waste facilities, three of them in Portland, three of which could in total replace all the commercial dry waste from Metro Central. Of those four facilities, one has a recovery rate similar to Metro Central, one has a recovery rate twice that of Metro Central and one has a recovery rate four and half times that of Metro Central. My question, which I do not expect an answer to today, is with all of the overcapacity with the enhanced material recovery available why is Metro retaining its position of accepting commercial dry waste at Central today or in the future?"

MEETING ADJOURNED at 3:50 p.m.