

## From the Division of Waste Management

In the spring “*At Home with the Wastenot Family*” newsletter, we asked our customers to tell us how we could get to a goal of Zero Waste and how we could reach the people who recycle only marginally. We know that Zero Waste is not totally attainable any more than the University of Kentucky’s basketball team winning the NCAA every year. But, reducing our waste, like reducing game losses, is a goal.

We thank all the people who sent us thoughtful suggestions about our current program and future goals.

The letters below have been edited for clarity but not content.

### **Pay for what you throw away**

I am an Urban Planning professional in Lexington and am very interested in fostering zero waste. I think an initiative that would aid and contribute to zero waste for Lexington would be the implementation of “Pay-As-You-Throw” (PAYT) programs. These alone will not reduce waste as enforcement, education, and equity are all issues to consider when implementing this strategy, but I think they would be huge in gaining ground in Lexington.

The strategy of PAYT is that residents are charged based on the amount they throw away. Implementing this could be done by simply selling unique trash bags and ties at grocery and convenient stores (a funky color or design would ensure that the bag and tie were purchased) and only these bags would be collected.

Another method is a more complex, but includes the implementation of a “tip-chip” in garbage cans. This would count the amount of tips the trash cart receives per month and data could be collected. Charging for solid waste collection while allowing free recycling collection also will encourage more people to sort and recycle their waste products. This has been successful in many cities in Canada, Ireland, and the entire country of Switzerland has the “pay-per-bag” system.

Another issue of concern is working with apartment communities (homeowners and apartments associations) to provide recycling. Having attended the University of Kentucky and lived off campus at apartment complexes, many of these facilities do not have a recycling bin near dumpsters. This is appalling for individuals that would recycle; however, these communities do not provide a recycling option.

*Brian Schoester*

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### **What worked well in Canada**

I moved here almost two years ago from Southern Ontario, Canada, where we've been running out of landfill space for years. So I think I have a pretty good perspective on what has worked well there and what hasn't. Here goes!

1. Make retailers start charging for every plastic bag they provide. A few years ago we started having to pay 5 cents per bag, everywhere we shopped, and everyone went out and got reusable

bags or green boxes. But don't make the mistake they did - instead of legislating it as a kind of tax, they allowed the retailers to keep the profits. Some retailers did donate some of the proceeds to charities. The proceeds also could be used to fund recycling programs! Anyway, the impact on landfill has been pretty significant, from what I hear.

2. Please start recycling plastics by number, not by the shape of the bottle! My husband used to work at a plastics factory and our understanding is that a number/type of plastic has the same uses, no matter what the shape of the container! Countless containers are taking up landfill space for no good reason.

3. Start a green-waste program. This is a really good diversion that many cities use. All organic waste can be composted. Guelph, Ontario, has been doing this since about 1995 and has seen a big reduction in waste going into landfill. Toronto and other large cities have since followed suit.

4. Charge a fee per bag of garbage collected, even if it fits in the bin! We had to start doing this in about 2003 and it had a huge impact on: a) reducing landfill waste, and b) getting people to recycle! We started out paying \$2 per bag. All bags had to be tagged, and each residence got 50 tags to start with. That year each homeowner got a \$100 credit off of their property taxes. Recycling remained free. Any additional tags were purchased at local retailers or from city hall.

This also had some negative effects - some people worked in neighboring cities that didn't charge, so they would dump their garbage there if they had a lot. Also, there was some increase in illegal dumping, so the city had to be more vigilant (as did rural property owners). The program actually lost money at first - not sure because of the reduction in waste or not as many people buying additional tags as they thought there would be - but the cost of the tags went up to \$2.50. And, I think we lost some of the credit on the property tax.

5. In the winter months, only collect garbage every second week, but continue collecting recycling every week. This is what they did in our town (and Toronto has experimented with it), and we didn't find it difficult at all. People would be forced to recycle what they can so that their trash doesn't build up as fast.

6. Have deposits on beer/liquor bottles: I don't know how feasible this would be here, because in Ontario all alcohol is sold through the Liquor Control Board. So, we have wine and liquor stores, and beer stores. But all beer cans and bottles, liquor and wine bottles are sold with a deposit, which the retailers return to the customer when they bring the bottles back. I think it's 5 cents a can and 20 cents a bottle. Then there is a program through the stores where the bottles and cans are either be recycled or reused without going into the main recycling program.

I also think that Lexington has some really good programs, such as yard waste collection. That is a huge diversion! And the recycling program is really good - but there is always room for improvement, right?

*Michelle Kropp*

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### **Please expand the plastics**

Please find a market for all the items that are NOT on the plastics list. It bothers me to think of all the carry-out containers, lettuce boxes, etc., that go into the landfill. I know that other cities, such as Ft. Worth TX, have a market for them (I hope they don't sort them out and send them to the landfill!).

*Elaine Landry*

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### **Plastics is a guessing game**

I find the recycling newsletter's article on zero waste laughable considering the city's method of recycling.

Why is it that we do not recycle so many plastic products, and why is that we do not use the number system contained on plastic products? By asking citizens to engage in a guessing game with you seems like poor planning. Furthermore, your inability to recycle so many products makes the zero waste idea almost amazing.

I hope to see improvements in how the city recycles.

*Joe Johnson*

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### **Too restrictive**

1. We need to recycle more plastic. We are missing a lot of plastic recyclables by restricting them to beverage bottles and jugs and detergent bottles with no lids or caps. Why not recycle other plastics?
2. In San Francisco almost everything is recyclable including cardboard containers with plastic coating. Why can't we get to that point?
3. Recycle plastic caps and lids.
4. Implement composting on a voluntary basis to see if it will work here.
5. Provide drop-off points for recycling plastic bags. Kroger's does this but they are not always convenient.

I try to recycle but the LFUCG has so many restrictions that it is self-defeating. I was hoping that we would move forward with our efforts but I am extremely disappointed with the latest mailer that emphasizes restrictions.

*Mary Burkley Pike*

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### **Go by the numbers**

You are looking for ways to reduce waste. We do not recycle enough. We should be recycling all plastics, #1-7. It will greatly reduce waste. Think of all of the plastic products that could be recycled: plastic containers inside bags (I'm thinking cookies, salad boxes, berry containers, etc.). I lived in a community where they did this and it worked great!

Compost: you advertise that residents can get free recycled Herbies to compost; however, when you call about them, you learn that there is a long waiting list. That means that you have more people that want to be helping, but you are preventing this from happening. While I think it is great to recycle the old containers, perhaps the city should make a small investment in buying appropriate containers to distribute for compostable materials to keep that much more out of landfills.

Another thing the city should do is put pressure on the supermarkets for better packaging. Egg containers, among other things, should be made of cardboard that can be recycled (and made of recycled cardboard) that can be kept out of the landfill.

Restaurants should be prohibited from using styrofoam and should have to use biodegradable containers. Whole Foods is doing this right now and you could learn from them. Encourage stores (grocery, drug, etc.) to provide incentives for customers to bring reusable bags instead of using plastic bags. Help people learn where they can recycle plastic bags.

Perhaps a "swap" could be set up where people drop off things they no longer want/need/use but are in good condition, and others can pick up for free.

*J10s4life (unsigned email)*

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### **Returning plastic bags**

Please find another way to discard plastic bags other than going to Kroger's. I wish there was some sort of attachment that could hang on the Rosie for reducing our plastic waste.

*Bridget Scully*

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### **Stickers might help it sink in**

Here are my ideas to help people recycle properly.

1. The city needs to put stickers on the inside cover of the Rosies indicating what is recyclable and what is not. I find the hardest thing to do is make people understand the details of what the Rosie will not take such as pop bottle and detergent bottle caps. Details such as these need to be highlighted in large red letters on the stickers.

2. Perhaps see if the manufactures such as Coke, Pepsi or beer companies will indicate on their cartons (noticeable to the average consumer) that these cartons are not recyclable. If this is not possible, the city could require local grocery stores, vendors, etc. to put stickers on the cartons as the merchandise arrives at their stores. Or perhaps a sign on the shelves that reads "These cartons are NOT recyclable." Seems easy enough to me.

3. Have TV ads that remind folks of the importance of recycling and doing it properly. Reiterate the do's and don'ts of recycling. Maybe it'll sink in.

Keep up the good work guys. People will get it through their heads eventually☺

*Lynn Niemeier*

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### **Money is a great incentive**

If tax incentives were provided to recyclers, I think more would join the effort. If I am giving the city a source of income with my recycling, why shouldn't I benefit as well? If the LFUCG promoted a tax incentive for those who use their Rosies, I bet you would see an increase in recycling and a decrease in landfill waste.

*Millicent Wells*

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### **Smaller cart, cheaper rate**

Your questions:

1. How we can reduce our waste?
2. How do we get the people who are marginal recyclers to recycle more?

The easy way to achieve this:

1. Make Herbies smaller
2. Instead of weekly service; have service twice a month – but at a cheaper rate.

Hope this gives you some incentives!

*Peter Walter*

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### **More plastics and financial reward**

Although I applaud the efforts that the Waste Management Division has made to simplify recycling with the single-stream recycling, I do not see any way possible to achieve zero waste unless we can expand the types of materials, notably plastics, that can be recycled. I am fairly confident that I consistently put only "allowed" plastics in our Rosie, but I collect another two garbage bags of recycling code numbers 1 and 2 each month and take them to a site where they are accepted. From my observation, most people who don't recycle plastics do it because they don't understand why so few types are accepted and can't be bothered to figure out which ones are. Please give us more options for plastic recycling if you want people to participate.

Given expanded recycling opportunities, I also believe that people would recycle more if they are rewarded financially for disposing of less landfill-only garbage. I know certain places in Oregon achieved this by weighing a homeowner's garbage and charging by weight, an unwieldy proposition I would think. The approach taken in Austin, TX, where disposal fees are tied to whatever size can you fill seems simpler and one that might be considered here.

*Susan Buhrow*

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## **Ban grass clippings; expand plastics**

I think Lexington should implement a citywide composting program and ban the collection of grass clippings. I would love to compost myself but have nowhere to put it. If other cities are moving toward zero waste, then perhaps there will start to be a market for the types of plastics we do not collect at this time.

I also think Kentucky should charge of small fee for the use of disposable shopping bags similar to Dublin, Ireland.

*Alma True*

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## **Hold events and contests**

I applaud the ongoing excellent leadership at LFUCG's Division of Waste Management. The recent trial run on composting food waste near Clays Mill made me hopeful we'll soon have food waste composting citywide. In your spring newsletter, you raised a possibility that is new to me: becoming a zero waste city. I embrace that idea eagerly, and am grateful that you are asking us all to consider it.

Some ideas in response to your first question: "How can we reduce our waste?"

1. Expand the food-waste pickup and recycling program citywide.
2. LFUCG, Bluegrass Pride and Cooperative Extension (or some similar array of partners) could create a Master Composter program, and teach many of us how to compost the yard and kitchen waste we now put in our Lennies, Herbies, and Rosies.
3. With or without the Master Composters, hold many more types of educational and inspirational events to teach about reducing waste, recycling, and composting. These could take many forms: field days or tours of homes and businesses already practicing zero waste management, pop-up 15-minute demos at crucial community events, floats in the July 4 parade, or standard 2-hour classes strategically offered and repeated all over the community.
4. In the short run, before citywide food waste pickup, set up acceptance sites all over the community where people could drop off food waste to be composted.

For question #2 about how to get people who are marginal recyclers to recycle more, here are a few possibilities:

1. An annual Kid/Vid contest rewarding the best 30-second promotional ad for recycling, produced by youngsters up to 18. Lexington Film League, KYGreenTV and Northside Library Digital Studio might be good partners.
2. Work with community youth groups and all-ages gardening/community gardening/environmental groups to set up some demonstrations all over town that make a convincing case that the effects of not recycling are bad, the effort required to recycle is worth it, and the responsibility for recycling for our kids' futures is worth taking on.
3. Perhaps create an ambassador corps of young people (or all ages) to help deliver information door-to-door and encourage visits to the demo sites.

Please keep pulling us toward zero waste.

*Rona Roberts*

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### **Explain the carts**

It would help immensely if you alter your public relations policy and began using complete nomenclature that is easy to understand and comprehend. Please try using these terms in your literature. Say "Blue Rosie," "Gray Lenny" and "Green Herbie."

Currently you just say "Rosie" as if every newcomer to Lexington knew exactly what you meant. Well, they don't, and that just adds to the problem, and folks in general just give up trying to figure out all the legalese that goes with using your containers. Even if you have lived here a long time, who uses Rosie and Lenny in polite conversation? They are never reinforced so even I have trouble figuring out which container you are talking about, but I do understand the blue one, the green one and the gray one.

Every fall a whole new group of college students, etc., move to town, anxious to be part of the "green movement," and they are turned off at the very beginning when they try to figure out the Rosie, Lenny, and Herbie nomenclature. I know because I own an apartment building and hear tenants' complaints about which containers are for the recyclables and which are for garbage, etc. Your literature is preaching to the choir.

You could make this easier if you would just double name every container as in "Blue Rosie," etc.

*Marie Copeland*

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### **Provide indoor collection bins**

The way to get people to recycle more is simple. At the heart of all engineering advancements is human laziness. People will recycle if it's easier to recycle than to throw out. Lexington has very nice trash/recycle bins for the outside of the house. But that's not where people separate trash from recyclables; that's done in the house where it's convenient. The answer is simple, we need trash cans inside the house that will not only separate trash from recyclables, but we need to make it easier to recycle than to throw out. The trash can should have two sides, with the recycle side easy to lift out with a connected handle. This will not only save people money on trash bags, it will increase our recycle amounts. I have talked with the mayor's assistant about this. The main concern was the money to build these trash cans. While the cost of this may be a lot, the increase in recycling and decrease in landfilling will more than cover the cost.

*Jason Cappelletti*

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### **Reduce fuel waste**

I have two concepts that would reduce fuel waste in garbage collection, and reduce the amount of polyethylene-based grocery bags disposed of by the citizens you serve.

You could mandate that all collection bins be placed on the curb on one side of the street reducing the distance each collection truck must drive by close to 50 percent by eliminating the redundancy of going down each street twice. It would also reduce the distance between bins since you're doubling the bins on one side, so the driver won't have a desire to accelerate so much since the distance is less, which should marginally increase gas efficiency. Simply take the same days of pickup and redraw the routes and once you know on which side of the street is optimum for collection, mail a notice and allow a 2-3 weeks grace period for people to get into the new habit. Then, don't pick up the bins on the wrong side of the street. For the first 3-4 weeks put a notice on the doors on the homes that don't comply with the new rule explaining why their trash didn't get collected. It would be necessary for each cart to have the numerical address of the home where it belongs.

The second concept is much more of an investment as it relates to polyethylene-based bags in stores. Just stop allowing local grocery stores to provide them and only allow the reusable and durable cloth bags. Most statistics show that 90% of individuals reuse plastic bags in some fashion. By eliminating the plastic bags, I believe people will bring cloth bags with them to the store if these bags are seen less as a commodity similar to polyethylene-based bags. You also could politely suggest that the stores for the first couple months put a banner out front saying: "Please bring back your reusable bags so that (Store Name) can keep our prices low for you."

The city could partially subsidize the cost to the stores of the difference of the two bags, and considering the average life span of the cloth bags, after the first massive need for the bags, the need for production of shopping bags would be reduced tenfold. The cost to the city for subsidizing the cloth bags could be reduced by advertising on the bag, not only the store it originally served, but any product you can imagine, like a portable version of a NASCAR car's skin of aesthetically placed logos and ads – a mobile billboards of sorts. These bags would make their way into every crevice of the city – the schools, bars, malls, and even our farmers' market. Companies like Pepsi and Coca-Cola would love to invest in such a "Green Container," further profiting the grocery stores and product stores that have those products.

*Andrew Kahl Schmitt*

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### **Change ordinances; find more markets**

You guys have done a great job educating Lexington's citizens; I don't think that you will educate those who are under educated or just don't care. All that is left to do is passing a new ordinance that prohibits the mixing of materials which, in my opinion, should already have been done.

1. We need a revised city ordinance (RCO) that prohibits the use of styrofoam and heavy-duty plastic take-out food containers ("doggie bags").
2. We need an RCO that prohibits manufactures from delivering items in unnecessary packaging. I realize that some manufacturers do it as a loss-prevention measure, but there are alternatives. For example, why do cupcakes have to come in heavy-duty plastic when there are other ways to protect them?
3. Why can't we find a buyer for yogurt containers? We send millions to the dump each year!

4. Why can't we find a use for the large pieces of styrofoam that protects shipped merchandise like appliances?
5. While I am for the elimination of plastic bags, we will need a replacement to put frozen food and meat in because these items wet the paper bags and they rip.
6. I am against the banning of grass clippings because when I leave them on my lawn it actually kills the growing grass in many spots. I have no problem with my lawn if we are having dry conditions and there is little moisture in the ground.
7. Create a market for recycled carpet. Discarded carpet has created a problem for years – even all of the scraps the dealers throw in their dumpsters weigh thousands of tons.
8. Our city rates a “C” when it comes to recycling at public events and in our parks. Where are the recycling containers?
9. Have the city do a survey of all commercial dumpsters to see what is being thrown away. Much of it is recycled stuff like wooden pallets, plastics, etc. Implement a strong educational program for our commercial people to reduce what is going to the dump.
10. Find a market for sheet plastic of all colors. We throw away all the black stuff used to keep dirt out of our storm sewers; we throw away tons of clear plastic sheeting used for commercial and other purposes such as that used to wrap goods placed on pallets. Also, what about all of the plastic bags that our lawn dirt and flowerbed bark come in?
11. Let's get the homeless and the Hope Center people involved in the entire process. I have "worked" with many of them, and I think that they would be willing to work for some money. Many of the Hope Center people can be used to pick up litter from our streams and detention basis, preventing many recyclables from going into our sub-ground water systems. I think that the LFUCG could afford to purchase a blanket insurance policy to cover them while they are doing these things.
12. Examine all of the stuff (mostly furniture) that our UK students throw out on the curb at the end of each semester and find a way of recycling it. This furniture does not all have to go to the dump. Perhaps we could pay Hope Center people to separate the furniture components, so they can go where they can be reused or recycled. I would also try to get furniture retailers on board for recycling all of this stuff.
13. The Salvation Army does a great job with clothing; anything that they cannot sell is baled and sold to China and elsewhere. Have you ever seen all of the clothing that ends up in our Herbies? Let's separate it out because there is a profitable market for it. If not, give it to the Salvation Army.

I think that the city could be doing far more with a few additional people in the environmental division to handle these problems.

Keep up the good work; we are on the right track.

*Richard Owen*

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### **Too many carts**

Having read the desired handling of the various items, one thing immediately came to mind, and that is the space needed for all the carts! When we moved back here from Florida, one cart is not bad, and we are able to accommodate it out of sight. For more than one cart there is no room. The unsightly things are either in the way or are very inconvenient to use.

In Florida we recycled everything; large containers were in a location approximately one mile from our home, and it was no problem to recycle once per week. The large containers were picked up as needed. The regular trash was collected just as it is here.

This way the recycled components are already sorted, time would be saved and unsightly containers would not be needed, space would be saved, and I believe people would prefer that in many cases.

*Walther Freyberg*

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### **Offer smaller carts**

I am one of the few that uses the Rosie recycling cart on my street, Pleasant Ridge Drive. I have asked or made comments over the last few years to neighbors asking why they don't recycle, and the answer is always the same. They don't want another "large" trash container. Many said they would recycle if you would offer smaller containers, like the ones we used to have a few years back. Actually, I liked the smaller ones as well. The smaller ones fit in the garage nicely; the larger one I have to keep outside. So, perhaps offering a choice between a small or large container would encourage others to start recycling.

I know it seems nominal just to make a phone call and request a Rosie, but I think if you had a campaign where you loaded the Rosies on your trailers (which I have seen), and made neighborhood sweeps on Saturdays, when most people are outside or at home and rang doorbells asking if they would like one. I'm sure most would accept it on the spot. I know this is a bit labor intensive, but you could target streets like mine where there are not a lot of recyclers. A simple campaign slogan like: "Be a responsible recycler and get a Rosie for free!" might work as well.

*Mindy Sexton*

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### **Make recycling mandatory**

I think recycling should be mandatory for Lexington and the Herbie should be made smaller than the Rosie. We fill Rosie often and on an average we have her filled about 2/3rds. In the Herbie, we average three tall garbage bags, sometimes more. Now, perhaps small businesses would need to keep the larger Herbie, but I think residential should have smaller Herbies and larger Rosies.

When I look around my neighborhood I would say that at least half of the people do not recycle. Making it mandatory would get those people on board. It's not difficult now that we can combine so much.

*Jim Seamans*

### **Recyclable take-out containers**

Suggestions to reduce waste and make it easy to recycle more:

1. Have the grocers, especially Kroger's, provide paper bags instead of just plastic bags. I miss the old "paper or plastic" question; now our only choice is plastic.
2. Have the restaurants and vendors help promote recycling by putting take-out food in recyclable containers.
3. Make it a source of pride to recycle. Perhaps we could set up a kind of friendly competition within the city among various neighborhoods to see who can get the most people in their neighborhood to commit to increased recycling by some percentage (e.g., 10% more per week).
4. Make available appropriate bags in which to put the recycling materials within the Rosie. If plastic bags can't be used, what kind of vessel are we supposed to put the recycling into?

*Linda Van Eldik*

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### **Pay us; don't punish us**

Although I myself love the idea of recycling and use my Rosie far more than my Lenny, I am opposed to this self-righteous, snobbish attitude towards those who don't.

Zero waste is an unreachable, pie-in-the-sky, liberal goal. Just look at the list of cities cited in the newsletter. The reality is the good, hard-working taxpayers of this city pay for these services. It sounds like there are those at the city who wish to punish those for not recycling. Why don't we start the conversation in a positive way? Instead of threats of more taxes (fines, call it whatever you want) for what the taxpayers – your bosses – are already paying for, why don't we do this:

- For those that are using the services they are paying for, leave them alone.
- For those of us who are using our recycling bins, pay us!

The city government benefits from those who recycle so we should benefit for what our tax dollars have created in this recycling program. That is the way to approach this issue in a positive manner not a fascist manner.

*Rick Fightmaster*