

The Recycle Ann Arbor Program
of
The Ecology Center of Ann Arbor, Inc.
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The Recycle Ann Arbor program is a service of the Ecology Center of Ann Arbor, a non-profit corporation. Contractual arrangements with the City of Ann Arbor, combined with revenues from the sale of recyclable materials, allow the program to provide monthly curbside pickup of recyclables to all neighborhoods in the City of Ann Arbor. A pilot demonstration program using a mobile drop-off trailer for large multi-family complexes not currently receiving curbside service has recently started operations. A staffed drop-off recycling station is also made available to the public two days a week. Offices and commercial buildings are serviced, upon request, with scheduled pickup of high-grade office and computer papers in addition to other recyclables.

Volunteer block coordinators assist in promoting use of the voluntary curbside recycling program. Block leaders distribute pamphlets, monthly reminder tags, and information about the recycling service to their neighbors. Currently 20 to 25 percent of eligible households participate in the curbside service each month.

Capital equipment for the Recycle Ann Arbor program is provided by the City of Ann Arbor, by internally generated funds from the recycling program, and by private sector companies involved in shipping, marketing, and processing recyclables. Equipment owned by the city is leased by the Ecology Center for a small fee. Recycle Ann Arbor bales most of its newspaper, cardboard, and high grade papers in a 7,000 square foot processing facility located at the city-owned landfill.

Key organizations and tools used to initiate recycling programs:

- The Ecology Center of Ann Arbor has provided a recycling drop-off facility since 1970 to demonstrate the feasibility of recovery of recyclables from the waste stream. A pilot demonstration of curbside recycling was initiated for a few months in 1971 to show that citizens will participate in such a service. This non-profit environmental organization's initial goal was to persuade the city to provide curbside recycling. An effort that was not received well for more than ten years.
- A second non-profit corporation, Recycle Ann Arbor, formed in 1978 specifically to provide an ongoing curbside recycling service to Ann Arbor residents. Initial service was limited to selected neighborhoods and was provided by volunteers using their own trucks. The group always had the goal of providing the curbside service to all residents of the City. EcoCycle of Boulder, Colorado was used as a model.
- Both groups teamed up to submit a proposal for curbside recycling to the City of Ann Arbor. This initial curbside recycling feasibility study sought city support for necessary capital equipment and operating subsidies.
- Staff of the Ann Arbor Department of Solid Waste assisted by estimating costs of providing a city wide curbside recycling service with city employees and equipment. An estimate of private sector service delivery costs was also made. Projected avoided costs were calculated. This basic internal analysis, indicated to city officials and City Council members that Recycle Ann Arbor and the Ecology Center could provide the service at a lower cost than either the City or a private firm.
- Recycle Ann Arbor and the Ecology Center of Ann Arbor merged to consolidate recycling efforts and to coordinate a final push for acceptance of their proposal. These citizen backed community groups were able to gain critical citizen support through the Ecology Center's membership of 1500 and the wide constituency that both organizations built up through the provision of recycling services to thousands of Ann Arbor households.

- Key political leaders, sensitive to the long term problems of solid waste disposal for the city, were persuaded by this constituency to show support for recycling. These included the mayor and City Council members.

- Specific and persuasive arguments were researched and developed by volunteers and staff of the newly merged organization. Arguments were based both on environmental and economic foundations, including critical analysis of both the existing solid waste landfill and other less desirable options (eg. having existing garbage trucks recycle newspaper using specially designed side racks). These arguments were presented in briefing sessions with key decision makers and in public hearings.

- A city sponsored public participation effort served as a catalyst in bringing the non-profit recycling organizations and the City of Ann Arbor to agreement on how to proceed with the curbside recycling expansion. This Ann Arbor Energy Steering Committee, comprised of 20 to 30 members of the community, was charged by City Council with the task of identifying projects to increase the efficiency of use of energy and natural resources at both the municipal and community level.

- The Energy Steering Committee, assisted by grant monies from the U.S. Department of Energy, produced the Ann Arbor Energy Plan. Included in the plan were recommendations that a operating subsidy be provided to Recycle Ann Arbor to provide the curbside recycling service and that capital equipment be purchased and leased to Recycle Ann Arbor to assist in providing that service. A waste to energy facility was also identified as needing thorough analysis as a possible complimentary disposal option to reduce dependence on landfill space.

- City Council, in adopting the Energy Plan, requested a detailed implementation plan for the curbside recycling program. This was drafted by Ecology Center staff with the assistance of planning consultants employed by the City of Ann Arbor for implementation of the Energy Plan.

- An Energy Advisory Board, created based on recommendations included in the Energy Plan, served as a citizen body to review the recycling implementation plan and submit it to City Council for their approval.

- City Council approved the implementation plan, directing the City Administrator, attorney, Community Development Office and the Departments of Solid Waste and Engineering to begin implementation of the plan in cooperation with the Recycle Ann Arbor program of the Ecology Center.

- A local foundation provided a timely grant to assist in promotion of the curbside recycling program allowing development of the block coordinator system.

- The Solid Waste Management Planning Committee of Washtenaw County produced their solid waste management plan required by P.A. 641 and used that document to set a goal of recycling 25% of the waste in the Ann Arbor waste shed of Washtenaw County. Key members of the committee were also supporters and active volunteers for the Ecology Center and Recycle Ann Arbor.

- A Source Separation Task Force, recommended by the county solid waste management plan, now is meeting to determine how additional momentum can be provided to the recycling efforts of Ann Arbor to achieve the 25% goal. Other county-sponsored task force groups also are meeting on waste-to-energy, landfill, and hazardous waste subject areas.

This summary compiled by James Frey, Staff Coordinator - August, 1985

For more information contact the Ecology Center at (313) 761-3186