



**Report of the
Zero Waste Arlington Committee
to the
2020 Special Town Meeting
FY 2019-20 Efforts and Results**

The Zero Waste Arlington's mission is to foster greater participation in all forms of waste reduction to improve health and restore the environment. We have a new logo and branding which has increased our visibility. While this is a report for FY 2019-2020, we're pleased to also report that in the last few months we have continued to engage with the community through social media, and successfully hold meetings via Zoom.

Outreach and Education: *People have questions. We have answers.* We attend as many community events as possible with the aim of outreach and education. In 2019 we tabled at the Beer Garden (summer), Feast of the East (June), and Town Day (September). We sponsored the Town's first Fix-It Clinics; events at EcoWeek (April) and Earth Week, and public art installations with Arlington Public Art. We worked closely with the Town's Recycling Coordinator on the re-design/re-brand of the annual Recycling Guide to the 2020-21 Zero Waste Guide, and have plans for a Zoom-based community discussion Zero Waste series launching in Winter 2021.

Community Engagement: Our changed name (from Arlington Recycling Committee) and mission has drawn several more residents to get involved. We have regular requests for people to be added to our zerowaste-arlington Google Group, and have increased our social media presence. The [ZWA Facebook Group](#) now has **465** followers and during the pandemic we have active participation in Zoom meetings.

Compost Subscription Services: Arlington residents have sought out alternatives to backyard composting as early as 2017, with four private companies providing curbside pickup. To help accelerate this trend, in Fall 2019, DPW began actively encouraging Arlington households to subscribe to one of these private curbside organic waste pickup services. The town invested in 500 small, durable curbside totes and 500 kitchen countertop bins, and offered these as a free incentive to a household for signing up with one of these services. The first batch of 500 has already been circulated, and the program is continuing into calendar year 2021. ZWA partnered with DPW in promoting the program in the many ways in which it interacts with Arlington residents. Of course, the primary rationale for the program is diversion of heavy organic waste from the waste stream for which we pay hauling and tipping fees, and moving toward meeting Commonwealth of Massachusetts solid waste reduction goals.

2020 Town Survey Questions submitted by ZWA: ZWA submitted five questions seeking Arlington residents' opinions about single use plastics. In particular, ZWA asked about preferences regarding convenience items, including plastic straws, utensils, take-out containers, and single use water bottles.

The majority of the over 4,000 **respondents expressed a strong interest in reducing single use plastics** in their life and the community. Asked about their opinion regarding plastic straws and utensils provided by restaurants, 63% of respondents indicated a preference that restaurant staff ask patrons if they would like a straw, rather than just providing one, 73% wanted to be asked if they need plastic utensils with takeout orders, rather than just including them, and 20% did not want restaurants to provide plastic utensils at all! Respondents also suggested a willingness to pay a little more for their takeout food to be packaged in environmentally responsible containers, including compostable ones.

There was interest in trying to reduce the amount of single use water bottles that are used in Arlington. In order to further this goal, ZWA has been promoting more water bottle refilling stations, like the one installed in Town Hall earlier this year, to encourage residents to use reusable water bottles rather than single use disposable bottles.

The results of the survey suggest that respondents want the Town to continue to focus on efforts to reduce the abundant amount of plastic in the waste stream. ZWA will use these results to guide future advocacy and policy efforts to reduce the use and disposal of single use plastics in Arlington.

No Plastics Please Campaign: As described above, the results of the Envision Arlington 2020 Town Survey indicated that Arlington residents, generally speaking, want to reduce their single use plastic waste from restaurants.

Looking at these survey results, ZWA sees a chance to empower customers to refuse single use plastics, which will also save restaurants money, through our **No Plastic Please (NPP)** Campaign. For restaurants participating in NPP, they will need to either ask whether the customer wants single use plastics included in their order or just default to not giving single use plastics unless they are requested. For customers participating in NPP, they will feel more at ease in telling restaurant staff that they do not want any single use plastics included in their order. Restaurants will be provided with a window sticker indicating their participation, as well as a digital icon for their website.

Taken together, the two approaches will result in a positive impact on both the restaurants (in that they are not wasting money on providing utensils that customers do want) and the customers (in that they are not opening up their take out bags and promptly throwing the single use plastic items in the trash without even using them once). While we have collaborated pre-Pandemic with the Town's Economic Development Coordinator about the NPP message and rollout to restaurants, we are in a holding pattern while Covid-19 vaccines are rolled out in 2021 and restaurants regain their footing.

OTHER WASTE MANAGEMENT NEWS FROM DPW

Recycle IQ Program: In September, 2020, Arlington started the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection grant-funded Recycling IQ Program. Over a period of four months, residents' recycling bins have been inspected to determine if non-recyclable materials have been placed inside. If the resident's bin is deemed contaminated, they will receive an OOPS TAG identifying the issue, and their recycling will not be collected that week. This effort is commonly known as a "trash audit."

The Recycling IQ Program funded four temporary, part-time jobs to conduct checks of residential recycling bins, tag bins that are deemed contaminated, and follow-up with educational materials to help residents identify how they are contaminating the recycling stream. A ZWA volunteer is one of the four staffers for the program. The program covered 20% of Arlington households and the initial data collected showed that there is a real need for this type of direct outreach.

Contamination of recyclables is a long-standing problem for two reasons: 1 - it increases the cost of sortation of the materials, and 2 - it reduces the value of the recycled materials. These issues are highlighted on the Oops tags: 1 - bagged recyclables; 2 - plastic film or bags; 3 - food or liquid debris; 4 - textiles; 5 - tanglers such as wires, chains, hoses; 6 - foam of any kind.

Solid Waste Statistics: In 2020, Arlington is projected to divert 90,000 lbs of textiles through the Bay State Textiles bins, which translates to over \$4,000 in shared revenue for our schools.

In FY 2020 Arlington's contractor JRM hauled **12,225 tons** of waste to the Wheelabrator incineration plant in North Andover. JRM hauled **5,171 tons** of recycling from our bins/barrels/carts to its Greenworks material recovery facility in Peabody for sorting and sale. Our monthly Recycling Center continues to be popular, bringing in hard to recycle, heavier items such as large/bulky rigid plastic, electronics, and scrap metal. **Everyone should utilize the Recycling Center to help Arlington increase its diversion rate! WE CAN DO BETTER!** Here are just a few ideas.

REFUSE

What you don't need
ZWA's No Plastic Please Campaign

REDUCE

What you do need

REUSE

The Library of Things at the Robbins Library
A Facebook group - Everything is Free in Arlington,
The Little Fox (Reuse) Shop at the Fox Library,
The Arlington List and

REPAIR

We will be bringing Fix-It clinics to town.

RECYCLE

Avoid contamination of your blue bin with plastic bags, film, wrappers

Follow directions found in the *Zero Waste Guide*

Textile donation bins located all around town.

ROT

Help reduce trash tonnage we send to the incinerator

Compost in your backyard with a bin from DPW

Consider the several reasonably-priced vendors who pick up organics in your neighborhood.

Inquire about efforts to expand FIDO - the pilot food scrap drop off program.

Supporting The Great Pumpkin Rescue

Join the efforts of the Zero Waste Arlington!

We meet the third Thursday of every month.

Follow us on Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/zerowastearlington/>

Email cmilan@town.arlington.ma.us to be added to the ZWA Google Group