



Report of the Zero Waste Arlington Committee to 2021 Town Meeting

The Zero Waste Arlington's (formerly Arlington Recycling Committee) mission is to foster greater participation in all forms of waste reduction to improve health and restore the environment. While we did provide an interim report to the Fall 2020 Special Town Meeting, we will amplify some of that reporting, and update Town Meeting on our activities since Fall 2020.

OUTREACH & EDUCATION

This pandemic year since March 2020 required ZWA to rethink how we connect with Arlington's residents and businesses. Normally, we are out in the public realm attending as many community events as possible. This usually includes tabling at the Town Day, Feast of the East, and the Beer Garden. Additionally, we sponsor Fix-It Clinics, activities at EcoFest and EcoWeek (April/May.)

ZWA determined that in order to properly fulfill its mission of outreach and education, and to optimize the infrastructure for its monthly public meetings, an account with a provider such as Zoom was necessary. We initiated a Zoom webinar account in February 2021 with a 100-participant capacity. (More on this later.) Our virtual monthly meetings now regularly attract six or more non-ZWA members of the public who bring new ideas and energy. We've altered the normal meeting time to better accommodate the schedules of members with young children. We also plan to continue to offer a virtual attendance option, once the pandemic ebbs, for both Members and the public.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Social Media ZWA recognizes the power of social media and its reach to a larger audience, especially during the pandemic. To that end we are actively managing the [The ZWA Facebook page](#), posting relevant content at regular intervals. As of May 2021 we have 665 followers ... up from 310 followers 12 months ago. Our primary means of communicating more formal announcements with the ZWA community is through our Google groups email account, which currently has 242 participants.

Webinar Series On March 3, 2021, ZWA produced the first edition of a new webinar series "**Earth to Arlington: Let's Talk Trash**," to increase levels of engagement with Arlington residents about solid waste issues (plastics, in particular), with a focus on the "reduce" and "reuse" legs of the 3 Rs we are all familiar with. The March 3 webinar focused on the Fall 2020 *Recycling IQ* (trash-recycling audit) program, which was implemented by DPW in several neighborhoods in which our hauling company JRM had alerted DPW to high levels of blue bin "contamination." As many of us know, high rates of contamination of recyclables has

turned the global plastic recycling world upside down in recent years. Processing costs have skyrocketed as the market value of many types of recovered materials has plummeted. As has been noted already in Town Meeting 2021, improved “characterization” of trash will help the town negotiate the best possible contract in FY 2022.

The webinar garnered **137 pre-registrations**, and had a total of **104 attendees** at this live 4:00 pm webinar. It was well received by the very engaged audience who gave it positive reviews, such as:

“I appreciate Charlotte’s and ZWA members’ positive attitude toward people’s recycling efforts. You’re very kind about people’s intentions.”

To view a recording of the webinar please go to our website -

<https://www.arlingtonma.gov/Home/Components/News/News/10915/3936?arch=1>

ZWA has mapped out three additional webinars for calendar year 2021, focusing on: Municipal Solid Waste, Reduce & Reuse, and Plastics



CAMPAIGNS

No Plastic, Please! As indicated in our Fall 2020 VTM report, the Town’s 2020 Survey provided ZWA with data on Arlington residents’ preferences regarding convenience items, including plastic straws, utensils, take-out containers, and single use water bottles. Over 4,000 respondents **expressed a strong interest in reducing single use plastics** in their lives and the community. This led to our No Plastics, Please (NPP) campaign, an awareness initiative targeting both restaurants and their customers. A participating restaurant will be expected to either ask the customer if they want single use plastics included in their order, or just default to not giving single use plastics unless they are requested. For customers/ residents participating in NPP, they will feel more at ease asking restaurant staff to not place any single-use plastic, including condiment packets, in their order. Restaurants will be offered a window sticker advertising their participation, as well as a digital icon for their websites. Significant effort went into the planning for the launch of this campaign in Spring 2020, including the development of promotional material and content. The pandemic had us hit pause on the campaign launch, but we continue to gather additional



ideas on the campaign and input from interested residents.

The Price of Plastic - Some alarming facts. And, recycling will no longer be “Free” Many industry leaders will tell you that *we cannot recycle our way out* of the plastics problem. Blue bin contamination, and China’s National Sword policy, have made this reality very plain to anyone who looks beyond the blue bin, and at what happens to “recycled” plastic waste after our blue bin materials are collected. Annually, 32 million tons of single-use plastic containers in the U.S. never get truly recycled back into another plastic product, representing less than 10% of what’s collected! Waste plastic is landfilled or incinerated or, it’s littered, and then degrades into harmful microplastics. By 2050 , it is estimated that, by weight, there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish. Already, the oceans are estimated to contain 165 million tons of it. Simply put, plastic waste is a menace to human health and the environment.

The results of the 2020 Survey suggest that respondents want the Town to continue to focus on efforts to reduce the abundant amount of plastic in the waste stream. Morally, it’s the right thing to do. But, what about the financial cost? DPW will be negotiating a new hauling and processing contract for our trash in late 2021. This time around (unlike in the expiring 10-year “recycling is free” contract,) Arlington will be paying tonnage fees for its blue bin hauling and processing. “Reduce” will take on a much more important dimension than it ever has in the overall scheme of solid waste management.

The Low-hanging fruit: Food Scrap Diversion: The low-hanging fruit In trash hauling and processing fees is in diverting organic material/food scraps from the conventional waste stream, as they make up *around 25% of the weight of trash barrel materials*. In 2021, there are easy options available that require you to only divert these organics from your kitchen garbage bin and not have to set up and manage a backyard compost bin. A household can either bring their organics, in any type of container, to one of the monstrous FIDO community collection bins at Arlington DPW, for free, (pre-registration is required) and dump them in 24/7/365. Or, a household can subscribe to a curbside pickup service for as little as \$99/year. It’s so easy now to keep food scraps out of your trash barrel. For those who want to backyard compost, DPW continues to sell discounted compost bins for \$25 and will offer How-To guidance.

SOLID WASTE STATISTICS

In 2020, Arlington diverted 45 tons 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 municipal solid waste (MSW) to the Wheelabrator incineration plant in North Andover. JRM hauled **5,171 tons** of recycling from our blue bins/barrels/carts to its Greenworks material recovery facility (MRF) in Peabody for sorting, baling, and sale. The monthly Recycling Center (RC) continues to be popular, bringing in hard to recycle, less incineration-friendly items such as large/bulky rigid plastic, Styrofoam, electronics, and scrap metal. The RC collects books, and is also piloting a Swap Shed in Spring-Summer 2021. **Everyone should utilize the Recycling Center to help Arlington increase its diversion rate!**

Join the efforts of the Zero Waste Arlington!

We meet virtually at 6:00 PM the 4th 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