

**VILLAGE OF LAKE BLUFF
VILLAGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING**

Monday, June 22, 2015
6:00 P.M.

Village Hall Board Room
40 East Center Avenue

A G E N D A

I. Call To Order

II. Roll Call

III. Non-Agenda Items and Visitors (Public Comment)

The Committee-of-the-Whole allocates fifteen (15) minutes during this item for those individuals who would like the opportunity to address the Committee-of-the-Whole on any matter not listed on the agenda. Each person addressing the Committee-of-the-Whole is asked to limit their comments to a maximum of three (3) minutes.

IV. General Business

The Committee-of-the-Whole will entertain requests from anyone present to modify the order of business to be conducted.

- i. Consideration of the Minutes from the April 27, 2015 Committee-of-the-Whole Meeting
- ii. A Preliminary Discussion Regarding Solid Waste Planning & Material Diversion

V. Adjournment

*R. Drew Irvin
Village Administrator*

The Village of Lake Bluff is subject to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Individuals with disabilities who plan to attend this meeting and who require certain accommodations in order to allow them to observe and/or participate in this meeting, or who have questions regarding accessibility of the meeting or the facilities, are requested to contact R. Drew Irvin at 234-0774 or TDD number 234-2153 promptly to allow the Village of Lake Bluff to make reasonable accommodations.

**VILLAGE OF LAKE BLUFF
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE MEETING
April 27, 2015**

DRAFT MINUTES OF MEETING

The Village of Lake Bluff Board of Trustees met as a Committee-of-the-Whole (COW) in the Village Hall Board Room (40 East Center Avenue) on Monday, April 27, 2015. Village President O’Hara called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and Village Clerk Barbara Ankenman called the roll and announced the following were present:

- Village President: Kathleen O’Hara
- Trustees: Steve Christensen, Village Trustee (arrived at 6:45 p.m.)
Mark Dewart
John Josephitis
William Meyer
Brian Renner
- Absent: Eric Grenier, Village Trustee
- Also Present: Barbara Ankenman, Village Clerk
Drew Irvin, Village Administrator
Peter Friedman, Village Attorney
Michael Croak, Building Codes Supervisor
Brandon Stanick, Assistant to the Village Administrator (A to VA)

Non-Agenda Items and Visitors

President O’Hara stated the COW allocates 15 minutes for those individuals who would like the opportunity to address the Village Board on any matter not listed on the agenda.

There were no requests to address the COW.

Consideration of the Minutes from the April 13, 2015 Committee-of-the-Whole Meeting

Trustee Renner moved to approve the April 13, 2015 COW Meeting Minutes as presented. Trustee Josephitis seconded the motion. The motion passed on the following roll call vote:

- Ayes: (4) Dewart, Josephitis, Meyer and Renner
Nays: (0)
Absent: (2) Christensen and Grenier

A Discussion Regarding the Creation of a Sustainability Plan in Conjunction with the City of Lake Forest

Village Administrator Drew Irvin reported on April 21st Staff met with officials from the City of Lake Forest (City) regarding the possibility of the Village jointly developing a Sustainability Plan. The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives defines a Sustainability Plan as a common framework to guide local government efforts to improve the social equity, environmental and economic conditions in a jurisdiction which ties together a community’s goals, strategies, implementation plans and metrics for improving sustainability. He noted the City hired an intern to develop a draft project schedule and is now looking for partners. In addition, he noted the City was exploring grant opportunities for this effort as well.

Village Administrator Irvin stated the Village Board had given the former Plan Commission direction to

draft the Village’s Comprehensive Plan to reflect the vision statements consistent with the creation of a Sustainability Plan. He stated the best method to accomplish this is to amend the existing Comprehensive Plan by inserting a Sustainability Plan as an appendix. He stated the Village’s Strategic Plan contains language consistent with pursuing a Sustainability Plan.

Trustee Meyer inquired of the cost. Village Administrator Irvin stated the cost identified thus far would include the involvement with the plan and for a survey to Village residents.

In response to a comment from Trustee Rener, Village Administrator Irvin stated it is expected that the City’s and Village’s sustainability plans will be slightly different; however, the categories and general outlines would be consistent.

Trustee Christensen arrived at 6:45 p.m.

It was the consensus of the COW to direct the Village Administrator to develop a Sustainability Plan in conjunction with the City of Lake Forest.

Adjournment

As no further business came before the COW, Trustee Josephitis moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:50 p.m. Trustee Dewart seconded the motion. The motion passed on a unanimous voice vote.

Respectfully Submitted,

R. Drew Irvin
Village Administrator

MEMORANDUM



Date: June 10, 2015

To: President O'Hara and Members of the Committee-of-the-Whole

From: Drew Irvin, Village Administrator
Jake Terlap, Public Works Superintendent

CC: Brandon Stanick, Assistant to the Village Administrator
Peter Friedman, Village Attorney
Department Heads

Subject: Preliminary Discussion Regarding Solid Waste Planning & Material Diversion

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide background information regarding two (2) solid waste material diversion programs that the Solid Waste Agency of Lake County (SWALCO) is recommending the Village explore: (i) commercial waste franchising and (ii) food scrap recycling. SWALCO Executive Director Walter Willis and Groot Municipal Manager Josh Molnar will be in attendance at the upcoming COW meeting to answer any questions regarding these topics.

Situation/Background

Lake County has been a leader in Illinois in both solid waste planning and implementation of material diversion programs having adopted the first state mandated plan in 1989 and having achieved a 48% recycling and composting rate for 2013. However, Lake County recognizes that its current disposal rate of 4.8 pounds per person per day is too high and that much of the discarded material is recyclable or compostable, and therefore should be diverted from final disposal to a higher and better use that will result in increased economic growth and reduced environmental impacts. As you may recall the Lake County 60% Recycling Task Force met a total of 12 times with their work culminating in the attached report; the report contains some 36 recommendations grouped into three sectors (residential, commercial, and construction and demolition debris) to achieve a reduction in pounds per capita per day (or "PCD") from 4.8 to 4.12 in 2015 and 3.48 in 2020. The Village is currently exceeding the 1.6 PCD goal set for 2015 for residential waste only, having reached a 1.5 PCD rate in 2014 based on recently released data on SWALCO's website. While the Village has experienced many recycling successes (e.g. hosting of textile and pharmaceutical collections, municipal franchise with recycling carts, recycle yard waste, etc.), there are some areas where the Village may choose to expand its role in materials management.

Commercial Waste Franchising

Similar to residential waste franchise agreements, a commercial waste franchise is essentially an exclusive contract awarded by the Village to a private waste hauler to provide refuse and recycling services for all commercial accounts in the Village. In an effort to reduce costs for local businesses, facilitate increases in recycling, and establish more control over the impacts of commercial waste collection (e.g. limit number, day, time, fuel-type of collection vehicles) certain communities (including Villages of Bannockburn, Deerfield, Grayslake, Libertyville and Gurnee in 2015 as well as longer established franchises in the Cities of Highland Park and Highwood) have established commercial waste franchises in a changing regulatory environment.

For the past several months SWALCO has been working with the legislature and waste haulers to create the attached commercial waste franchise ordinance. The language contained in the attached ordinance has been

approved by the haulers affiliated with the National Waste and Recycling Association's Illinois chapter. In short, passage of the ordinance starts a 3-year data gathering process and SWALCO expects it will also result in greater commercial recycling participation without enacting a mandate. Even if the Village Board determines that issuing a Request for Proposals for a commercial franchise is not in the Village's best interest at this point in time, SWALCO Executive Director Willis strongly encourages the Village to consider adopting the ordinance anyway solely as a mechanism to start data collection efforts and a dialogue between the business community and their haulers. According to Mr. Willis, the typical municipality in Lake County that does not have a commercial franchise has about 25% of its local businesses recycling. This ordinance puts the haulers on notice that if they don't get 50% of local businesses to recycle by the end of a 36 month reporting period that the Village can then issue an RFP for a commercial franchise. Since the haulers generally do not like commercial franchises, the local experience has been that haulers will work hard to get local businesses that aren't recycling to start. SWALCO will be creating a webpage where all the data the haulers report will be posted, which the Village can link to our website and provide the information on the Village website as required by the law. SWALCO believes that approval of the commercial franchise ordinance is tantamount to asking local businesses to have a discussion with their current hauler and see if they can arrive at a recycling and solid waste collection program and cost that is acceptable to them.

Staff anticipates the COW discussing this matter with SWALCO Executive Director Willis and, possibly, directing staff to review the draft ordinance with the Village Attorney for consideration by the Village Board at a future Board meeting.

Food-Scrap Recycling

According to the US EPA, organic materials (food scraps, yard trimmings, wood waste and paper and paperboard products) are the largest component of municipal solid waste and comprise almost two-thirds of the nation's waste stream as of 2010. At a more local level, two of the goals identified in the Lake County 60% Recycling Task Force report are (i) to conduct a pilot residential food scrap collection program with a SWALCO member and (ii) determine how to proceed with food scrap collection and composting (based on the outcome of the pilot program and status of processing capacity). In addition to lobbying for legislation to help provide infrastructure (processing capacity) for organic recycling in Lake County, SWALCO has been reaching out to municipalities to gauge their interest in piloting food-scrap recycling programs. Over the past few months, the Village, SWALCO, Groot, and DK Organics have been discussing what a Lake Bluff pilot program might look like and how it might be put into operation. Of note is HB 437 which allows for municipalities to develop temporary and permanent drop-off sites for collecting food scraps, a bill supported by SWALCO that is now awaiting action from Governor Rauner.

Given the preliminary nature of this matter, Staff anticipates the COW discussing the food-scrap recycling concept with SWALCO Executive Director Willis and Village Staff.

Reports and Documents Attached:

1. Draft SWALCO Commercial Franchise Ordinance
2. Copy of the September 29, 2014 Chicago Tribune article "Food-scrap Recycling is Gaining Ground," by Barbara Brotman.

Commercial Solid Waste Hauling and Recycling Program Ordinance

Ordinance No. _____

WHEREAS, Public Act 98-1079 became effective on August 26, 2014 and created the Solid Waste Hauling and Recycling Program Act, and amended the Illinois Municipal Code and the Illinois Solid Waste Planning and Recycling Act; and,

WHEREAS, Public Act 98-1079 requires each hauler operating in a county or municipality to offer collection services for recyclable materials to their non-residential business customers, and to provide a written offer to provide recycling services, at least once every 2 years, to their non-residential business customers that are not recycling; and,

WHEREAS, Public Act 98-1079 prohibits a municipality with a population of less than 1,000,000 from awarding a commercial franchise unless it: 1) provides written notice to all haulers licensed by the municipality of its intent to issue a request for proposal for a commercial franchise, and 2) adopts an ordinance requiring a 36 month reporting program to determine the percentage of non-residential businesses in the municipality contracting for the collection of recyclable materials, and demonstrates that the recycling participation for the final six months of the 36 month long reporting period is less than 50% of the total number of businesses served in the municipality or that during 2 consecutive 6 month reporting periods after the 36 month reporting period that less than 50% of businesses are under contract for the collection of recyclable materials; and,

WHEREAS, Public Act 98-1079 permits a municipality that has issued a written notice and conducted the 36 month long reporting program to, upon written request to the haulers, continue to require the haulers to report data on the recycling participation rate every 6 months and to also require the haulers to report on the quantity, in tons of recyclable materials and municipal waste, collected by the hauler in the municipality; and,

WHEREAS, the 2014 Lake County Solid Waste Management Plan Update encourages units of local government in Lake County to evaluate commercial franchising as a method to control costs, increase recycling, and reduce greenhouse gases associated with collection from non-residential locations; and,

WHEREAS, the Village/City of _____ is a member of the Solid Waste Agency of Lake County and voted to either accept or approve the 60% Recycling Task Force Report finalized in 2011 and since incorporated into the 2014 Lake County Solid Waste Management Plan Update, and has committed to working on programs that will increase recycling at non-residential business locations, including the evaluation of commercial franchising to increase recycling.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT ORDAINED BY THE VILLAGE/CITY OF

_____ THAT:

Section 1 – Definitions

“Contract for service” means a written or verbal contract between a hauler and non-residential location, and includes the hauler providing a collection container and service for collection of municipal waste and/or recyclable materials.

“County” means Lake County, Illinois.

“Hauler” means any person who engages in the business of collecting or hauling garbage, municipal waste, recyclable material, landscape waste, brush or other refuse on a continuous and regular basis, and makes multiple scheduled collections per month within a County. A hauler may be either licensed by a municipality and is hereinafter referred to as a “licensed hauler” or registered by a municipality in accordance with Section 3(a) of this Ordinance and is hereinafter referred to as a “registered hauler”.

“Municipality” means the Village/City of _____.

“Non-residential location” means a commercial, industrial or institutional property that has a hauler providing collection or hauling services for municipal waste or recyclable material (not including “special waste” as that term is defined in the Illinois Environmental Protection Act), and said hauler provides that individual property with its own container(s) for collecting municipal waste and/or recyclable material.

“Participation rate” means the percentage of non-residential locations that have a hauler contracting for separate collection of recyclable materials, and is computed by setting as the denominator the total number of non-residential locations served by the haulers in the municipality with collection services for municipal waste as reported by the haulers, and setting as the numerator the total number of non-residential locations contracting with the haulers in the municipality with collection services for recyclable material. Such separate collection of recyclable materials shall be on a periodic basis and if less frequent than once every four weeks shall be reported on the municipal form provided pursuant to Section 3(c)(2). For purposes of computing the participation rate, if non-residential locations opt to share a container for collecting recyclable material the sharing of a container must be documented as being acceptable to those non-residential locations and as having adequate capacity to meet the recycling needs of the non-residential locations sharing the container. Such sharing of recyclable material containers shall be reported as recyclable material customers on the municipal form provided pursuant to Section 3(c)(2) of this Ordinance. If a non-residential location does not contract with a hauler for collection services for recyclable material, but does recycle recyclable material at its location, such recycling activity may be documented and reported on the municipal form. The municipality shall or shall not (Note: prior to finalizing this ordinance the municipality needs to decide whether it will or will not count recycling if such service is not provided by the hauler and modify this ordinance appropriately by selecting “shall” or “shall not” prior to enacting it.) count such recycling activity, not provided under contract with the hauler, toward the participation rate calculated by the municipality, and shall maintain a consistent methodology for the time period this ordinance is in effect.

“Recycling” means a method, technique or process designed to remove any contaminant from waste so as to render that waste reusable, or any process by which materials that would otherwise

be disposed or discarded are collected, separated, or processed and returned to the economic mainstream in the form of raw materials or products.

“Recyclable material” means material that is separated from municipal waste for the purpose of recycling, including, but not limited to, ferrous metal cans, aluminum containers, plastics including HDPE and PET containers and plastics #3 through #7, newsprint, corrugated paper, junk mail, magazines, office paper and boxboard.

Section 2 – Offer of Collection of Recyclable Materials

- (a) Each hauler operating in the municipality shall offer, either as part of basic service, or alternatively as an additional service, the collection of recyclable materials from any non-residential location within the municipality. The offer shall meet the following requirements:
 - 1. For those non-residential locations that have collection services for recyclable materials, the hauler shall provide information on how and what materials to recycle at least once every other year from the effective date of this ordinance. One sample copy of this information shall be provided to the municipality, at least once every other year, by each hauler within 30 days of it being provided to the non-residential locations.
 - 2. For those non-residential locations that do not have collection services for recyclable materials, the hauler shall provide a written offer to provide recycling services at least once every two years from the effective date of this ordinance. The written offer shall also include a request that the non-residential location respond to the hauler’s request in writing. One sample copy of this written offer shall be provided to the municipality, at least once every two years, by each hauler within 30 days of it being provided to the non-residential locations.
- (b) Recyclable materials collected by a hauler within the municipality shall not be deposited into a landfill or incinerator unless all reasonable efforts have been made by the hauler to recycle the material. If source separated recyclable materials are landfilled or incinerated the hauler shall notify the municipality on the municipal form provided pursuant to Section 3(c)(2) of this Ordinance.
- (c) Ownership of recyclable materials set out for collection shall remain with the non-residential location that set out the material for collection until the material is removed by the hauler.

Section 3 – Procedures to Determine if a Commercial Franchise can be Considered by the Municipality

- (a) The municipality shall provide written notice to all licensed haulers providing hauling services in the municipality of its intent to issue a request for proposal for a commercial franchise, and such written notice shall include a copy of this Ordinance.
- (b) If the municipality does not license haulers it shall make its best effort to determine the haulers that provide collection services within its borders, develop a list of registered haulers, and provide them with written notice as required by this section and to publish a

public notice in accordance with its regular notice requirements. Such written notice shall include a copy of this Ordinance.

(c) Upon adoption of this Ordinance each licensed or registered hauler, for a period of 36 continuous months, shall report the number of non-residential locations served by the hauler in the municipality for collection of municipal waste, and the number that contract for recyclable materials collection service. The specific data required to be reported for the 36 month period shall be provided and reported as follows:

1. The 36 month continuous study shall commence on the first day of the month following the effective date of this Ordinance being enacted by the municipality.
2. Every six months from the commencement date each licensed or registered hauler shall report to the municipality, on a form to be provided by the municipality, the number of non-residential locations served by the licensed or registered hauler for collection of municipal waste, and the number of non-residential locations contracting for recyclable materials collection service. Each six month report shall be submitted to the municipality within 30 days following the end of each six month period.
3. The municipality shall post on its website, within 15 days of receiving the reports required under Section 3(c)(2) from all the licensed or registered haulers, the participation rate as defined in Section 1 for each six month reporting period. When determining the participation rate the municipality shall use the information provided by all haulers operating within the municipality in accordance with Section 3(c)(2) of this Ordinance. The information shall be reported by licensed or registered hauler, without identifying the hauler; and, in aggregate without naming individual haulers and the non-residential locations the haulers provide collection services to.
4. If the participation rate calculated by the municipality, in accordance with this Ordinance, for the final 6 month period in the 36 month study establishes that the participation rate is less than 50%, the municipality may proceed to issue a request for proposal for a commercial franchise.

(d) Beginning at the conclusion of the 36 month reporting period, and upon written request of the municipality, each licensed or registered hauler shall report to the municipality for every six month period thereafter for as long as the municipality chooses to receive such data. The data required under this Section shall be provided and reported as follows:

1. The number of non-residential locations the hauler provides collection services to for municipal waste.
2. The number of non-residential locations the hauler provides collection services to for recyclable material.
3. An estimate of the amount, in tons, of municipal waste collected from the non-residential locations serviced by the hauler.
4. An estimate of the amount, in tons, of recyclable material collected from the non-residential locations serviced by the hauler.
5. The municipality shall post on its website, within 15 days of receiving the reports required under Section 3(c) from all the haulers, the participation rate as defined

in Section 1 for each six month reporting period. When determining the participation rate the municipality shall use the information provided by all haulers operating within the municipality. The information shall be reported by hauler, without identifying the hauler; and, in aggregate without naming individual haulers and the non-residential locations the haulers provide collection services to.

6. If the participation rate reported to the municipality is determined to be less than 50% of the non-residential locations for two consecutive 6 month reporting periods, the municipality may proceed to issue a request for proposal for a commercial franchise.

Section 4 – Compliance Monitoring

- (a) A licensed or registered hauler reporting pursuant to Public Act 98-1079 and this Ordinance is required to maintain a current list of the non-residential locations in the municipality served by the hauler for collection of municipal waste, and contracting with the hauler for collection services for recyclable material. This list shall be made available, within ten (10) business days of written notice from the municipality, for review by municipal personnel or its designated person from the Solid Waste Agency of Lake County, Illinois (SWALCO) at the premises of the hauler after each six month reporting period. Municipal personnel or its designated person from SWALCO shall review this list solely for the purpose of verifying compliance with the requirements of Public Act 98-1079 and this Ordinance. This list must include the street address location of the service, and the municipality or its designated person from SWALCO may then visit these locations to determine if recycling services are in fact being provided in accordance with this Ordinance.

Section 5 - Penalties

- (a) Any licensed hauler who violates the requirements of this Ordinance shall be subject to a fine of \$500.00 for each day a violation has been found to be committed. A second such violation by the same licensed hauler of this ordinance shall result in a fine of \$750.00 for each day a violation has been found to have been committed. Any licensed hauler that violates the requirements of this Ordinance a third time may have its license revoked by the municipality.
- (b) Any registered hauler who violates the requirements of this Ordinance shall be subject to a fine of \$500.00 for each day a violation has been found to be committed. A second such violation by the same registered hauler of this ordinance shall result in a fine of \$750.00 for each day a violation has been found to have been committed.

Section 6 – Effective Date

- (b) This Ordinance as approved on this _____ day of _____, 2015 shall be in full force and effect beginning on _____, 2015.

Approved and passed this _____ day of _____, 2015.

Ayes:

Nays:

Absent:

By: _____

Village President/Mayor

Attest: _____

Commercial Hauling Form For The Village/City of _____

In order to demonstrate compliance with the Village/City of _____'s Commercial Solid Waste Hauling and Recycling Program Ordinance enacted on _____, you are required to submit this form with the requested information in a timely fashion.

Company and Contact Information

Company Name: _____ Contact Name: _____
Address: _____ Title: _____
_____ Phone No: _____
_____ E-Mail Address: _____

Hauling Service and Recycling Information

****Please fill in the associated six-month timeframe for this reporting period AND calculate your Recycling Participation Rate****

SIX-MONTH REPORTING PERIOD (_____ - _____ Month, _____ Year)

- A. Number of non-residential locations that contract with your company for collection of recyclable materials in the Village/City of _____ A. _____
1. Of the total number indicated above, how many of the non-residential locations share a container for recyclable material? A1. _____
2. Of the total number indicated above, how many are provided recycling services that are less frequent than once every (4) weeks? A2. _____
- B. Number of non-residential locations serviced in the Village/City of _____ B. _____
- C. Recycling Participation Rate (*Divide A by B*) C. _____ %

During this six-month reporting time frame did your company landfill or incinerate any recyclable materials that were collected as source separated recyclable material?

(Please circle)

YES

NO

If yes, provide information, date(s) and reason for landfilling or incinerating the recyclable material.

I certify that the foregoing information is true and complete to the best of my knowledge, and understand that any willfully false information is subject to penalties under the Village/City's ordinance.

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Letter to be Sent to Business Owners Shortly After Enactment of the Commercial Solid Waste Hauling and Recycling Program Ordinance

Dear Business Owner,

On _____, 2015 the Village/City of _____ enacted the Commercial Solid Waste Hauling and Recycling Program Ordinance that requires the haulers providing refuse and/or recycling collection services in our municipality to report to us the number of businesses under contract for recycling services. Under a State law passed last year (Public Act 98-1079), the Village/City of _____ was granted the authority to require haulers to provide information on recycling participation rates every six months over the next three years. If the haulers do not demonstrate that at least 50% of the businesses have recycling services at the end of the three year period, the Village/City may choose to pursue a commercial franchise with one exclusive hauler. The Village has not made a decision on whether to pursue a commercial franchise but is very interested in learning about the current recycling participation rate and seeing that grow to 50% or greater over the next three years.

Please understand the Village's/City's ordinance and the State law are not mandates to your business to recycle. We strongly encourage you to consider adding recycling services to your hauling contract if you don't already. Often, by contracting for recycling services you can see your refuse or garbage bill go down as you decrease service, which helps pay for the added recycling service. The ordinance and State law also require the haulers provide you a written offer, if you currently don't have recycling service, to provide you recycling services and this written offer must be provided to you at least once every two years. Regardless of whether the Village/City would have passed its own local ordinance this requirement for the haulers to make a written offer to provide recycling services is a new State law applicable to all of Lake County. Therefore, based on the local ordinance and the State law expect your waste hauler to be contacting you soon about recycling services, and please consider having a discussion with your hauler and try to find a way to add this service within your budget.

If you have questions regarding the local ordinance, please contact _____ at _____ . It is the Village's/City's goal to increase the level of recycling participation by businesses in our municipality. The Solid Waste Agency of Lake County estimates that about 20 to 30% of businesses currently recycle in Lake County. If we can grow this participation rate to 50% or greater that will be a significant achievement and one that we will be tracking and reporting back to you on.

Regards,

Mayor/Village President of _____

Food-scrap recycling is gaining ground



Barbara Brotman

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

blbrotman@chicagotribune.com

SEPTEMBER 29, 2014

Karen Rozmus stood in front of a room full of municipal and county officials and experts on solid waste disposal and talked about my cantaloupe rinds.

Not my cantaloupe rinds specifically. But the food scraps of the 725 households in Oak Park participating in the village's food scrap composting program, one of which is mine.

I listened proudly at last week's Transforming Waste in Chicagoland symposium, organized by the nonprofit Delta Institute, as Rozmus, Oak Park's environmental services manager, spoke about CompostAble — the only such public program operating in the state.

Participating Oak Park residents pay \$14 a month and get a small pail for kitchen scraps, a starting supply of compostable plastic bags and a 96-gallon cart for organics — the food scraps plus yard waste.

We can put far more in the pails than we could in a backyard compost pile — not just vegetable scraps, but meat, bones, dairy products and compostable paper and utensils.

Then we send it out as if it were dry cleaning.

The village's trash hauler, Waste Management, picks it up and takes it to a facility in Romeoville where it is ground up, put into crop rows called windrows, turned regularly for aeration and transformed into compost.

And twice a year, the village hauls back some finished compost and invites program participants to help themselves.

I peered at the photos Rozmus, who created Oak Park's program, showed of a windrow turner — the massive machine that aerates its compost piles — making its way down a long row.

Were my apple cores in there? My overripe bananas? Was this the final resting place of our leftover Thai food?

It is an honorable place. My little under-sink pail — and no, it doesn't smell — is apparently doing serious environmental good.

"Food scraps are a major part of the solid waste stream," said Eve Pytel, the Delta Institute's director of strategic

priorities, and thus a prime target for reducing the amount of waste sent to methane gas-producing landfills.

"If you want to take your next big slice of the pie out, you've got to get food scraps," she said.

Oak Park is doing so, Rozmus said, and taking out a good-sized slice — about 2,300 pounds a week.

"That's about a ton a week that we're not sending to the landfill," she said.

Solid waste experts see composting as a way to push past the recycling plateau many towns have reached. Seattle is serious about doing so; its City Council voted last week to impose a fine, albeit a nominal one, on households that put food waste into their regular garbage instead of compost bins.

Public industrial composting programs are being tried in a number of areas. New York City has a pilot curbside pickup program that is now serving 100,000 households.

In this area, a private company, Evanston-based Collective Resource, provides home pickup of food scraps to some 200 households. And there have been a few attempts at establishing public programs. Highland Park started a food scrap composting program in 2012, but it was halted after six months when the composting facility experienced numerous problems and closed down.

But Oak Park's program, also begun in 2012 as a pilot, is still going. "We're all jealous," said Walter Willis, executive director of the Solid Waste Agency of Lake County, who is working on establishing food scrap recycling programs there.

"Everybody's watching us. It's very exciting," Rozmus said happily.

But the program may not fly in other communities, she said: "There's an attitude in Oak Park where people get it. They understand environmental issues. They're willing to pay a little extra to teach their kids the right thing to do."

And even so, only 10 percent of residents participate.

I signed up eagerly. I had thought about composting in my backyard for years; but thinking was as far as I ever got.

Katie Kralik, a high school chemistry teacher who lives in Oak Park, did compost in her backyard. But not any more. She is now a happy customer of the village's composting program.

Backyard composting wasn't easy, she said. "It took forever. We couldn't keep it hot enough," she said.

The compost from the village program is better than anything she and her family ever made, she said.

Not only is her under-sink bin odorless but without food scraps in it, so is her conventional garbage, she said. And there isn't much of it.

"We don't even have to take it out every week," she said.

Neither do we. The composting program has been a revelation. Once we separated out the food scraps, we saw that the vast majority of our garbage was food scraps.

And much of it made me feel guilty. All those melons I throw out untouched because they turn out to be tasteless; all those chicken carcasses that a better person than I would make soup with; all those vegetables that turned rotten in the back of the refrigerator — how could I waste so much food?

Now the guilt is gone. The more food I put in my under-sink pail, the more compost can be made. I'm not wasting food; I'm providing the ingredients of a valuable natural resource.

"Food scraps are the new frontier," Rozmus said. "As soon as we start getting more infrastructure, I think it's going to grow faster than recycling. People have been recycling for 25 years, and I think they're ready for it."

I left the symposium a happy resident of the new frontier. I had seen where my cucumber peelings go; and the planet and I both liked it.

blbrotman@tribune.com

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