



*SUSTAINABILITY
OFFICE*

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David Madore
Maine DEP
17 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

SUBJECT: City of South Portland Input for Updated 2024 Maine Solid Waste Management and Recycling Plan

Dear Mr. Madore,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input for the 2024 Maine Solid Waste Management and Recycling Plan. In 2020, the Cities of South Portland and Portland published our One Climate Future joint climate action plan. The plan includes numerous strategies that address waste reduction and facilitate a circular economy. We are encouraged that many of strategies set forth in the 2019 Solid Waste Management and Recycling Plan are aligned with the One Climate Future plan. The City of South Portland agrees with the overarching strategies listed in the 2019 Waste and Recycling plan: increasing waste reduction and reuse initiatives, increasing diversion of organics from disposal, diverting materials from landfill disposal, and addressing current conditions and trends that create disincentives to managing waste further up the hierarchy. However, we believe the State's strategies could be expanded to include more specific and aggressive waste reduction and recycling goals. The following comments are the City of South Portland's recommendations for the 2024 Waste and Recycling Plan.

Reduction and reuse should be prioritized over recycling. While the City of South Portland supports efforts to improve recycling rates and recyclability of materials, we believe the plan should focus on reducing the overall quantity of discarded materials and encouraging reuse. Repair cafes and tool sharing libraries are excellent options to prevent materials from entering the waste stream. Maine communities could benefit from how-to guides, resources, and funding to make these programs attainable. South Portland was able to create a free Electric Lawn Tool Library with funding from a DEP Waste Diversion Grant. The program has been extremely popular and several Maine communities have reached out with questions about starting their own program. South Portland would be happy to help the Department create a how-to guide for other communities interested in starting similar programs.

Reuse is another effective opportunity to reduce waste. The Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging Law is an encouraging first step towards promoting reuse by requiring packaging producers to pay for the cost of managing the waste their packaging generates. South Portland supports using a portion of the EPR reimbursement payments to fund reuse infrastructure, such as industrial washing stations, to make reuse a viable business model in the State.

Encourage the expansion of reuse and recycling facilities and deconstruction. The 2020-2021 Municipal Solid Waste Generation & Disposal Report demonstrates that the quantity of construction and demolition debris (CDD) disposed in the State only continues to rise while the recycling rate remains extremely low. The City of South Portland encourages the expansion of reuse and recycling facilities to help reduce the quantity of landfilled CDD. Additionally, we would like to see the new Solid Waste Management and Recycling plan support deconstruction and reuse of building materials. Deconstruction is a skilled and time-intensive process, which often makes it the more costly option compared to demolition. However, deconstruction results in job creation, preservation of historic architectural materials, affordable building materials, and reduced extraction of virgin materials. The City of South Portland encourages the State to include incentivizing deconstruction in the 2024 Waste Management and Recycling Plan. This could include creating educational materials to inform property owners of potential tax savings from choosing deconstruction, providing a database of deconstruction businesses in the State and locations where Mainers could purchase salvaged materials, or how-to guides for municipalities who want to encourage deconstruction.

Maine should adopt phased mandatory organic waste recycling: States and cities around the country have started to limit or ban food waste disposal in landfills. Banning food waste results in lower greenhouse gas emissions, more landfill capacity, and greater food donation rates. Four New England states have already implemented mandatory organics recycling for commercial and large-scale institutional waste. In 2020, Vermont passed a law banning the disposal of all food scraps including residential sources.

This past March the Environment and Natural Resources Committee brought forth LD 1009 *An Act Regarding the Reduction and Recycling of Food Waste* aimed at preventing food waste from going to landfills or waste-to-energy facilities. The bill is an opportunity to move food waste up the Food Recovery and Solid Waste Hierarchy, one of the foundational premises of the Solid Waste Management and Recycling Plan. Maine currently lacks the infrastructure to manage statewide food waste higher up the waste hierarchy, but mandatory food waste recovery could change that. A statewide mandate would result in the construction of additional food waste composting and anaerobic digestion facilities, expanded capacity at existing facilities, additional haulers, increased food donations, and reduced distance that the food waste will need to travel to be recycled. Voluntary programs are a start, but they are not enough to truly push the needle. The City of South Portland offers free food waste drop-off collection as well as subsidized curbside food waste collection. Despite these efforts, it is estimated that only approximately 16% of the South Portland residents participate in the food waste recycling program.

The City of South Portland urges the Department to include advocating for statewide food waste recycling in the 2024 Waste Management and Recycling Plan. This could include a phased mandate that would start with large-scale generators and gradually expand to include all food waste sources.

Single Use Plastics Bans: Despite their short lifespan single-use plastics have a large carbon footprint. Many single-use plastics, like straws and cutlery, are not made of readily recyclable materials, meaning they end up in our landfills or our environment. These plastics leach harmful chemicals and break down into microplastics that compromise the health of our environment. Banning single-use plastics is a proactive step to prevent plastic pollution. Various municipalities, provinces, and countries globally are

taking steps towards banning single-use plastics. These bans are usually done in a phased approach to give businesses time to find alternative solutions. Implementing single-use plastic bans at a large-scale is generally more effective than implementation at the municipal level. A state-level ban would result in wider reach and create consistent standards for businesses operating in neighboring jurisdictions. South Portland encourages the State to consider a statewide, phased ban on single-use plastics.

Expand rechargeable battery recycling stewardship programs: The City of South Portland has been encouraging beneficial electrification through education and outreach and our Electrify Everything! rebate program. The program included rebates for electric lawn mowers, leaf blowers, and string trimmers. Electric lawn equipment reduces greenhouse gas emissions, ozone emissions, and harmful particulate matter compared to their gas-powered equivalents. While the State has the Stewardship Program for Consumer Batteries, the program does not include rechargeable batteries that weigh more than 5 kilograms or that provide more than 40 volts of direct current. Unfortunately, many rechargeable lawn equipment batteries exceed these criteria, meaning there is often no recycling option for these batteries. As we transition to electric power, it is important that consumers are able to properly recycle rechargeable batteries when they reach their end of life. The City of South Portland encourages the State to include expanding the Battery Stewardship Program to include larger rechargeable batteries in the 2024 Waste Management and Recycling Plan.

Facilitating regionalization: 38 M.R.S. § 1305 *Municipalities; powers and duties* states, “Each municipality shall provide solid waste disposal services for domestic and commercial solid waste generated within the municipality.” Assigning this responsibility to each individual municipality, or Home Rule, discourages collaboration between municipalities and hinders the potential of creating regional waste management systems. Many municipalities would benefit from shared resources and costs of waste management. The combination of National Sword in 2018 and the financial hardship caused by the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in many Maine municipalities making the difficult decision to eliminate their recycling programs. Shared resources between municipalities could make recycling more financially viable, resulting in higher statewide recycling rates. The City of South Portland encourages the State to reconsider the language of 38 M.R.S. § 1305 to allow for the possibility of regionalization.

Best regards,
Susan Parmelee
Sustainability Program Manager
City of South Portland