

Residents back expanding recycling program

By **DAN TOMASELLO**

LYNNFIELD — While residents support expanding the town's recycling program, townspeople are divided on whether a plastic bag ban should be implemented here.

DPW Director John Tomasz recently presented the recycling survey results to the Board of Selectmen. Tomasz recalled that the Recycling Committee administered the survey in October, and close to 1,700 residents took the survey.

"The objective of the survey was to understand our community priorities with respect to trash and recycling," Tomasz stated. "By diverting the amount we reuse, recycling and compost, Lynnfield can reduce its cost for waste disposal. Our ultimate goal is to preserve the environment for generations to come, and improve and encourage responsible waste management."

Tomasz said the town currently spends \$67 per ton to get rid of trash and \$25 per ton to recycle materials.

"If I went out tomorrow and bid those out, it would probably be in the \$70 to \$90 range for each item," said Tomasz. "Our contract expires in June 2021. We have to start thinking about how we are going to tackle that cost. Just for the tonnage disposal, we are looking at an additional \$100,000 to \$140,000 just to get rid of those items unless the market changes."

According to the survey, 1,572 residents said they participate in the town's curbside recycling program every other week. The data revealed that 635 residents have used the town's Hazardous Waste Day collection event and 561 people have recycled cardboard at Town Hall. The survey's results indicated that 646 residents reported using the DPW's yard waste drop off program at the DPW yard and 442 residents have utilized the Lynnfield-Wakefield co-op swim team's Christmas tree pickup program.

The survey's data indicated that 324 residents utilized special appliance recycling days and 722 residents reported recycling bottles at stores. According to the survey, 527 residents reported returning plastic bags to stores and 257 residents undertake composting. Forty-six residents have used a commercial composting program such as Black Earth, and 522 residents have recycled electronics and batteries at stores. The data indicated that 303 residents have dropped off unwanted prescriptions at the police station during National Prescription Drug Take Back Day.

In regards to food waste, 1,330 people stated that they throw out unwanted food in the trash while 229 people use a home composting bin. Additionally, 51 people participate in a commercial composting program and 132 people reported giving unwanted food to pets and livestock.

According to the survey's results, 1,252 residents said they dispose two or fewer trash bags each week while 315 residents reported disposing of three or four bags. Fifty-four people said they dispose of five or six trash bags each week.

According to the data, 1,553 residents reported recycling "as often as possible," 62 residents stated they recycle "when it is convenient" and 33 residents noted they never recycle.

When asked how can recycling be improved, 833 residents reported the town could do a better job informing people about what can and cannot be recycled. Additionally, 850 people said the town should be offering free or reduced recycling barrels and 913 people stated that they want large and standardized wheeled containers to be made available.

The survey's results revealed that 277 residents were willing to pay more in order to have recycling picked up each week instead of bi-weekly. According to the survey, 683 residents stated that they want a supplemental drop off day at the DPW yard, and 676 residents supported installing recycling stations in public places.

When asked what would motivate people to recycle or reuse items more, 305 people said they would if the town enforced and reduced the trash limit. One-hundred-and-ninety people said they were willing to pay fees for bulky items, and 400 people said the town needs to do more to educate residents about the issue.

Additionally, 139 residents said the town should implement a Save Money and Reduce Trash (SMART) program that would require residents to pay for trash. Seven-hundred-and-fifty-four residents reported that they recognize reducing waste benefits the environment.

The survey's responders were divided on whether the town should implement a plastic bag ban, which has been launched in Melrose, Reading and Wakefield. North Reading will be implementing its plastic bag ban on Jan. 1.

According to the survey, 750 residents supported a plastic bag ban, 658 were against the idea and 167 people stated they don't care.

"I think that will be a hot topic in town," said Tomasz.

Tomasz said the survey's responders believe "recycling is important."

"People recognize that recycling is a good thing to do," said Tomasz.

Tomasz said the Recycling Committee is looking to implement "simple, cost-effective things to help people."

"A lot of people don't understand what can and cannot be recycled," said Tomasz.

Tomasz said the Recycling Committee and the DPW were “extremely grateful for the enthusiasm from the community for this survey.” He said the survey’s results “will enable the town to make clear priorities for the future.”

Selectmen Chairman Phil Crawford thanked Tomasz and the Recycling Committee for launching the survey.

“It’s great that you got that many responses,” said Crawford. “It means a lot of people are interested in this topic.”

In response to a question from Crawford, Tomasz anticipates the Recycling Committee is looking to develop some recommendations to improve the recycling program this winter.