WEST HARTFORD SMART EXPERIENCE

CONNECTICUT FACES A TRASH CRISIS
HOW WE CAN SOLVE IT TOGETHER
WASTE REDUCTION INITIATIVE

- 2016 - Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) updates State Solid Waste Management Plan

- New goal: divert 60% of all solid waste generated in the state after January 1, 2024

- Accomplish this via source reduction, reuse and recycling

- If West Hartford continues its current waste management practices, it will be unable to meet these state-mandated reduction and recycling goals by 2024.
INTRO TO SAVE MONEY AND REDUCE TRASH (SMART)

• In 2016, West Hartford received grant to explore SMART.

• SMART is a Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT) system: an innovative way to pay for waste collection and disposal services. It is designed to motivate people to recycle more and think of ways to generate less waste overall.

• West Hartford contracted with Waste Zero, a national leader in municipal waste reduction, to propose and educate the public about a more equitable system of solid waste finance to reduce waste and increase recycling.

• Initial analysis showed a SMART program can reduce trash by 44%.
SMART CONVERSATION

• 2016
  • Conducted a survey about local and State waste process
  • Held small focus groups with survey respondents

• 2017
  • Held 3 well-attended public forums on the SMART concept
COMMUNITY CONVERSATION FINDINGS

What did West Hartford Residents Think?

• Mixed results
  • 1/3 agreed with the SMART concept PAYT
  • 1/3 agreed state has a waste management crisis
    • **BUT** wanted other solutions to reduce their waste **NOT PAYT**
  • 1/3 suggested the DPW Director be fired for suggesting the idea PAYT

• Social Media hijacked the narrative of SMART’s benefits

• Lack of Trust
  • Is this really a Crisis?
  • WASTE ZERO produces the trash bags, leaving the impression this was beyond just waste
  • Savings goes back in to the system, it doesn’t go back to the resident
ACTIONS TAKEN POST COMMUNITY CONVERSATION
BASED ON COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

• Weekly Recycling Collection Trial: FY 2018 - 2019
  • Anticipated volume increase never materialized
  • Increase in “Wish-Cycling”
  • Put-out rate lower than projections, failing to justify collection cost. Program discontinued.

• Implemented Food Scrap separation in West Hartford school lunch programs. Program currently active.

• Formal recommendation to implement SMART presented
  • Lack of community support

• Hired a dedicated Recycling Coordinator – PT with FT responsibilities
  • Education-Education-Education

• Bi-Weekly Yard Waste collection added Spring 2019
NEW INFLUENCES TO CONSIDER

• New: Recycling Processing Fees
  • No longer generate revenue from mixed materials
  • $84 per ton mixed materials processing fees = $650,000 in new fees annually

• Reduced Mixed Material Volumes
  • What’s In / What's Out efforts to reduce contamination rates
  • Local education lead by Town Recycling Coordinator
LESSONS LEARNED

• Top down approach failed
  • Lacked top state and local “Influencers”
  • Relied on “go it alone” or “pioneer change agent” at the local level

• Political and community buy-in process flawed
  • Moved ahead with the SMART conversation without strong buy-in
  • Lacked a consensuses on the theories of SMART

• Fiscal Accountability
  • Out of pocket expenses increase not decrease
  • The term “Savings” is flawed

• The Fear of Change
  • Resident loss of convenient and un-checked disposal options

• Enforcement
  • No clear answers
  • Fear as to what enforcement of garbage collection looks like - outcomes
Q&A