

TO: Cleveland Heights Task Force on Refuse and Recycling
FROM: Sustainable Heights Network Recycling Committee
RE: Citizen input for consideration by Refuse and Recycling Task Force

BACKGROUND

The Sustainable Heights Network was formed to serve as a vehicle for citizen engagement on environmental issues in Cleveland Heights, University Heights and Shaker Heights. The Recycling Committee has focused on the effectiveness of recycling options in the municipal and private sectors. Since summer of 2018 we have been looking closely at the challenges facing Cleveland Heights' curbside recycling program.

In view of the Task Force's assignment to evaluate and make recommendations for improving recycling, we respectfully submit the following thoughts and suggestions for more successful recycling practices. Since recycling has a natural affinity with larger issues of environmental sustainability, climate change and quality of life, some of the ideas presented here reach more broadly into these areas.

We encourage the City to foster innovative thinking and creative problem solving to address the many urgent environmental issues facing our community and our world. We offer these points for consideration by a progressive-minded community seeking solutions to environmental degradation, resource overconsumption, public health risks and the effects of climate change.

We would welcome the opportunity to work more closely with the City to help engage residents, conduct research, develop and implement programs and make Cleveland Heights a model city for recycling and sustainability efforts.

SUSTAINABLE HEIGHTS NETWORK RECYCLING COMMITTEE

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EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

- Information about recycling needs to be more widely disseminated, accessible and accurate. If automated collection is approved, that will be an ideal chance to launch a major educational campaign.

- Ongoing updates should be part of any long-range education plan. Recycling guidelines, conditions and opportunities will continue to shift, and people need to count on accurate, up-to-date information.
- A multi-pronged approach is necessary. Easy-to-find information on the City's web site is essential. Social media presence is becoming more and more significant. Many other smaller outreach tools should be used to carry the message, including: a cover feature in Focus magazine; refrigerator magnets attached to the cover of Focus annually; clear outline of policies, including any new fees and fines enacted; a major mass mailing campaign; regular inserts in all City mass mailings, such as bills.
- SHN members engage in community education at neighborhood events, such as the home improvement fair, street fairs and block parties. We are available to supplement the City's outreach efforts.
- Programming that addresses climate change and personal responsibility could be encouraged in our schools and with arts groups such as Dobama, Lake Erie Ink and Heights Arts.
- Cross-disciplinary school curricula could likewise involve students of all ages.
- Our schools could have a "Keep It Clean" program to reduce recycling contamination, starting at the earliest grades and continuing through every building.
- Service opportunities in recycling or sustainability efforts should be an ongoing part of K-12 education. Our private schools and colleges should be included in outreach programs.
- A survey of residents' feelings and participation with recycling could be beneficial.
- Education about how to compost could reduce trash and help residents with better lawn and garden care.
- Education should not be limited to just curbside recycling. Private and non-governmental options for circular disposition and re-use of materials and items should be explored. Solid Waste District is one valuable source of such information.
- Recycling is not enough. It is important that we all reduce our consumption of resources, especially plastics. We need to do everything we can to lessen the prevalence of single-use plastic. This should be seen as part of the education mission about recycling. "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Refuse" is still the most concise directive, and should be part of our messaging plan.

ALTERNATIVES AND SUPPLEMENTS TO RECYCLING AS WE KNOW IT

- Should the City operate a drop-off recycling site? This could allow responsible disposal of items that do not fit the curbside list. There are many challenges with this, but could be advantageous in reducing our waste tonnage.

- Create a seasonal or annual “freecycle” fair for people to exchange re-usable items, like sports equipment, furniture, clothing. Shaker Heights and South Euclid have events like this.

- Bring the “Not For Sale” mobile app to the Heights, for the same purpose. Many cities have access to this, including Lakewood.

- The City could operate its own composting and/or mulching facility, and provide free or low-cost mulch to residents to cover any costs.

- Proper mower mulching of grass and leaves by the City and homeowners would lessen leaf collection loads and improve the health of lawns. “Grass clippings not accepted for collection” ?

- All public litter cans should have a companion receptacle for recyclables. Clear labeling of the cans will be important.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

- Fleet vehicles could be replaced over time with all-electric vehicles. Electric cars are an inevitable part of our future.

- The availability of vehicle charging stations could spur further adoption of electric cars and set Cleveland Heights apart as a sustainability leader.

- Garbage trucks, with their high mass and stop/start routines, are perfect candidates as electric vehicles with batteries recharged by regenerative brakes. Ultra-capacitors represent the next generation of high efficiency, lower-overall-cost propulsion power. Such vehicles, including city buses, already exist.

- The City should make E-Star or LEED certification of our buildings a priority in future construction and renovation projects. Solar panels on our buildings are a logical, maybe inevitable, long-term cost saver. Why not be at the forefront of this movement?

- At the least, all City buildings could be powered by renewable energy, (and even realize cost savings. Shaker Heights has achieved this).

URBAN PLANNING, PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS AND ENTREPRENEURIAL EFFORTS

- The City should invite and foster environmental entrepreneurship as part of our economic development plan.

- The Severance mall site represents an incredible opportunity for high impact, high visibility projects. As an urban farm reclaimed from an asphalt wasteland, it could be a national banner to further our brand as a sustainable city. It could also be a regional hub for environmentally responsive businesses.

- Rust Belt Riders is a successful and rapidly expanding local composting operation. With our abundant supply of autumn leaves, we would be an attractive location for them. We should assist them in securing a favorable site and business support before another city does so.

- To reduce landfill volumes, Cleveland Heights should consider a contract with Simple Recycling www.simplerecycling.com a for-profit recycling service that provides free of cost collection of textiles and small household goods via curbside pick-up. Simple Recycling is currently being offered in neighboring communities: Highland Heights, Mayfield Village, Richmond Heights, South Euclid as well as hundreds of communities in Ohio and nationwide.

- Stormwater management will become increasingly important in the face of increased rainfall associated with a changing climate. Our ailing sewer infrastructure needs all the help it can get, and proper rainwater capture and re-use at institutional scale can only benefit our local ecosystems.

- Despite some challenges, Styrofoam recycling technology has made significant advances in recent years. We should offer to “incubate” a Styrofoam recycler.

- While waste-to-energy conversion is not a first-line choice for ecological sustainability, it has achieved some successes, and puts otherwise unusable materials into service. Peekskill, NY is one place where WMI fuels 88,000 homes with waste burned at very high temperature. Plastics-to-diesel is another technology that has seen advances. Such businesses might not be suitable for our city, but could be looked into.

- Biodeisel conversion, (turning food waste, including commercial fryer oils, into fuel), is a mature technology that could take advantage of the waste from our many restaurants.

- Glass recycling is a simple technology that can be implemented on very small scale. Recycled glass has fallen out of favor largely because of the cost of transporting it. A local glass recycling operation in Cleveland Heights might be a good small-scale gateway business that could open the conversation about the circular economy, and provide jobs and job training to entry-level employees.

- Our transfer station is a valuable asset. We already accept waste and recycling from Case Western Reserve, with a small monetary return to the city. We should research other institutions, businesses or communities who could benefit from using the transfer station.

- City building codes should incentivize energy efficiency and LEED-like measures in building design, construction and materials.

- The City should adopt a “net zero” or carbon neutral goal that is ambitious and admirable across the region.

- Set a zero-waste goal and create an implementation plan (SHN can provide examples). If not a goal, then at minimum, the City of Cleveland Heights should establish a zero-waste protocol for CH facilities and city sponsored events.

SUSTAINABILITY AS A CORE VALUE

- The City should establish a Department of Sustainability, or at minimum, a Sustainability Director or Coordinator, to manage the myriad opportunities and challenges presented by ideas such as those in this document. Consensus and cooperation between City departments is essential to success, as is the ongoing commitment to the long-range goals of exemplary environmental stewardship.

- To maintain and build our identity as an ecological, healthful and sustainable community, a mission statement regarding our commitment to environmental health would be called for. "Cleveland Heights Recycles" has served us well over the past three decades, but in the twenty-first century, it has become plain that "recycling is not enough." All cities everywhere are confronting the same environmental issues. Cleveland Heights can be a leader in implementing innovative approaches and tangible solutions.