

To: East Haddam Selectmen
First Selectman, Emmett Lyman
Selectman, Rob Smith
Selectman, Sue Link

From: Transfer Station Committee
Robert C. Morsch, Chairman

April 5, 2018

Selectmen:

You passed a motion on August 16, 2017 calling for the creation of a Transfer Station Committee (TSC). The committee would have five regular members, and two alternate members. Interviews were held with town residents who volunteered to serve on the committee. The purpose of the committee was to “study ways in which solid waste operating practices in the Town of East Haddam can be improved at the Town transfer station”. Personnel decisions were made and on January 18th the committee met. At our first meeting, First Selectman Lyman appointed Robert Morsch to chair the Committee. The Transfer Station Committee has since held meetings twice monthly at town facilities and visited transfer stations in Haddam, Essex, Portland and East Haddam. The committee has no authority and functions solely to make recommendations to the Board of Selectmen.

The purpose of this report is to provide our findings and make recommendations.

A study was conducted of all transfer stations within Middlesex County. A table was created that compared all town transfer stations by population; whether carters were permitted; whether there was mandatory garbage pick-up; permit fees; bag fees and other fees. A copy of the same is included and is part of this document. Also attached are copies of the budget versus actual expenditures for transfer stations in East Haddam, Essex, and Portland. They also are part of this document. An examination and review of the revenue and expenses associated with the bulky waste area of the transfer station was conducted. The data provided is illustrated in the attached spreadsheet.

Included also are the agenda and minutes for all of our meetings, along with a copy of the interim (60 day) report. This is the report that was presented to the Selectmen at a Board of Selectmen’s meeting on March 24. Also provided is a list of motions passed by the committee. Again, these motions exclusively dealt with making recommendations to the Selectmen. You will note that the most significant motion discussed later in this report contains a number of items. The committee voted unanimously that the Selectmen adopt all of the recommendations as a group.

Many of these documents, along with the DEEP announced intention of moving towards a goal of achieving 60% recycling by 2024, played a significant role during our deliberations, conclusions, and recommendations. (See Public Act 14-94.)

East Haddam currently recycles 21.7% of total household waste, well -below the norm and what is possible. It is our belief that eventually DEEP’s goal will become increasingly important. (Please review Projected Impact of SMART on East Haddam, CT – DEEP January 2018, for the reasons this is likely.) This, along with the belief by DEEP that tipping fees (the fee to get rid of non-recyclables) will move from \$60.00 per ton to over \$100.00 per ton provides ample motivation to control costs now rather than waiting for our transfer station costs to explode.

The First Selectman informed me that the Board of Finance expected to receive revenue from the operation of the transfer station. While this is a reasonable request, and is standard throughout most of Connecticut, raising revenue through a simple fee-based sticker system does nothing to increase recycling, nor does it reduce operation costs.

The fundamental focus of the committee has been to meet the revenue requirement in a way that motivates residents to increase recycling, while at the same time reducing the total tax burden residents of East Haddam pay for the operation and use of the transfer station.

To do so requires the town to create a new policy that funds the transfer station in a different way. Residents who use the transfer station will no longer exclusively pay for the transfer station through ever increasing mill rates. Rather, we will be empowered to limit and reduce our costs by increasing our recycling.

We pay when we dispose of non-recyclables and save by paying nothing when we recycle. The increase in recycling associated with the adoption of a "Pay as you Throw" plan has two significant financial benefits. The data shows that in towns where the plan is implemented, recycling increases to 40%-50% of total town waste. This has a substantial impact on cost by decreasing tipping fees for non-recyclables while simultaneously increasing revenue received for recyclables (we receive \$5.00/ton for recyclables). This has been done in Portland and the savings have been dramatic for their residents. Portland is a nearby town and is similar in size to us (population East Haddam 9,100; Portland 9,500).

Using Portland's budget for 2017/18, residents will pay \$164,835 to operate their transfer station through their real estate taxes, \$60,500 for town supplied garbage bags, and \$27,000 for use permits. This total is \$252,335. Dividing the total paid by residents by their 9,500 population equals a cost per resident of \$26.56 to operate the Portland Transfer Station.

East Haddam's proposed budget for 2018/19 is \$615,673. Public Works budgeted \$40,000 in revenue from all transfer station related sources, leaving \$575,673 to be paid for by the taxpaying public. With 9,100 residents, the cost per taxpayer is \$63.26. Why we pay \$63.26 per person for our transfer station and Portland pays \$26.56 per person should be alarming to all East Haddam taxpayers.

The reasons for the \$363,338 cost differential are numerous. Under a town-based bag program, carters do not use the transfer station and commercial trash is not accepted. In addition, tighter monitoring to ensure only East Haddam residents have access to our transfer station and taking measures to control the bulky waste area will have a positive impact. These measures will reduce the total amount of all types of trash, thus reducing our costs dramatically. (Commercial trash was not accepted by any of the transfer stations surveyed.) In addition, the data shows that residential hauler's business will increase when a town-bag based program is implemented. As an example, Portland haulers collect minimally 50% of their residential trash compared to East Haddam's 25%-30%. This increase will further reduce the transfer station's variable cost of operation (tipping fees & transportation costs).

While moving to a town-based bag or "Pay as you Throw" program represents a significant change for us, times require we look towards the future. Our town is one of the last two towns in Connecticut that allows private carters to use their transfer station. Durham and Middlefield have now announced they are ending this practice effective 6/30/18.

We have two local companies that serve about 25% of the community providing trash pick-up services. The committee is made up of a broad spectrum of East Haddam residents including one of our local carters as a

regular voting member of the Transfer Station Committee. Please be mindful that our comprehensive recommendation, discussed later, was passed unanimously. This occurred because all the committee members understood that our recommendations were in the best interest of the taxpayer, our local haulers, as well as our environment.

To provide a balanced comparison, the committee visited a transfer station without a bag program, the Essex Transfer Station. This station does not allow commercial haulers and allows for a choice of a sticker or a punch card based system to use the facilities. (Yearly stickers cost \$125/yr. or an optional punch card may be purchased for \$25 covering 10 resident supplied bags for non-recyclables. There are discounts for seniors.)

Essex's actual yearly budget (2016/2017) was \$252,225. Direct revenues associated with the operation of the transfer station were \$122,070. The net cost to operate the transfer station was thus \$130,155. Dividing this cost by the number of residents in Essex (6,700) yields a cost per resident of \$19.26/yr.

Essex's cost was the lowest cost of the three transfer stations measured, however, it was also noted that it was the smallest in size and town population. The Essex Transfer Station manager, who is also a member of our committee, plans to haul their own trash in the future as is mentioned below. This action will further lower Essex's cost per resident.

As part of East Haddam's recommended cost reduction program, we suggest that the town purchases a truck and an appropriate number of containers. Portland hauls their trash. Should we do the same, our savings should be approximately \$108,000 per year considering lower MSW and recycling volumes and the elimination of transportation expense. The investment has a payback period of two years. This should be an easy business decision. We would also suggest replacing all rented containers eventually with town-owned containers. There should be a determination identifying the number of containers required as soon as possible.

It will also be necessary to change the way we access the upper level of the transfer station. We recommend a gate guiding all vehicles over the scale. In short, no one goes to the upper level without speaking with a transfer station employee. This will ensure that the town is being paid per the fee schedule when bulky waste is being deposited. It is critical only our residents have access to the upper level. The justification for a gate can be found in the "East Haddam Transfer Station Bulky Waste Analysis". A review of this analysis shows the savings associated with implementing the required controls and other changes will make this area at least break even. The savings will exceed \$50,000 per year.

Given that the cost structure of our Transfer station is two to three times that of the other transfer stations we studied, it is not feasible to consider regionalization. If our costs become similar to other area transfer stations this could be reviewed at that time. It is, however, difficult to see how this would be a viable option, given the increased resident travel required and the lack of any substantial economies of scale.

We are also recommending the use of a mandatory no-cost sticker system. The system must include proof of residency as well as the license plate of the car. Without a license plate component, out-of-town residents and businesses will have continued unfettered access to our transfer station. NO sticker /NO Access. We suggest a lengthy grace period, but eventually it must be enforced.

Safety - We approved a motion to recommend the back of the MSW Compactor be closed to the public. It is dangerous for people to stand on the back of a pickup truck 25 feet above a motorized compactor. I recently learned there was an accident years ago resulting in a broken back, with the town settling the

eventual litigation. In spite of a recommended change and subsequent implementation of a plan to limit access to this area, the policy was reversed due to complaints from those wanting to maintain the status quo. I believe that continuous improvement is a far better philosophy, and in this case safer, than maintaining the status quo.

I reviewed the Connecticut Municipal Leaders Manual, which clearly states the Board of Selectmen “makes policy decisions” (Part 5-2, Section C). Should the Selectmen wish to implement this recommendation, it is their exclusive right under the General Statutes to do so.

We also approved a motion to recommend an ordinance creating a review board, such that East Haddam is able to collect fines that would otherwise go to the State government. This is best handled by a town attorney.

On March 12, 2018 **we unanimously approved a comprehensive motion to recommend the following be adopted as a group.**

- 1) Implementation of the previously recommended town bag plan. Bag cost and details to be determined by the Selectmen.
- 2) There will be no commercial MSW (Municipal Solid Waste) and recyclables brought to the Transfer Station.
- 3) Haulers (carters) will no longer have access to the East Haddam transfer station.
- 4) Contractors will be allowed to dispose of bulky waste generated by an East Haddam residence with proof that the waste came from an East Haddam residence.
- 5) Residents will continue to bring bulky waste to the transfer station at the rate set by the Selectmen.
- 6) The rate to dispose of bulky waste will be changed to \$140.00/ton.

The acceptance of this recommendation, along with the other suggested changes, will set the Transfer Station on a stronger financial path, decreasing the taxes our residents pay for the Transfer Station by nearly 50%. If implemented, our taxpayers’ yearly cost to operate the East Haddam Transfer Station will decrease as follows:

1. Tipping fee reduction from haulers	\$ 86,291
2. Tipping fee reduction from increased recycling	\$ 30,884
3. Increase in recycling revenue	\$ 498
4. Gross Savings from self-hauling (not including cost of diesel fuel, maintenance)	\$ 108,000
5. Savings from capturing revenue from Bulky Waste to break even (Assumes 86% pays and 14% go free)	\$ 52,339
6. Increase in Bulky Waste revenue from rate increase	\$ 28,968
Total cost savings and adjustments lowering taxpayer cost	<u>\$ 306,980</u>

There is an incremental variable revenue component borne by the resident transfer station user, the cost of the bags. Setting the bag cost is beyond the scope of this committee; however, the First Selectman has stated that he wished the bag prices to be as low as possible. Portland uses three different size bags that cost one, four, and five dollars each. The total cost to all residents for a year was \$60,500. Keeping the cost

of the small bags to a dollar, and the other sizes to two to four dollars, our bag cost will be considerably less than Portland's.

Without making any cuts in services, and including the cost of bags, our recommendations will reduce our taxpayer cost by \$265,000-\$275,000 per year. This will allow for an almost 50% cut in taxpayer provided funds (budget) to operate our transfer station. This will in turn reduce our per person cost from \$63.26 to \$32.97. When asked, the Board of Finance Chairman said "the savings of this plan was equivalent to one percent (1%) of East Haddam's total budget." Implementing these changes will make a substantial contribution in reducing government costs in our town.

There are a few technical reasons why we were unable to reach Portland's current numbers. One is an accounting difference dealing with the allocation of fringe benefits and the other deals with personnel. We have three people working at our transfer station and they have two. We agree that it is unsafe policy to leave a single East Haddam employee alone on a regular basis. We are making no recommendations to cut staffing. I have also not included the potential savings associated with the expected increase in East Haddam waste being handled by haulers.

During the last ten years, past Selectmen have formed two other committees to make recommendations concerning the East Haddam Transfer Station. None of the recommendations were implemented.

Our Committee is making recommendations that, if accepted, will have a far-reaching impact in terms of cost reduction, control, and efficiency. Perhaps, most importantly, we will take a leadership position with East Haddam's focus on recycling while we use less of our tax dollars.

While the direction and philosophy of the committee has been totally resident centric, we have taken an all-inclusive approach during our deliberations. As a result, we believe that our recommendations can be viewed as a win-win opportunity for those with different mindsets. The challenge going forward is that we are able to share with you and our fellow residents the concept that there are times when change can benefit us all in many different ways.

On behalf of the Transfer Station Committee, I hope you, our Selectmen, and the East Haddam community, choose to implement the recommendations contained in this document. These changes will dramatically reduce and control the costs for the operation of the transfer station. Taxpayer contribution to operate the facility will decrease by nearly 50%; our policies will be consistent with our neighboring towns and East Haddam will become an environmental leader in solid waste management.

From all of us, we thank the Board of Selectmen and the people of East Haddam for the opportunity to serve you.

Robert Bennett

Mike Birner

Vincent Ceceri

Gregory Egnaczyk

James Jansky, Jr.

Bob Morsch, Chairman