



### Feature

## Laura Cahn and the EAC – New Haven's Environmental Watchdog



*Laura Cahn never set out to be a full-time environmentalist, but environmental issues that impacted her personal life, including lead contamination in a home in Massachusetts as well as the realization that pesticide aerosols from the Yale playing fields were a threat to her neighborhood in New Haven, convinced her to get more involved.*

So how did the New Haven Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) come into being? Originally, it was an informal forum where various officials from public utilities could get together to discuss environmental issues. Around 2015, a group of concerned citizens started meeting to see if they could get the City of New Haven to take notice of certain environmental issues and concerns. They changed the charter for the existing environmental council so it could be comprised of various stakeholders who could advocate for the community, including the Chief Administrative Officer, the City Engineer, Planning Commission, Board of Alders and citizens from various districts. Laura is the current Chairperson.

The mission of the Council was re-written as follows: “[To] collect, analyze, interpret, publish, and disseminate base line information concerning historical, existing, and projected environmental conditions concerning air, water, solid waste, noise, and use of natural resources in the city [of New Haven].”

At the end of 2016, the Council and its appointees became canonized as an ongoing Commission in the City of New Haven. Meetings are accessible to the public and Laura extends an open invitation to citizens to come down and have their voice heard and even get involved in some capacity. (The meetings are held on the first Wednesday of the month and are currently on Zoom).

*“We try to tackle specific issues because we want to come up with solutions.”*

Speaking to that subject, I asked Laura about the Council’s recent efforts to address noise pollution problems in the City. She reports that the Council has, among other things, been studying the deleterious effects of leaf blowers which are ubiquitous around town from early spring until late autumn. Experts have been called in who analyze the effects of certain frequencies of sound at certain decibel levels. The Council has left no stone unturned in its study, (which includes a deep dive on low

frequencies that travel through solid objects by producing sympathetic vibrations – such as windows of homes and other surfaces, and the resultant physiological and psychological ramifications). Compliance with instructions, ordinances and best practices regarding these tools has also been studied. This thorough approach is indicative of their work ethic on any given project.

As with any of their chosen fields of study, the findings are typically documented and presented at the Council’s regular meetings, and are then made available to all City government parties so they may take action as they see fit. Depending on the circumstances, the Council may choose to continue monitoring the situation and report periodically to the City. That is what they are doing regarding English Station – the decommissioned power plant on the East River. The site’s current owner has intentions of developing the site and possibly rehabbing the physical plant. However, the site must be remediated and cleared of all toxins before being okayed for development. The EAC has partnered with CT DEEP to take on the task of monitoring the levels of toxins, making sure that no harm comes to the river life and any adjacent properties.

Ms. Cahn indicates that since the EAC operates in an advisory capacity, the challenge is getting various entities such as Community Management Teams, the Board of Alders, and Living Cities Initiative to disseminate their findings to their constituent residents in the City. This fosters transparency and awareness.

The NHSWRA has been known to frequent the monthly meetings of the EAC, and Pierre Barbour, our Executive Director, has given presentations and/or made himself available to address questions concerning recycling and waste diversion. In closing, I asked Laura what her ‘wish list’ would consist of when it comes to those areas. She is interested in “pay-as-you-throw” (PAYT) programs, which have been known to monetarily incentivize the participants in some communities to divert more of their waste to recycling. She also expressed interest in organics collection services and curbside textile collection. At one point in our meeting, she announced “I’ve got props!” I wasn’t sure what she was getting at but to my surprise she started wielding such things as egg cartons in front of the camera, illustrating how wasteful packaging is (her pet peeve). “100 years ago, you picked up your bread from the baker. A decade or two later, they wrapped it in wax paper for you. Then it was put in a bag with the wax paper, along with a plastic tie, and now everything is sealed in single use plastic clamshell containers and put in bags – why do we need all this packaging??”

Laura Cahn, it is clear you are passionate about what you do, and we thank you as well as the Council for your dedication and service to the City and its residents!

For more contact info and meeting minutes, click [here](#)

Laura Cahn brandishes the only type of egg carton acceptable in mixed recycling



 **Bits and Pieces**



**/Textiles vendor search**

You may have noticed that the textile recycling containers are no longer at the New Haven Transfer Station. We've decided that it was in our best interest, and the interest of transfer station users, to discontinue our relationship with our textile recycler and to go in a different direction. We regret that this has resulted in a temporary gap in service, but expect to have collection bins in place in short order. We fully expect the new provider will more closely align with best practices for textile recycling. Please be patient and understand that the Authority is working hard on this, and that any delay will be minor, but worth the wait, as service and recycling standards will be on par with the best in the State. We know that it being "the season" for cleaning out closets, that this is not a good time to have such an interruption, and we do appreciate your patience. We will be sending out a bulletin to your email as soon as we are back online. Should you feel the need to deposit your unwanted articles in the meantime, there are drop boxes in your neighborhood, usually placed at shopping centers or supermarkets. We can't vouch for the recycling practices or quality of any of these vendors, however.



**/ grass clippings**

'tis the season for yard waste! Please remember that the Transfer Station does not accept grass clippings. Please visit the [Grass Clippings](#) page on our website to find out what you *can* do with your excess green stuff.

**/ Earth Day (April 22)**

A reminder that Earth Day is April 22<sup>nd</sup>. We will post or feature local Earth Day promotional events on our website for those interested in getting their Earth Day events or messages out into the Community.

**/ Recycling Awareness Presentation**

A big part of the solution to consumer recycling is getting the right information out there. We're here to help! Our presentation makes it interesting and fairly simple, with some ideas that might even lead

you to “whistle while you work” at recycling. Not only is it the law, but it is good for the Earth and builds community pride. If you are part of an organization or group in the City of New Haven that could use a 'refresher course' on the do's and don'ts, then please contact us at the New Haven Solid Waste & Recycling Authority (203-691-5374) to schedule a presentation!

### **/ Recycling and Waste Disposal at Housing Complexes – who to talk to about problems**

If you live in a complex that is served by commercial waste collectors, and not served by the City of New Haven Refuse and Recycling trucks (you know, the white ones that say “City of New Haven Public Works” on the side), then please read on. Responsibility for compliance with garbage and recycling ordinances in the City of New Haven rests with the owner or property manager. It is their responsibility to arrange for responsible removal of trash and household recycling. If you believe there is a problem, you should address it with your property manager, or owner if there is no property manager on site. Some of the more glaring problems and/or ordinance violations in New Haven include (but are not limited to):

- o not arranging for a recycling collection container on the premises
- o overflowing dumpsters (receptacle not large enough or collection days are too infrequent)
- o overall site uncleanliness due to litter around dumpsters becoming airborne
- o occupants mixing recycling in with household trash
- o mixing of recyclable bin contents with trash bin contents (same truck collects both at same time)
- o trucks collect before 6:00 a.m. (before 5:00 a.m. in the downtown area.)
- o bins are placed too far away from some of the residences at the complex

Once you report these issues to the property management, depending on where direct responsibility lies, they should either act to remedy the situation or refer it to the refuse hauler who should then remedy it.

If any of the practices listed above have not been remedied in a reasonable amount time after you report them to the owner/property manager, you should consider reporting them to the Solid Waste Authority (see our contact information on the last page of this newsletter).



## Calendar:

The New Haven Solid Waste & Recycling Authority Transfer Station will be **closed Friday, April 15**, in observance of the Good Friday Holiday. Our administrative offices will be closed on that day as well.

National / Worldwide events:

April 22, 2022 – **Earth Day** (world-wide)

This year's theme: “Investing in Our Planet”

<https://www.earthday.org/>

## City of New Haven meeting schedule:

<https://newhaven-ct.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>

## New Haven Parks and Public Works info:

### **A Message from Parks and Public Works Resident Services:**

In observance of the Holiday, Parks and Public Works Resident Services office located at 34 Middletown Ave will be closed on Friday, April 15<sup>th</sup>. The Transfer Station located at 260 Middletown Ave will also be closed. Trash and Recycling will be picked up as normally scheduled.

- Just a reminder that leaves must be placed in brown paper bags and should not weigh more than 50lbs. Branches cannot be longer than 4-ft long and must be bound (cannot be wider than a foot wide when bound) in order to be picked up along with your weekly trash and recycling pick-up.
- The Parks and Public Works annual street sweeping program begins on April 1<sup>st</sup> and ends on October 31<sup>st</sup>. This annual program is designed to remove the heavy accumulation of salt, sand, litter and leaves that has collected over the winter months as well as help keep New Haven’s miles of streets clean.

Spring has sprung, and gardening season is upon us. Please consider mulching your grass clippings for a healthier lawn. Grass clippings are a natural fertilizer and a natural weed killer. Lawn clippings help lawns stay hydrated. Grass clippings are not acceptable at the Transfer Station.

Household hazardous waste such as paint, cleaners, solvents, batteries, chemicals, motor oil, oil-based products and aerosol sprays, is not accepted at the Transfer Station. These items can be brought to **HazWaste Central** at 90 Sargent Drive. They will be open from May 21<sup>st</sup> through October 29th. If you have any questions about household hazardous waste, you can call (203) 401-2712 or email [ask.hazwaste@rwater.com](mailto:ask.hazwaste@rwater.com).

Coupons are once again available! Free coupons may be obtained with a valid ID at Parks and Public Works Resident Services Office, located at 34 Middleton Avenue. Our hours are Monday-Friday 7am–4pm. Remember: you *must* present a coupon (one per load) to dispose of items at the Residential drop-off center at the New Haven Transfer Station.

As always, if you have any questions, give Parks and Public Works Resident Services a call at (203) 946-7700. We have been experiencing heavy call volume but if you leave your name and phone number with a question we will get back to you.

Remember you can always report Public Works issues at **See Click Fix** found on the New Haven City website (see “Links,” below).

**Links:**

New Haven Public Works- <https://www.newhavenct.gov/gov/depts/pw/>  
See Click Fix- <https://seeclickfix.com/new-haven>

**NHSWRA contact info and link:**



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