



Feature The Hard Facts

In a little more than a month, the price you pay to drop off construction and demolition debris at the New Haven Transfer Station will rise nearly 19%. The costs of MSW collection and recycling will go up as well. What does this mean for you as a citizen of New Haven, and how did we get here? Read on...

Several years ago, the New Haven Solid Waste & Recycling Authority entered into disposal contracts for waste removal that allowed the Authority to fix the “gate rate” (as it is called) at a reasonable or market-competitive price point. Those contracts expired at the end of this fiscal year, and a new disposal agreement was inked. The combination of limited disposal capacity, and increased contractor costs means we are no longer in a competitive market, so any savings that the Authority was able to pass on to its customers, including the City, have disappeared. Increased contract, transportation, disposal and recyclables processing costs will continue to adversely affect the City’s general fund operating budget for waste disposal.

As citizens, you will still be able to enjoy the use of free coupons from the City for dropping off qualifying items at the Residential Drop-off section at the Transfer Station, but you will see a noticeable bump in the price for disposing of construction and demolition debris.

Besides operations and disposal contracts increasing in price, there are other factors which contribute to such a rise in the rates at the Transfer Station.

For some time now, it has been determined that MIRA (The Materials Innovation and Recycling Authority Waste-to-energy facility in the Hartford area) would be shut down by July 2022 due to lack of funding for much-needed re-tooling, and the lack of any interested parties in taking over the facility. Though this shut-down has been forestalled until sometime next year, the shut-down will in all likelihood be a foregone conclusion. Roughly 1/5 of the State’s garbage had passed through MIRA’s facility, and with the advent of it’s closing, there has been a scramble throughout the state to find places to put that trash.

Many transfer stations will be resorting to shipping MSW to out-of-state landfills (landfills are no longer used for MSW in Connecticut), and this will undoubtedly drive up the price of collecting,



hauling and removing garbage. And since there will be increased transportation fees, and less of the typical cost savings from waste-to-energy processing, the price will increase even further. Add in inflation, coupled with the cost of fuel, and well – you see what I'm getting at....

Unlike in some other states, Connecticut's lawmakers have been resolute in keeping up the environmental standards established with the closing of landfills and continue to recognize that the State has no room for garbage.

Why can't the State encourage the construction of more waste-to-energy plants? ..you might ask.

WTE's have become much less profitable with the advent of cheaper energy sources (namely large increases in domestic natural gas production) and are having a harder time maintaining customer bases as a result. No new plants have been built for years, and none are being contemplated.

Why is the recycling gate rate going up as well?

Good question! Simply put, our agreement for recyclables processing with our operating contractor has changed over the years. Material Recovery Facilities (MRF's) have re-imagined the formula for accepting recyclables from municipalities. In years past, market revenue for each ton of New Haven's recyclables brought to recovery facilities garnered a flat revenue rate, and, in more recent years, \$0 cost for transportation/processing. Those favorable agreements have been replaced, due to a variety of market conditions and heavy volume of contamination coming from New Haven's recycling stream. The new contract transport/disposal fee structure looks at overall marketability and profitability. Municipalities will now share in the pain of the fledgling recyclables market. Transportation costs are no longer being absorbed by promised revenue from recyclables. In short, what was \$0 cost to the City could go as high as \$400-\$500K in additional costs. Those costs must be taken from the general fund.

Should our collective efforts at reducing or eliminating contamination in our recycling bins begin to take shape, there is still the possibility that the City would receive some compensation for better quality of its citizens' recyclables.

So for the foreseeable future, this is where things stand. But....

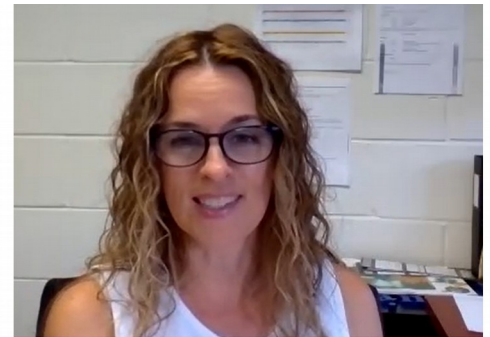
It doesn't have to stay that way. All of a sudden, diversion away from garbage looks a LOT more attractive from a financial standpoint. (And even though more recycling will be generated and recycling rates will be increasing, hauling recyclables will be considerably less than MSW rates, and, to the extent that diversion of organics from the waste stream and increasing the Reduction and Re-use of items, there will be more financial relief). The State of Connecticut has set a revised goal of 45%

diversion by 2024 and considering that statewide the diversion rate is currently a little more than 30%, the fulfillment of that goal would precipitate a major cost reduction that could drive overall municipal costs down (and ultimately, your costs as taxpayers!) So you see, what you do could have a direct positive outcome for your wallet.

Profile Heather Stearns

Although her title is “Recycling Coordinator” at SCSU, she sees the bigger picture

Ms. Stearns' career path took a sharp turn in 2007, and it definitely was the right turn for Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven. In her current position at the Office of Sustainability, Stearns is closing the loop on materials and streamlining the waste stream for SCSU through student and staff programs. Her focus is largely on re-use; recycling, though important, should be the last option when considering what to do with surplus materials.



Prior to 2007, she worked in the admissions department for Central Connecticut State University, and then transferred to Southern as an admissions administrator. At first, her associates were taken aback when she applied for a job at Southern that was out of her range of expertise: Recycling Coordinator. But to her it made sense – she felt like it was a job where she could really make a difference. It was a newly-created position, and she quickly took the initiative, instituting new programs as well as maintaining recycling practices on campus. Stearns, once an imperfect home-recycler, found herself honing her awareness in the process.

The program grew to include food recovery, food compost collection, a community garden, construction and demo re-purposing, and furniture re-use. If it can be recycled, re-used or refurbished, “we do it: solvents, light bulbs, toner cartridges, textbooks, etc.” There are two reuse stores on campus – one for staff and administration, and one for students. The staff store features donations from staff – over-orders, out-moded supplies, etc. and is an interdepartmental swap (for free).

The department is always finding paths for placing new commodities. A particular project is on the roster at present: How to “find a home,” as she puts it, for thousands of textbooks, along with a lot of furniture, currently being stored in the old student center. Amazon has just made things harder by not allowing 3rd party sellers of textbooks on its site (this is a shame because it thwarts students who are

usually cash-poor), so other avenues must be explored. And of course there is a school deadline for getting all of this done.

Food recovery is an important concern for Heather, and it really resonates with students – they can imagine individuals benefiting from this in an existential way. Attention is paid to recovering healthy foods in particular for the community. The food service vendor at the main dining hall partners with Heather's staff in packing surplus items at the end of the day, and then volunteers deliver surplus items to non-profit organizations in the area that then distribute to their patrons. A recent food drive (a separate process) in May netted 1500 lbs of non-perishable food, which went to the Campus food pantry.

Compostable trimmings and left-overs are also collected at the main dining hall. The material (approximately 40 tons per academic year) goes to an anaerobic digester in Southington (Quantum Biopower - <http://www.quantumbiopower.com/>)

The organic Community Garden tended by a part-time staff member and volunteers is large at 30 x 60 feet – and all 900 lbs. harvested each growing season is donated to food pantries and kitchens and the student dining hall.

Me: Seems that there is an attitude of resourcefulness on campus when it comes to waste diversion. – do you find that people at Southern are motivated to think “diversion” in general?

She feels that within the staff and faculty, her messaging has been effective. The student body is harder to inform, because of the diffusion of information (internet, media, peers, etc.) The department under her direction puts together tabling events, and publishes on social media, intra-campus messaging and email.

I asked her how she targets her audience; she considers three layers: 1) those motivated to act, 2) those that can be convinced, and 3) those that for whatever reason do not take waste diversion that seriously. She aims for bringing the middle group in with the first group. Her methods? Incentivizing through Inter-dorm contests, giveaways and food parties. Also, Interactive games, digital displays and graphics are featured at tabling events.

Me: I know the university has a net carbon-neutrality goal by 2050. What is your diversion goal?

“We are of course aligned with the state goal,” but it is becoming more challenging to meet that goal what with increased hauling costs and fee structure. By end of July, MSW fees for the school are up 40% from January! And of course recycling fees are set to rise as well. Here's where the department tries to get resourceful with logistics types (packers or front-loaders) and frequency of removal.

Me: It sounds like you truly are treating recycling as a 'last resort' when it comes to diversion.

Heather replies: Absolutely yes. This is all the more important in the face of rising hauling costs. To face that challenge, she has implemented some systems to cherry-pick low-hanging fruit (to use a double metaphor on my part!) They did have a cardboard packer on site, but not enough staff to operate collection. There is separate collection for metal which provides a nice financial return to reinvest in other projects.

Me: What about textiles?

Heather: They partner with Goodwill, which in turn Re-sells or diverts to recycling. The Sexuality and Gender Equality Center has also carried clothing. There is massive waste due to misplacement and contamination with unacceptable items in collection bins on move-out day(s) because of the sheer volume produced in a short amount of time, and the lack of student focus on such things since they are vacating the campus. She tries to encourage participation and attention to contamination by heavy messaging and reminders and early placement of receptacles prior to moving week in order to get students motivated. As one can imagine, it is at these peak times at beginnings and ends of semesters that there is a huge demand on the department's resources and personnel.

Me: Could you tell our readers what Southern is doing currently for waste diversion?

Heather: “We sponsored a non-perishable food drive in May which brought in 1500 lbs for our pantry.”

Stocking the re-use stores – a new building has opened on campus and one is being vacated, so there is a lot of movement of goods, much through the stores. This of course saves the school and students money, and closes the sustainability loop for at least one more product life-cycle. Incidentally, these stores will be ready for the summer semester.

Tabling events are in the works for the near future when students enroll for Fall courses. There is some synergy with Parents of students, as they will be there to encourage their children to take advantage of the savings opportunities at the campus re-use store!

As you can see, higher learning institutions typically have peak periods where there is a lot of movement of goods and people in a short amount of time, and Stearns makes sure that these opportunities for sustainability and savings are not lost at Southern.

“Residence Life” (the department that oversees the dormitories) helps immigrants in the community by donating any unused furniture and fixtures.

I asked Heather how Southern works in the community to distribute food and hard goods such as furniture. She notes that as a State agency the University works through non-profit organizations in the Community, which in turn distribute to citizens: Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen (DESK), Varick AME Church, Bethel AME Church, Park Ridge Tower and the SCSU Food Pantry

Recently, Southern partnered with the New Haven Solid Waste & Recycling Authority for the Authority's major recycling event for New Haven residents: Hometown Recycling Day, and Heather was very instrumental in obtaining a site on campus and spreading the word to students.

All of these activities have led Southern to establish a current waste diversion rate of 28%. (This is the amount of waste that has been diverted away from the trash waste-stream by reducing use, re-use, re-purposing and recycling)

Me: So where does she see waste diversion trending for Southern in the near future?

Heather: The Department would like to expand on their compostables collection program. She sees it extending to eateries across campus.

Expansion of programs is in process but the pandemic and a cut in her staff have both been a hindrance.

Me: Speaking of which, could you tell us about your staff?

Heather: There is a full time Sustainability Coordinator - Suzanne Huminsky - who writes grants, and is involved in reporting, energy reduction, water, transportation, and solar projects. With all she does in the position of Recycling and Waste Diversion, Heather is at 25 hours a week! They have student help from 3 interns: 2 in the garden, one in the re-use stores; and there is a part time University Assistant. They anticipate adding 2-3 students (paid interns, that also work with student volunteers) in food recovery in the Fall. Her office participates in the intern program – which draws on students from various disciplines at Southern.

Me: Could you speak to the subject of cross-communication and coordination with other higher-learning institutions in the city.

Heather: They typically check in and trade notes once a semester with CT state universities (Eastern, Central), and local schools: Yale, UNH and Quinnipiac and Albertus Magnus. Quinnipiac University has consulted with Southern on Food Recovery. SCSU is registered with and participates in various national list-serve bulletin boards for colleges and universities. All projects are subject to State institution guidelines for fair and equitable practices, including bidding.

Her Department participates in many New Haven environmental committees, and partners with a few other departments on campus, inviting the city's k-12 students to various events and activities at the school.

It is fair to say that as long as Heather Stearns is on the job, there will continue to be a diverse and comprehensive approach to waste diversion at Southern Connecticut State University!

Heather Stearns has a B.A. In psychology and an M.A. In Educational Leadership in Higher Administration

SCSU Campus Sustainability link: <https://inside.southernct.edu/sustainability>



Essay Nightmare on Middletown Ave.

The tale I'm about to tell you is true...

Once upon a time (recently), at a Transfer Station at 260 Middletown Avenue, a contractor decided to drop off some Household Hazardous Waste when no one was looking. Maybe he/she was too busy to bring it to the right place – HazWaste Central. Maybe he/she thought it wouldn't matter that it was dropped illegally...

Those few containers went unnoticed until...

A couple of days later, someone else dropped off some more HHW in the same area. Maybe they saw the material already there and thought that's where you are supposed to put such things...

Then the staff saw the materials strewn on the ground, and had these items removed, which involved city workers and a truck and a trip down to HazWaste Central on a Saturday...

The staff was happy, until...

Several days later, more items were surreptitiously dropped in the same area!
This went on for awhile – dropping, then removal, then dropping, then removal, until

After awhile, the pile got bigger, and bigger. Soon EVERYONE thought it was okay to drop paint and household chemicals in the big pile. The pile got so big in fact, that it stretched for 40 feet and encroached on the access roads, impeding traffic.

The staff at the Transfer Station feverishly posted temporary signs saying NO DUMPING! And encircled the area with police tape, but...

To no avail! 600 gallons of potentially dangerous waste eventually appeared – waste illegally dumped when attendants at the Transfer Station were either away or not looking!

By now the pile was too big to be taken directly to [HazWaste Central](#), and much time and effort had to be spent by the staff to categorize, quantify and apply for a disposal permit of the illegally dumped material. More than one Saturday was spent on this project. Not to mention the high cost to have all this material removed. Add to that the cost of permanent signage admonishing people against depositing items illegally....

Finally, after much heartache (and backache) most everything was removed...

And as for the person(s) who thought it wouldn't matter that they were clandestinely dropping off a few items illegally, I verily say unto them: It DOES matter!



Identifying, separating and clean-packing illegally dumped household hazardous waste for removal from the New Haven Transfer Station.

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:

Just a reminder that leaves must be placed in brown paper bags and should not weigh more than 50lbs. Please do not place leaves in plastic bags. 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. New Haven residents can pick up free yard waste coupons by presenting an ID

with their current New Haven address at the Department of Parks and Public Works office at 34 Middletown Ave, Monday through Friday from 7am-4pm. Residents can properly dispose of yard waste at the New Haven Transfer station located at 260 Middletown Ave from Monday through Saturday 9am to noon.

Also, a reminder that totes must be placed curbside the night before your scheduled collection day and removed within 12-hours after collection. Please note that plastic bags, food waste and styrofoam are non-recyclable items and cannot be placed inside the blue recycling toter. Check out RecycleCT.com for a complete list of items that can be recycled. Bulky items such as furniture, clothing, electronics and toys, etc may not be left out on the curb. You may be subject to receive a citation. Bulky household items must be taken to the Residential Drop Station. New Haven residents can stop by the office at 34 Middletown Ave to pick up free vouchers. Residents can use the vouchers to bring yard waste and regular household items to the Residential Drop-off at the New Haven Transfer Station. Construction materials are charged at 5-cents a pound. Lastly, paint products are not accepted at the Residential Drop-off. HazWaste Central located at 90 Sargent Drive provides free disposal of household hazardous waste. Please visit rwater.com/hazwaste for more information. They are open Saturdays only, from 9am to noon through October 29th. Closed holiday weekends. *Pre-registration required.* Visit rwater.com/hazwaste to register. For more information, call (203) 401-2712.

Coupons continue to be 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/>

Public Works paving schedule-

<https://www.newhavenct.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/15028/637903861608081376>

See Click Fix-

<https://seeclickfix.com/new-haven>

NHSWRA contact info and link:



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