

Comprehensive Plan Section

1. Introduction

The recycling center opened in 1979 - the first such center in the state. The recycling/transfer department is the largest in the Harpswell staffing chart. Through a rigorous cost recovery program, it reduces its draw on town funds and represents less than 2% of the town budget. The center has met most of the goals set out in the 2005 Comprehensive Plan. Some say that the Recycle Center is the real center of the town as over 2000 vehicles visit it every week in the summer, and about half as many in the winter months, with many people stopping to talk to neighbors and recycling staff.

2. Background

The Strawberry Creek Recycling Center opened to the public on April 23, 1979 (in 2005 the name was changed to A. Dennis Moore Recycling Center and Transfer Station).

The process methods have evolved from local incineration and landfill, to sorting and selling recyclables (when possible) through contracts. The current operations include single stream recycling (a wide array of recyclables deposited together), household solid waste, compostables, recycling for small metal wastes, returnables, and a separate transfer station for most other waste including larger items and construction materials.

The center is currently in the process of capital plan upgrades to improve the facility. In 2021-2022 compacting hoppers were replaced and the parking area was expanded. Plans are going forward to rebuild the building in 2024-25 and upgrade the power supply as CMP installs 3-Phase power and improves the transmission and distribution lines on Mountain Road. The design facilitates working with the commercially available waste disposal in Maine.

Harpswell has been fortunate to have dedicated employees who manage and run the facility, minimizing operating costs and maximizing potential revenue available from recycling. This puts Harpswell in a position to realize potential reimbursements from the future development of the State's Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) program described below.

Harpswell's Recycling Center and Transfer Facility, located next to Town Offices is open Tuesday through Saturday (except in winter, it is closed on Thursdays).ⁱ

The recycling and trash facility accepts all non-commercial solid waste and recycling from year-round and seasonal Town residents. Some residents pay for a hauler to collect and dispose of their solid waste and recycling material at the facility. Commercial Trash Hauler Rules were updated in 2018.ⁱⁱ

The Center accepts all kinds of paper and cardboard, glass, tin, metals, plastic, batteries (not car batteries), paint cans and oil. The Town website has an A-to-Z list for reference.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Recycling Center and Transfer Facility encourages recycling of food waste through separate compost collection bins under contract with Garbage to Gardens in place since 2017.^{iv} The Center also offers home composting bins for sale.^v

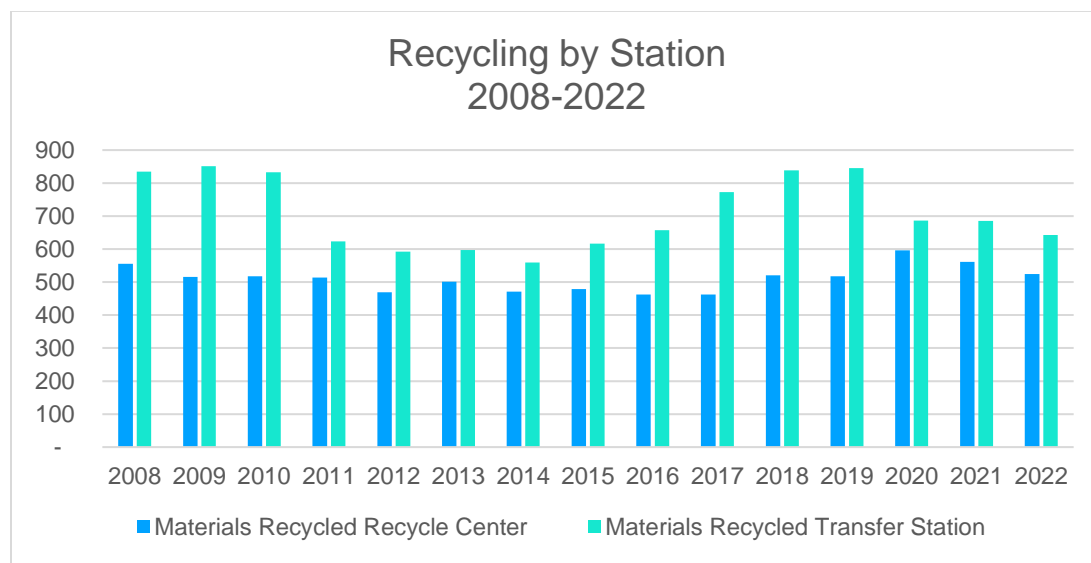
The “trash” hopper at the facility accepts non-bulky household waste that cannot be recycled - with certain exceptions. There are also twice-yearly Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Collection Days in Bath and Brunswick at which residents are encouraged to participate.

The transfer station accepts bulk materials including construction & demolition debris, furniture, a variety of electronics and universal waste, large metal items, propane tanks, tires, large batteries, ashes, brush, wood, leaves and yard wastes, for a fee.^{vi}

Household waste is collected at the facility, compacted, and shipped by contract to out-of-town recycling and landfills. Most recently, the town has contracted with Casella Waste Systems in a 3-year contract for this service. This contract continues and has increased costs per ton due to increased trucking costs, high inflation, increased labor and retention costs, and lack of workers in general.

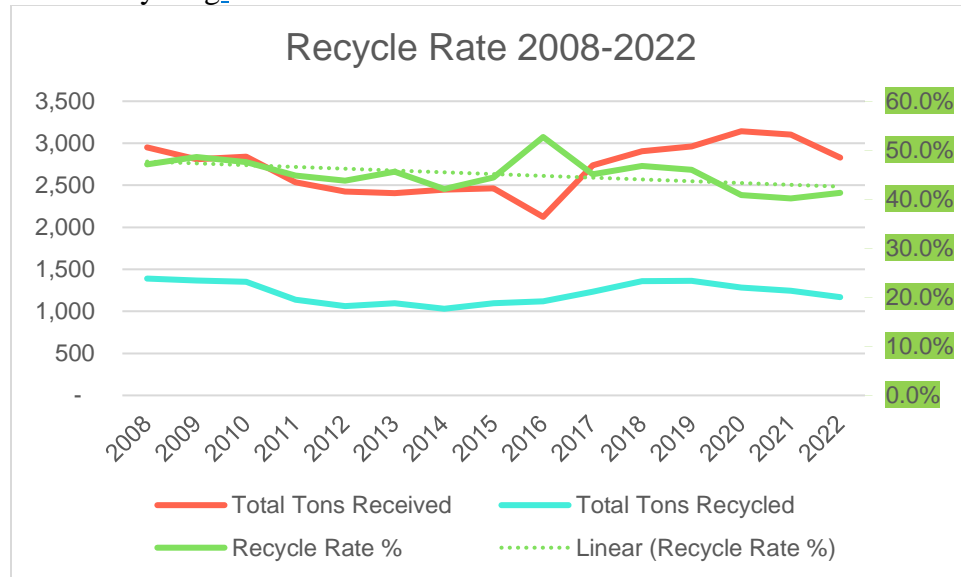
3. Trends

Historically, in the last ten years, recycling has kept over 11,000 tons of material from the landfill. [see chart below, “Recycling by Station”] Harpswell has continued its recycling program despite the vagaries of the market in support of environmental and sustainability principles. As of now, the recycling program continues in the face of increasing costs imposed by outside vendors. These increasing costs are an issue that might require changes to the program in the future.



In 2003 Harpswell’s recycling was reportedly a record 75% of the Town’s municipal solid waste stream - above State recycling goals established in 1989 of 50% of the statewide solid waste stream by 1994. In recent years, the town has seen a decrease in recycling percentage (as has the state of Maine), as well as increases in the costs of managing recycled materials through the contract (due to both changes in what is accepted (pressure treated wood is no longer accepted as recycled wood) and other changes in markets).

The first three years of the fifteen-year period beginning in 2008 had recycling rate of 48%. The period closed out in 2022 with a three-year average of 41% - this is a 15% overall drop in the rate of recycling.



In 2013, the facility transitioned from separated recycling streams to single stream recycling, reducing the footprint of the operation, and allowing for the storage of the Harbormaster and Marine Patrol boats inside the warehouse. An uptick of 7% in recycling was seen over the first year of single stream.

The first annual shredding occurred in 2017. Recent years shredding events have removed over 2 tons each year from the waste stream.

Composting is important to the costs at the facility since it is currently far less expensive to process than other household solid waste; and it produces a useful by-product: compost. It is estimated^{vii} that over 21% of household trash is food waste. The amount of composted waste sent to the Garbage to Gardens program has increased in recent years from approximately 37 tons in 2018 to over 60 tons in 2022. Considering that our household waste amount is over 1000 tons/year, there is potential to increase this amount significantly by encouraging more participation from residents.

In July 2021, the Maine legislature passed a law establishing a stewardship program for packaging^{viii} The program's purpose is to reduce the volume and toxicity and increase the recycling of packaging material. Producers of products will pay into a fund based on the amount and the recyclability of packaging associated with their products distributed in Maine. These

funds will be used to reimburse municipalities for eligible recycling and waste management costs, make investments in recycling infrastructure, and help Maine citizens understand how to recycle.^{ix}

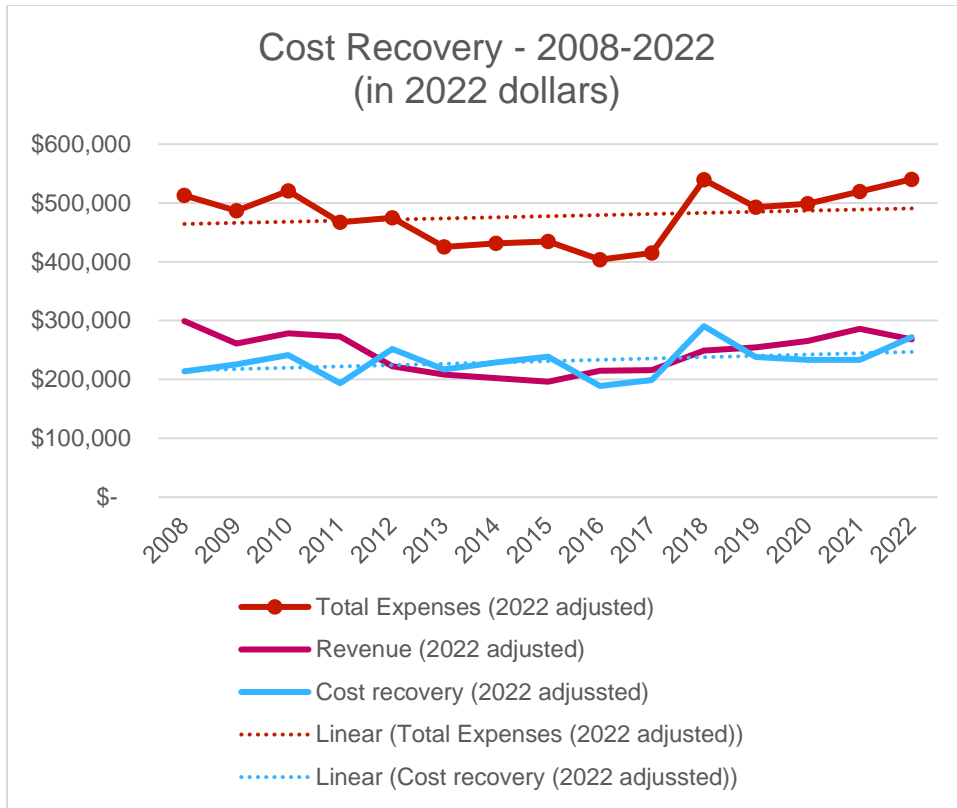
Under this program of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), municipalities, like Harpswell, will have the option of participating or not in the EPR program. If they participate, some reporting will be required for re-imbursements to be made for municipal costs of handling many solid waste categories.

The schedule for implementation will take several years to coordinate Maine's program with programs anticipated in other states and for product manufacturers to begin to adjust packaging. This schedule, which began in July 2022 is subject to revision but, at the time of this writing, first payments to municipalities could be in 2027.

4. Analysis/Issues

The chart below indicates that the blue dotted trend line of cost recovery has risen roughly in parallel to the rise in expenses (red dotted line). This is good news and a testament to careful management of the center.

However, there are possible storm clouds on the horizon. The sale of recyclable material has historically offset operational costs to some degree, but this cost differential has varied with changes in market demand and price, as well as the design of packaging. When there is a reduced market for recycling, the cost of handling and separating single stream recycling exceeds the cost of sending waste to a landfill. Maine's EPR legislation has been enacted to address some of these issues and will hopefully provide Harpswell and other participating Maine towns with revenue to offset the costs of disposing of packaging materials.



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Goal: Continue to plan for the Town’s waste management needs, evaluate options to reduce costs and to meet growth needs.

1. Action recommendations

In the coming decade, the center will need to focus on the following activities to keep the center functioning at its current high level of efficiency for the citizens of Harpswell:

- Continue to keep informational guides up to date and consider outreach to increase environmental and personal benefits of reducing purchases of non-recyclable goods.
- Continue to monitor the enactment of the EPR regulations and assess benefits and costs of Harpswell’s participation.
- Increase focus on the waste hierarchy, finding ways to encourage reduce-reuse-recycle actions and discourage disposal.
- Assess changes that might be needed in the Town’s recycling program considering costs and potential benefits of the EPR program.
- Encourage increased use of composting for food waste.
- Provide periodic opportunities for disposal of items not currently accepted at the recycling center, such as household hazardous waste.
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2. Challenges for the future

It is clear that recycling costs will increase in the future as former recycling options such as the transport of recyclables to China are closing down. This presents two consequences for the people of Harpswell -

- a. The cost recovery progress of the last decade will slow and reverse, adding to town costs, and
- b. A higher percentage of solid waste will not be recycled but end up in land fill.

3. A plan to proactively engage the recycling dilemma of the future.

The increasing difficulty in finding cost effective recycling and solid waste disposal needs to be addressed. The solution will lie outside the boundaries of Harpswell and require cooperation to address the scale and costs of technical solutions.

Harpswell, the first town in Maine to establish a recycling center, should develop a plan to reach out to nearby communities and organizations in Maine with shared concerns. These discussions should explore technical solutions and financing to solve the challenge of decreasing trends in recycling and the resulting increase in disposal costs. These discussions may require scaling up beyond southern and mid-coast Maine to include surrounding states and even federal involvement.

End Notes:

ⁱ https://www.harpswell.maine.gov/vertical/sites/%7B3F690C92-5208-4D62-BAFB-2559293F6CAE%7D/uploads/ADM_RECYLING_TRANSFER_GUIDE042023.pdf

ⁱⁱ [https://www.harpswell.maine.gov/vertical/sites/%7B3F690C92-5208-4D62-BAFB-2559293F6CAE%7D/uploads/COMMERCIAL_HAULER_RULES_2018\(1\).pdf](https://www.harpswell.maine.gov/vertical/sites/%7B3F690C92-5208-4D62-BAFB-2559293F6CAE%7D/uploads/COMMERCIAL_HAULER_RULES_2018(1).pdf)

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.harpswell.maine.gov/vertical/sites/%7B3F690C92-5208-4D62-BAFB-2559293F6CAE%7D/uploads/A_to_Z_guide.pdf

^{iv} <https://www.harpswell.maine.gov/vertical/sites/%7B3F690C92-5208-4D62-BAFB-2559293F6CAE%7D/uploads/07.19.18GtG-HARPSWELL.pdf>

^v https://www.harpswell.maine.gov/vertical/sites/%7B3F690C92-5208-4D62-BAFB-2559293F6CAE%7D/uploads/COMPOSTER_SALES2023.pdf

^{vi} https://www.harpswell.maine.gov/vertical/sites/%7B3F690C92-5208-4D62-BAFB-2559293F6CAE%7D/uploads/ts_overall_fees.pdf

^{vii} <https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/national-overview-facts-and-figures-materials>

^{viii} <https://legislature.maine.gov/statutes/38/title38sec2146.html>

^{ix} <https://www.maine.gov/dep/waste/recycle/epr.html>