



**Rivanna Solid Waste Authority Stakeholder Survey
January 2008
Survey #2: Summary of Results**

Background

This document summarizes the survey results from an online questionnaire that the Rivanna Solid Waste Authority (RSWA) administered in order to obtain input from the public about the following:

- Preferences among five optional scenarios to improve trash and recycling services in the RSWA service area
- General comments and questions about the five scenarios
- Willingness to pay more than residents currently pay for trash and recycling services

Methodology: The survey was open to all residents of the City of Charlottesville, Albemarle County, Town of Scottsville, and University of Virginia students. RSWA posted a link to the online survey from its strategic planning website pages (http://www.rivanna.org/rswa_strategicplan/tellus.htm) between December 6, 2007, and January 15, 2008. Respondents were asked to review summary slides of each of the five scenarios before answering the five questions. RSWA conducted the survey as part of its strategic planning process and promoted the survey at a December 4, 2007, Community Meeting, and through neighborhood associations and RSWA's e-mail list.

Respondents

171 people responded to the survey; 100% of respondents completed the five questions.

Statement of limitations

This survey does not represent a statistically valid sample size, nor does it proportionately represent the demographic or geographic diversity of the community. Nevertheless, it does provide an indication of opinions about the five scenarios from citizens in the community who have chosen to participate through the internet in RSWA's strategic plan development. The fact that 171 residents took the time to review the five scenarios and respond to this survey suggests that there are a number of residents interested in solid waste issues and possible improvements to the current trash and recycling system.

Summary of Results

1. Preferences among the five optional scenarios:

Respondents were asked to rank the five scenarios with 1 being the most preferred and 5 being the least preferred:

- #1: Eliminate RSWA
- #2: Manage Disposal
- #3: Manage Disposal, Plus Increase Recycling
- #4: Manage Disposal, Plus Increase Recycling, Plus Improved Recycling
- #5: Sustainable System (all of above, plus Burn Non-recyclable Solid Waste Materials for Fuel or Electricity)

The results demonstrate a distinct preference for Scenario #5 (61.43% gave it a 1 ranking, 11.1% gave it a 2, and 7.6% gave it a 3). Respondents who prefer the Sustainable System say they believe that this scenario provides the best long-term solution for management the region's solid waste and is the "responsible" thing to do. These respondents see the sustainable system as an investment in the future that reflects the community's values; they are not deterred by the increased costs for this option.

The next most preferred option was Scenario #4 (60.2 ranked it with a 2, 25.7% ranked it with a 1). These respondents favor this scenario for its diversion and fewer hidden costs. Yet, a number of respondents preferring Scenario #4 said they would favor Scenario #5 as a longer term solution once the costs and benefits of the Sustainable System are better defined.

Scenario #3 received a predominant ranking of 3 (middle range of preferred options) (76.0%). Those who favor it (and gave it a 1 rating) said it constitutes a compromise and provides additional recycling opportunities for the community. Scenario #2 was ranked 4 (less preferred) by the majority of respondents (74.3%), and Scenario #1 to eliminate RSWA was the least preferred by a clear majority of respondents (86.0%).

The following are representative verbatim responses for those who gave a “1” – most preferred rating, to each of the scenarios:

Scenario #5:

It diverts waste by 91% [sic] and reuses the waste in a meaningful way.

It is clearly the best and most comprehensive system and I would be happy to pay \$7.75-\$13.17 each month.

It is sustainable and local.

I prefer the Sustainable System because I am primarily concerned with what is the best long-term solution. Minimizing waste and utilizing economies of scale are smart business!

Going from Scenario #4 to #5 gives the largest increase in diversion, the other steps are fairly marginal improvements. #5 has the fewest hidden costs once completed (of course, it also has the most uncertain construction cost). All other scenarios rely heavily on trucking our trash somewhere else to a landfill, which is ultimately not sustainable.

Sustainable energy through waste diversion is the only long-term solution...Granted start-up costs are greater but the long term returns more than make up the difference. The problem will be education for the current population. This area is at least 10 years behind other urbanized areas in Virginia (in terms of waste management), where I have resided. We need to fix this now.

It's irresponsible to consider anything but sustainable. We have to start thinking long term, not immediate solutions. Make the investment count. It's gong to cost anyway.

I would like for Cvllle-Alb to be a leader in recycling technology. It makes it a better place to live, creates pride in our community, and stimulates a culture of awareness of both recycling and its economic consequences. We'll be better off economically as a result, despite the short-term increase in costs.

Scenario #4

Scenario 4 seemed a clear win-win situation with expanded and improved recycling and a manageable cost increase.

It achieves over 50% diversion with lower costs than Scenario 3. Greater recycling, reasonable costs.

Not too much of an increase to taxpayers. Allows for us to be self-sufficient and actually generate revenue, and would be more easily implemented than Scenario 5. Scenario 5 could be implemented (or looked at again) after Scenario 4 was working for a few years.

Scenario 5 would be best but would take so long to do. I'd rather see Scenario 4 first, then work toward Scenario 5.

I chose Scenario 4 because it seems the most cost-efficient, as well as building a foundation for future improvements.

I believe Scenario 4 gives the best bang for the investment required. I see Scenario 5 as a healthy ultimate solution but #4 reduces the capital investment while dramatically increasing our potential to improve the environment and out lives.

Before we go full out to the "Sustainable System" let's take steps towards it and try to begin to prove out whether the costs and benefits actually prove out.

Obviously it is giving back to the public.

Cost. Benefit.

Recycling at the highest level without the added risk and expense of burning solid waste materials.

Scenario #3

Greener. Less cost. Can always add [Scenarios] 4 and 5 later.

Compromise. Want to do some recycling.

Financial considerations.

Least costly.

Scenario #2

Long-term solution.

[Note: No other verbatim responses were given by respondents who "most preferred" Scenario #2]

Scenario #1

It is important to note that 5.8% (N=10) of respondents gave a 1 rating to Scenario #1 (Eliminate RSWA). However, a review of their verbatim responses to Question 2 (Why do you prefer that scenario over the others?) suggests that these respondents misunderstood the rating scale, gave Scenario #1 the "most preferred" rating (i.e., 1) when they meant to give it a 5, and do not in fact want to eliminate RSWA. As noted above, 86% of respondents gave Scenario #1 at rating of 5 (least preferred). Some sample verbatim responses from this group that suggest these 10 respondents misunderstood the rating scale:

In my opinion, scenarios 4 and 5 provide the best balance of service, cost-effectiveness and environmental consideration.

Ability to use an abundant resource (waste) as fuel. Directs the most amount of materials from the Landfill. In this scenario, Charlottesville takes the most responsibility for its lifestyle.

Sustainability, the environment.

Best for the long-term.

Sounds like it would end all the arguing.

2. Questions or comments about the five scenarios

About half of the respondents (N=88) wrote comments or posed questions about the scenarios. Several respondents expressed concern that eliminating RSWA was an option. Others expressed concerns about Scenario #5 in terms of site selection, emissions, and costs of construction and ash disposal. Many respondents expressed a desire to move forward with improved services but want additional data on costs/benefits and long-term environmental impact of Scenario #5. Some representative comments and questions:

I want RSWA to know that I feel it's important to start implementing some of these measures as soon as possible. I would be more than willing to help with some kind of awareness campaign as well as to drum up excitement about some of this stuff!

We must be bold and lead the way for other municipalities.

Am not sure that 4 convenience centers are needed – don't think that they'll be fully utilized. WTE facility would be very hard to site and expensive to run.

\$13 increase in monthly fees seems excessive for the privilege of being greener and burning our trash. I am skeptical about this option. I'd like to see the best possible improvement in recycling and trash reduction, at modest cost. That is Option #4.

I believe Scenarios #1 and #2 shouldn't even be given as options.

I definitely think the county needs curbside recycling – that is a MUST! Best option would be a large bin (like existing trash containers...) Bi-weekly pickup would allow for full containers and easy recycling by residents. Yard waste recycling once a month would be great as well (maybe March-December). This yard waste should be composted and used locally if possible.

Do consumers end up paying double for electricity in #5? Paying for the RTF/WTE set up (which could get sold to a power company) and then paying their electricity bill?

I don't think most residents will be ready for a recycling program of this magnitude and expense.

The City and County need to give up their own independent systems to have a truly regional authority.

I'm concerned about air pollution from burning trash and concerned about transporting recyclables.

This community should aim for a state of the art waste management system. #5 may be it, but it's too expensive now. Maybe in the future.

I like the idea of #5 but its added complexities seem risky at the present time until such technologies get fleshed out better over time.

Is there a system currently in operation in the State or elsewhere that can be emulated. No need to reinvent the wheel.

In Scenario #5, will emissions control measures capture 100% of the particulates? I have concerns about where the facility will be located and the potential impact on neighboring property. Why is there no increase in diversion between Scenarios #3 and #4?

Why can't we have curbside recycling like the city?

Worried about the capital costs of 4 and 5.

3. Willingness to pay additional fees for improved recycling options and beneficial environmental services

Respondents are clearly willing to pay more for improved recycling services, with the largest percentage (30.2%) willing to pay up to \$10 in additional fees each month. The results show that 18.3% are willing to pay up to \$5 more per month, 30.2% willing to pay up to \$10 more, 24.3% are willing to pay up to \$15 more, and 14.8% are willing to pay as much as \$30 more. Only 4.1% of respondents said they are not willing to pay any additional fees and 8.3% said they would pay up to \$2 more each month.

Seventy-three respondents wrote comments or questions about their willingness to pay for improved services. Chief among these is a concern among some respondents that the costs be paid equitably depending on the amount of waste produced and services provided (especially in the rural area of the County), the need for public education about solid waste issues, and the desire for more recycling options than are currently available, especially in Albemarle County. Some representative comments follow:

Lacking in all the scenarios above is an educational component. I am appalled every time I see my neighbor's trash pile up...they throw tons of recyclable cardboard in the trash. Do they not know of the McIntire Recycling Center? If not, why not?

This is a small price to pay to benefit our community and set an example. We will be paying more in the future regardless of the scenario.

We pay \$25 per month now whether we recycle or not, and the amount of garbage we generate does not matter. I want to pay less if I recycle more, or have less trash.

There is only one person in my household, so my desire to pay fees would be based on how they are levied...I don't feel it would be fair for me to pay \$10-\$30 extra per month when my neighbors who have four people in their home are also paying the same fee.

I'm poor by most standards, but I'm also willing to pay whatever it costs to cover my fair share. One thing I would recommend is that the cost be distributed according to who's conspicuously consuming/dumping the most.

I'd pay more if there were good reason, but the estimate for option 5 is within this range.

I currently recycle 90% of my waste and do not pay for waste collection, so when I indicate an additional \$10 per month, that is on top of \$0 per month currently. Because I live in a non-urban (although within the growth area) part of the County, I'm not sure I would benefit from curbside recycling. While I support curbside pickup if it will improve recycling rates, I do have concerns about paying for it in taxes if I'm not receiving a benefit.

I would like a convenience center in Scottsville.

It seems that any planned changes would drastically improve the recycling options around the urban ring. What benefits, if any, would improve for residents in the rural area of the County?

I worry about a flat fee increase across the board that will adversely affect low-income families.

I want to recycle but it's not easy in rural Albemarle County.