

Northport Recycling Committee  
18 Beech Hill Road  
Northport, ME 04849

Melanie Loyzim, Commissioner  
Maine Department of Environmental Protection  
State House Station 17  
Augusta, ME 04333-0017

March 13, 2024

Dear Ms. Loyzim;

We are a committee appointed by the Town of Northport Select Board to research options for Northport to manage its recycled waste. We're writing to weigh in on the draft EPR for packaging rules and to provide information about how Northport's current recycling program works, our efforts to reduce the cost of recycling in Northport, the challenges we face, and how we hope to benefit from the new legislation.

Context:

Northport is small, with a population of around 1500, and around 680 households. In FY 2023 we sent 88 tons of uncompacted recycling to Winterport, where DM&J then compacted it and hauled it to EcoMaine in Portland, a total of 160 miles. We sent 538 tons of MSW from Northport to the landfill in Old Town, hauled by Pine Tree. Our recycling rate in FY 2023 increased to about 14%, from about 13% in FY2022 (not including metals, demo debris, or yard waste.)

In FY '23 we paid \$54,968 for 88 tons of recycling and \$47,826 for 538 tons of MSW (hauling, tipping, and container rental). In the current year, with price increases, we expect to pay over \$74,000 for recycling, which is not tenable long term. The Transfer Station budget is the fourth highest item in our Town budget, after plowing & sanding, roads and bridges, and administration. Even though the amount we spend on recycling is getting hard to justify to taxpayers, the Town voted unanimously at last June's town meeting to continue to recycle. Taxpayers are willing for now, but we need to cut our recycling cost and ensure that recycling is effective.

Our current efforts:

Because our citizens, at successive Annual Town Meetings, have voted to continue to collect recyclables, even though it is more costly, citizen volunteers formed a Recycling Committee to report to our Select Board. The Committee has spent the past fiscal year surveying our current recycling materials and assessing the feasibility and availability of alternatives to all the materials that go into our waste stream. We visited other local municipalities to see their facilities and solutions. For a while Northport residents were welcome to bring recycling to Belfast, but with the change in market conditions, that is no longer permitted and Belfast is not interested in a shared recycling arrangement with Northport at this time. We invited

presentations by, and researched the possible more local alternatives for waste services, including MRC membership, the potential PERC incineration plant in Orrington, and the potential Fiberight/Municipal Waste Solutions plant in Hamden. We also discussed possible changes to our collection and transport system with EcoMaine, where our recyclables have been transported so far.

Additionally, we surveyed alternatives for disposal of other materials, such as paint, hazardous waste, and clothing in order to facilitate reuse and lower costs to the town of disposal of MSW. We discussed the possible savings of compacting our trash and our recyclables to reduce costs, though we found this not to be feasible at this time.

The Committee generated a list of “EcoTips” to encourage waste recycling and diversion, published in the “Town” section of our local newspaper and in the monthly Town newsletter. The Northport Select Board will print them in a brochure to distribute to residents.

Our challenges:

By far our greatest recycling expense is the great distances we have to transport our recyclables. Without close regional centers, we have to use diesel trucks traveling 160 miles for each haul which in itself is inefficient and polluting. By compacting our recyclables we could decrease our hauling fees to 1/6 of the current expense. Unfortunately, the Northport Transfer Station has no electricity and is located 3/4 mile from the nearest electrical pole. Buying a compactor (\$41,500 + supporting structures) and bringing in electricity, (\$100,000) would be a huge expense for a town of 1500 people.

There are currently no recycling facilities closer to Northport. We anticipate the opening of PERC in Orrington and Municipal Waste Solutions in Hampden, but it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of these facilities to efficiently reuse recyclables. We have been unable to partner with any neighboring municipalities.

Because of these regional and infrastructure challenges, we are limited, on our own, to reduce costs.

How the draft EPR rules could help us:

There are several considerations we hope you will keep in mind while drafting the final rules for the EPR law to help bring municipalities' cost of recycling into line with the cost of landfilling. We speak from the experience of Northport, but these factors probably apply to many small, rural towns.

- Transportation to a recycling center is a formidable expense. Our current tipping fee for recyclables is \$295 per ton (v. \$100 for MSW) while our hauling fee (to Winterport, then to South Portland) is \$400 for approximately 1 ton. Financial help to our town for infrastructure could enable purchase of a compactor and power source to cut transportation costs (representing diesel-fueled highway miles) to 1/6<sup>th</sup>. Collection vehicles equipped with compactors could be a viable alternative at a regional level, but is beyond the scope of the town.
- Additional collection centers (statewide infrastructure) could cut transportation needs.

- The Northport Recycling Committee expended considerable effort to produce the “Ecotips” educational brochure. Information such as this applies statewide, and could be made available to all towns to customize, along with financial help for printing.
- It is critical to the credibility of the EPR for packaging program that the end use of recyclables is environmentally favorable and that the program reduces the amount of packaging that winds up in our MSW. Especially considering the high cost of recycling, Northport residents are concerned that recycled items are effectively and meaningfully “recycled.”
- Research and discussions by our dedicated members have impressed our Northport Recycling committee with the complexity of disposing of municipal waste responsibly. Technical help with infrastructure planning and recycling facility options would be very helpful.
- Please keep in mind that the program as currently envisioned will not bring our town’s cost of recycling in line with the cost of landfilling. The projected cost of recycling for the fiscal year 2023 –‘24 is \$74,150. We estimate that the cost to landfill that material would be \$40,050. Thus we would need compensation of about 46% to equalize the costs. Furthermore, Northport charges \$3 per bag of waste, slightly more than the actual cost of disposal, while, like other towns, we do not receive any fee for recycled materials.

We sincerely appreciate the compensation, guidance, infrastructure aid, and possible regional coordination that these rules will provide. We hope they will be crafted with the needs of small, rural towns like Northport in mind, including infrastructure improvements and aid with technical decisions and education. Please keep in mind that small towns dedicated to recycling need your help beyond the direct quantity-based compensation to make their recycling programs attractive for their residents.

Sincerely,

*Martha Reeve*

Martha Reeve, Chairman, on behalf of the Northport Recycling Committee:  
Shelley Swanson Fein  
Karen Gleeson  
Molly Schaffler, Select Board representative

CC: James Kossuth, Northport Town Administrator