

**Reducing Operating Costs
at the
Hebron Transfer Station**

Submitted to

The Hebron Board of Selectmen

Prepared by

The Hebron Citizens Green Committee

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I. Introduction

The Hebron Citizens Green Committee (“the Green Committee”) was formed in the fall of 2011, holding its first meeting on October 11, 2011. Its mission is to help the Town of Hebron, its residents and businesses find ways to become more environmentally responsible. The first task given to the committee by the Board of Selectmen was to identify steps that can be taken by the town to reduce the costs associated with operating the town’s solid waste transfer station on Old Colchester Road. After reviewing several factors related to this issue, the Green Committee has reached two conclusions: first, increasing Hebron’s rather low recycling rate is the best means of reducing those costs, and second, the use of the transfer station, a valuable asset to the town, should be promoted and expanded as part of this effort.

In fiscal year 2011, Hebron residents who used the transfer station only recycled about 23% of their solid waste (the present state average is about 28%, and the state goal is 58%). This report details those steps that the Green Committee recommends be taken to help boost our recycling rate and reduce the cost of operating the transfer station. In fact, significant savings can be realized by taking steps to increase the recycling rate at the transfer station. Some of the recommendations can be implemented at no cost, while others will cost money, but the net result should be significant savings for the town. Furthermore, many of the recommendations in this report will also allow Hebron residents to save money personally, in addition to any savings by the town.

It should be noted that this report is being presented to the Board of Selectmen at a very difficult time in the budget process. Two, and possibly three, budgets will have been rejected by town voters by the time the Selectmen receive this report. As a result, the Selectmen will be hard pressed to approve any new funding and will in fact be looking for all possible savings from existing programs and services.

It is therefore especially important to note that this is one of those rare situations where the Hebron citizens have the ability, by their direct actions, to actually lower the cost of government, and do something good for our environment at the same time. While limited funds may need to be expended up front to implement some of the recommendations of this report, the town can save significant amounts of money in the long run as a result.

II. The Current Costs of Operating the Transfer Station

The following table provides a complete breakdown of the costs and revenues involved in operating the transfer station for the 09/10 fiscal year. The net cost for the 09/10 fiscal year was almost \$230,000, with the largest single item being the cost of having the MSW (municipal solid waste) burned at the CRRR trash-to-energy facility in Hartford.

2009/10 Transfer Station Report

Item	Expense	Revenue
1. MSW (\$69/ton)	\$115,659.02	
2. Bulky Waste (\$68/ton)	\$50,000	
3. Yard Brush	\$1,291.09	
4. Hazardous Waste	\$7,014	
5. Refrigerant Removal	\$2,219	
6. Tire Removal	\$1,918	
7. Misc. Admin Fees, Decals, etc.	\$1,120.84	
8. Connecticut State Permits	\$1,400	
9. Truck Costs	\$7,500	
10. Fuel	\$13,992	
11. Compactor/Container Maintenance	\$1,500	
12. Full Time Attendant (w/ benefits)	\$44,714.44	
13. Part Time Attendant (w/ benefits)	\$11,337.51	
14. Roll-Off Driver (3 days, w/ benefits)	\$27,851.57	
15. Overtime	\$8,803.57	
16. New Roll-Off (\$6,000 every five years)	\$1,200	
Sub Total	\$299,017.65	
17. Steel		\$14,100
18. Transfer Station Income		\$50,945
19. Recycling Income (460 tons)		\$4,600
Sub Total		\$69,645
20. Transfer Station Net Cost for 09/10	\$229,372.65	

III. Why Recycling Is Important

There are several important legal, environmental and financial reasons why we should recycle as much as possible. First, Connecticut law (Section 22a-241b, CGS and Section 22a-241b-1 through 4, RCSA) requires that we recycle many of the materials that are received at the transfer station (see the table on page 6). Periodically the state adds new items to its list of mandatory recyclables, often as a result of increasing demand for the materials, availability of processing facilities or information documenting adverse effects of disposal.

There are several environmental reasons that recycling is beneficial: it reduces air pollution, surface and groundwater pollution, soil contamination, litter and the effects of toxic chemicals on humans and wildlife. It also saves energy and other valuable natural resources, since it almost always requires substantially less energy and raw materials to make a product from recycled materials as compared to virgin materials. Also, when considering the entire life cycle of a product, the emissions of greenhouse gases are significantly reduced when we recycle. Less energy is used in extracting raw materials, manufacturing the product, transporting the materials and product, and disposing of (or in Connecticut, burning) the waste material. The State of Connecticut's Climate Change Action Plan indicates that achieving the state's recycling goal of 58% would be one of the most significant steps the state could take to reduce the effects of global warming.

The most direct effect on the local level is financial: under the present contract with CRRA (the Connecticut Resources Recovery Authority), for every ton of material recycled at the transfer station instead of being disposed, Hebron avoids paying the \$69.00 per ton "tip fee" for the waste to be burned. When the new town contract with Willimantic Waste takes effect in November 2012, the tip fee will be \$60.00 per ton (for the five year life of the contract), plus the town will receive a rebate of \$15.00 per ton for recyclables, for a net savings of \$75.00 per ton when we recycle!

The following examples show how much the town would save if those who use the transfer station recycle at a higher rate, using the fiscal 2011 tonnages. These savings amounts, and those for curb-side residents below, were calculated by multiplying the net \$75.00 per ton savings times the number of tons of recyclables represented by each increase in recycling rate.

- Increase recycling from 23% to 30% \$11,250 savings
- Increase recycling from 23% to 40% (former state goal)..... \$26,850 savings
- Increase recycling from 23% to 58% (new state goal)..... \$54,900 savings

It should be noted that these projected savings do not include the additional direct savings possible for those residents who use curb-side pick-up. If those residents increased their recycling rate to the same levels, their total savings would be even more, since 2011 data has indicated that they recycle at a lower rate than those that use the transfer station (only about 19% in 2011). Estimated total savings for curb-side residents in 2011 would have been as follows:

- Increase recycling from 19% to 30% \$ 17,800 savings
- Increase recycling from 19% to 40% \$ 32,625 savings
- Increase recycling from 19% to 58% \$60,525 savings

Overall, the town and its residents could have collectively saved anywhere from \$29,050 to \$115,425 by increasing their recycling rate town-wide.

IV. Recycling in Hebron Today

At the present time Hebron residents can choose to either bring their own trash to the transfer station or use curb-side pick-up. A little over half of the town's residents use curb-side, based on the tonnage of waste taken from the transfer station compared to the tonnage picked up curb-side. Statistics have indicated that in general, Hebron residents who use the transfer station recycle at a higher rate than those who use curb-side pick up (for fiscal 2011, 23% vs. 19%), although that difference may shrink somewhat now that single stream recycling is here. More on single stream recycling later.

The transfer station is open four days per week for a total of 32 hours per week. This compares very favorably with other towns of a similar size. Our transfer station is staffed by one full time and one part time worker, who are often expected to maintain control over a large number of cars, trucks and people in a very small, congested space.

For comparison purposes, transfer station practices for eleven other small towns were reviewed (Andover, Bolton, Chaplin, Colchester, Columbia, East Haddam, Haddam, Lebanon, Plainfield, Stonington and Woodstock). Only two (East Haddam and Stonington) were open more hours at their transfer station per week than Hebron (39 and 36 vs. 32). Woodstock was open 4 days/24 hours total per week, while Stonington was open six days and the rest were open only one or two days at 7-16 hours per week. Most of the towns surveyed charge a fee to dispose of trash at their transfer station, ranging on an annual basis from \$20 in Columbia to \$150 in Woodstock. Stonington uses a SMART system (see page 9). Chaplin charges by the size of the load, while Hebron, Plainfield and Andover charge no fee at the present time.

Over the last several years, the number of items and materials that can be recycled at the Hebron transfer station has increased significantly. The following categories of materials are now recyclable at our transfer station:

<i>Mandated by Connecticut Law</i>	<i>Other Recyclables</i>
Glass/Metal food and beverage containers	#3-#7 plastic containers
#1 and #2 plastic containers	Junk mail
Boxboard	Other paper
Corrugated cardboard	Aluminum foil
Newspapers and magazines	Aseptic cartons (milk and juice)
White office paper and residential paper	Fluorescent bulbs
Colored ledger paper	Ballasts
Scrap metal	Antifreeze
Household electronics	Clothing
Waste oil	Phone books
Motor vehicle batteries	Tires
Leaves and grass clippings	Useable household articles (swap)

Unfortunately, despite these positive features, Hebron's residents do a fairly poor job of recycling. Limited steps have been taken in the past to encourage residents

to recycle more, with newspaper articles written and other efforts made to educate the public. The recycling rate at the transfer station in 2007 was 26%, but in fiscal 2011 it was only 23% (compared to the state average of about 28%, and the state goal of 58%). Note that the rate may show some increase in fiscal 2012 as a result of the implementation of single stream recycling by the main private hauler in town.

V. How We Can Increase Our Recycling Rate

A. First Things First – Education, Education, Education

There are several reasons that can explain Hebron’s poor performance in recycling: lack of information on what, how and why to recycle, inconsistent information provided to residents, inconvenient location of the transfer station, aversion to any state mandate, people are too busy, and laziness/inertia. The Committee is unanimous in its recommendation that, regardless of any other steps taken by the town, we must educate our residents and businesses on why recycling is important, what should be recycled and where, and how it can be done easily and at minimal cost. The best way to deal with this “education gap” is to give people the information they need so it is easy and convenient for them to recycle. Take away the excuses, and most people (but unfortunately not all) will do the right thing.

B. Satellite recycling location(s). The Old Colchester Road transfer station is inconvenient to get to for many residents, especially those in the northern part of town, and inconvenience pushes people away from recycling. If one or two other recycling locations were set up, people would be more likely to recycle. The Green Committee heard comments from several residents at this year’s Maple Festival indicating that they would strongly support a satellite location, compared to the inconvenience of driving to the present transfer station. Other towns, such as Glastonbury, use satellite stations very successfully. They do come at a cost, for the roll-offs, plus some maintenance and policing of the site, however, it seems to be worth the cost in other towns.

A possible added benefit could be realized if some residents had their trash hauled by private hauler, but brought more of their recyclables to a conveniently located satellite station. The town would get increased rebates for the added recyclables. The more we can send the message about recycling, and make it easier, the more people will make it part of their daily routine, and not let the excuses get in the way. Some candidate locations for a satellite station would be the Town Office Building, the Fire Station on North Street, the sand/salt storage site on Saltbox Road and Burnt Hill Park.

Another twist on this option would be to enter into an agreement with adjacent towns under which residents could use either town's recyclables station. The point is to make it as easy as possible for our residents to recycle.

Operation of a satellite location would be governed by an existing general permit from the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, however, there is no fee or registration required by the permit. The only conditions address issues such as requirements to cover the bin and minimize litter.

- C. Implement single stream recycling at the transfer station. Single stream is the process in which all recyclables are placed in one bin, as opposed to separation of papers and cardboard from metal, plastic and glass containers. Single stream is being implemented in many more towns in Connecticut, and the private haulers that pick up in Hebron already use it. The process has been touted as a way to significantly increase the recycling rate by making it easier to recycle. In fact, the amount of recyclables collected almost always does increase since it is easier for the resident. However, there is a great deal of controversy at present regarding whether or not the amount of material actually recycled increases. The concern is that by mixing recyclable materials, and then compacting them, glass and some metal fragments would become embedded in the paper and cardboard, lowering its quality and causing more to be thrown away. Studies have shown this to be the case in some municipalities. Recyclables processing facilities and haulers in Connecticut have invested millions of dollars to purchase vehicles and sorting equipment to accommodate single stream collection, so Hebron's decision may not make much difference in the bigger picture. If Hebron did implement single stream recycling, in addition to increasing our recycling rate (at least on the front end), the town could save on hauling costs, since fewer trips would be needed to

haul compacted recyclables to Hartford (or Willimantic). There would be some up-front cost for the compactors, estimated recently at \$10,000 - \$15,000 to purchase a reconditioned unit.

- D. Save Money and Reduce Trash (SMART) or Pay as you Throw (PAYT) Under this system, those that use the transfer station would pay for trash disposal by the bag or by the bin, or pay for stickers that would have to be applied to each bag (usually different prices for different size bags). A variation is available for those that use curbside pick-up.

At present, those Hebron residents that bring small quantities to the transfer station pay the same low amount (through taxes) as those that bring large quantities. This is unfair and does nothing to encourage recycling. SMART systems treat trash disposal similar to a utility service, where you only pay for what you use (and recyclables are taken for free, so the more you recycle, the less you pay). People have more control over how much they pay for the service, which is not the case now.

These systems have resulted in significant increases in recycling rates in most towns, and have been demonstrated to have the most beneficial impact on recycling rates compared to any other alternatives (50% increases or more). The down side of SMART systems is the difficulty in selling the idea to the residents because of the cost of the bags or stickers. Also, there may be a need for increased oversight at the transfer station to make sure people are following the rules, although some towns have not seen the need to hire more staff for this purpose. Also, implementing a SMART system may cause some residents to stop using the transfer station altogether and go to curbside pick-up. In addition, there are concerns regarding the possibility of illegal "roadside" disposal by those refusing to use the system. However, if this has happened at all in towns that implemented SMART systems, it has been short-lived as people ultimately decide to either use the new system or a private hauler.

Following is a listing of the Connecticut towns that presently use SMART systems, and the cost per bag in those towns.

Connecticut Towns with SMART Systems:

Brooklyn	30/40 gallon bags @ \$1.80/bag or 17 gal bag @ \$1.20/bag
Colchester	25/30 gal bag @ \$3.00/bag
Coventry	33 gal bag @\$1.00/bag, or 13 gal bag @ \$0.50/bag
Essex	33 gal bag @ \$3.00/bag or 10 stickers for \$25.00
Killingly	35 gal bag (or smaller) @ \$2.50/bag
Mansfield	1-13 gal can/wk @ \$11.75/mo up to 4-35 gal cans @ \$34/mo
Portland	45 gal bag @ \$5.00/bag; 30 gal bag @ \$4.00/bag; 15 gal @ \$1.00
Sprague	30 gal bag @ \$1.25/bag or 13 gal bag @ \$0.60/bag
Stafford	33 gal bag @ \$1.25/bag or 15 gal bag @ \$0.65/bag
Stonington	33 gal bag @ \$1.25/bag or 15 gal bag @ \$0.75/bag

- E. **Special Collection Days.** Certain waste materials are recyclable but may not be disposed on such a frequent basis to justify the town making facilities available at all times for the public. For example, sneakers, textiles, Styrofoam, carpet and other materials could be collected by the town periodically, but not every day the transfer station is open. Also, there are organizations that have historically been involved in collection efforts of these and other materials, and they may be interested in partnering with our town in such efforts. Events could be held at locations other than the transfer station such as RHAM.
- F. **Implement Composting at RHAM.** Food scraps are heavy, and since the town pays for trash disposal by the ton, reducing the amount of food waste as much as possible would significantly reduce the amount of waste thrown away. RHAM and the two elementary schools are good candidates to support a composting operation since they are concentrated sources where the food scraps could be easily collected and transported to the composting facility. The process could involve students as part of a science curriculum, as is the case in many towns that do this. There is an up-front cost for construction of the system (but minimal, if any, long term net cost), and a learning curve. However, in addition to reducing the amount of waste disposed, the school

would get free compost to use in its plantings or to give away. Also, an additional side benefit has been realized at some schools – awareness of the composting process gives overall recycling a higher profile, and recycling of other materials increases. Concerns regarding odors and animal problems can be eliminated by proper design, construction and operation of the composting system.

VI. Other Options for Cost/Revenue Changes to the Operation of the Transfer Station

In order to give a full picture of changes that could be made in the operation of the transfer station, the following options are presented strictly as potential cost savings or revenue generators. However, none of these options are recommended by the Green Committee, as they would discourage the use of the transfer station and thereby create a disincentive to recycle.

- A. **Charge a Fee for the Use of the Transfer Station.** A few years ago Hebron considered the imposition of a fee for the use of the transfer station, however the proposal was defeated at referendum. While a fee would generate funds for the town, it would represent a disincentive to using the transfer station for recycling, not only defeating the purpose of the fee but also resulting in lower rebate money being paid to the town. Instead, we need to establish a system that discourages disposal of trash while at the same time encouraging recycling. See the discussion of SMART systems on page 9.
- B. **Reduce the hours at the transfer station.** As pointed out above, we are fortunate that the Hebron transfer station is open many more hours each week compared to most towns of a similar size. An alternative to closing the transfer station altogether for trash is to simply limit the hours that the transfer station is open. However, if the hours were limited by eliminating one week day from the schedule, there may be limited savings since the part time worker does not work during the week, and the full time worker would be assigned to other

duties in the Public Works Department as he is now. If the transfer station were to be closed on a weekend day, one half the cost of the part time worker would be saved, or approximately \$5,000 - \$6,000 per year. However, it is the Green Committee's opinion that this would be very short sighted, in that it would de-emphasize recycling, probably reduce the recycling rate in town and thereby reduce the amount of rebate money the town receives. Even if the town were to save some money, it would negatively impact a very beneficial service provided to its residents.

- C. Close the transfer station for trash disposal. Many towns do not have a transfer station for trash disposal, and instead rely on one of the following options:
- Private haulers contracted directly by the residents. This would result in the lowest up-front cost to town, but probably a lower overall recycling rate (and resulting lower rebates for recyclables). Cost to the residents who presently use the transfer station would be significantly higher than at present, since they do not incur any cost other than a small amount for gas to bring their trash to the transfer station, plus whatever minimal amount is covered by property taxes. The cost for curbside pick-up for a typical household in Hebron was recently indicated at about \$84 per quarter, or \$336 per year, including both trash and recyclables. It is important to note that all Hebron taxpayers, including those that use curbside pick-up, pay for the cost of operating the transfer station. As a result, the amount paid for curbside service is all extra cost when compared to those that bring their trash to the transfer station.
 - Town employees and equipment. In this scenario, the town would purchase trash collection trucks and hire staff to operate them, clearly a very expensive option.
 - Private hauler contracted by the town. Rather than each household making separate arrangements with a hauler, a few towns seek bids for the service and then only allow the chosen hauler to operate in town. The town pays the hauler out of tax revenue. Manchester and Mansfield are examples. Costs for the residents are probably a little lower than if they contracted directly, since the town can usually get a better deal than individual residents.

Note: In any of these options it would make sense for the town to continue to operate the transfer station at least for recyclables and the materials presently collected on the lower level. Also, it should be noted that some residents with long unpaved driveways either cannot accommodate trash trucks, or would have difficulty bringing their trash to the “curb.”

Nevertheless, if the town were to implement the first option above (hauler contracted by the residents), the annual savings to the town would be significant, based on elimination of the charge for MSW removal. Especially in the present fiscal environment, it would be tempting for the town to consider saving money simply by closing the transfer station and requiring residents to contract separately. In fact, by either partially or completely closing the transfer station, costs for the town would decrease, perhaps by as much as \$115,000 per year or more. However, costs for those residents who use the transfer station would increase, by an amount far greater in the aggregate. For example, if only 1000 families use the transfer station (probably a low number), and they had to pay \$336 per year more for trash removal, the \$336,000 they would pay to contract separately would dwarf their share of the \$115,000 total paid by the town for disposal at the transfer station.

VII. Recommendations

Following are the recommendations of the Hebron Citizens Green Committee for increasing recycling in Hebron. It is the Committee’s position that all of the recommendations below should be implemented, although obviously they all cannot be done at the same time. The Citizens’ Green Committee is ready to assist the Town in any capacity that is necessary to implement these recommendations successfully.

A. Education

A budget should be established for the town to provide its residents with comprehensive and regular information on what, how and where to recycle, and how to do it easily and at minimum cost. Information on recycling and

waste reduction should be more visible on the town website. As part of this effort, the Green Committee should partner with RHAM, the elementary schools and other town committees and organizations to help get the word out and hear new ideas on how to reach our goals. A rule of thumb used by some to estimate costs of outreach to the public is one dollar per household per year which, for Hebron, would mean approximately \$3,000 to \$4,000 per year at least for the first few years.

The town must make recycling information available on a frequent basis, in a variety of locations and by a variety of means (e.g., signs, flyers, posters, meetings, town website, town vehicles, local TV, mailings, fairs, events, school presentations, store fronts, meetings with community groups, DEEP staff, media coverage, etc. etc.). Keep sending the message – remember, take away the excuses. The town should also partner with the private haulers and other organizations such as DEEP to promote recycling.

Also, the town should set the example for its residents and businesses. It is difficult for the town to convince the public to change its ways if it is not doing as much as possible to recycle as part of its own operations. A good example is found in many town parks. After any baseball or soccer game, it is common to see trash bins overflowing on the grounds, with almost all the trash being recyclable cans and bottles. What message does that send to the public, especially the kids? Town leadership should send a clear message to all departments that they must implement aggressive recycling programs. Simple steps can be taken that will cost little or nothing, save the town money, send a positive message to the public, and not interfere with normal operations.

Finally, the town should seek recognition (e.g., from DEEP) for its efforts, and give recognition to those town employees, residents, schools and businesses which do an exemplary job. Send positive messages and people will respond.

B. Single stream at the transfer station

Because of the ongoing controversy regarding single stream recycling, Hebron should continue to monitor this issue before taking steps to implement single stream at the transfer station. If adequate information becomes available indicating that it makes sense, without causing a contamination problem, then the town should proceed to either purchase or lease compactors and, if

necessary, new roll offs, to facilitate a single stream system at the transfer station.

C. SMART

Following the lead of almost thirty other towns in Connecticut, and thousands of others across the country, Hebron should implement a SMART system at our transfer station. While it will take some work and convincing up front, there is no doubt that it will result in lower operating costs and much higher recycling rates at the transfer station. A decision would have to be made as to how much of the cost of disposal will be paid through the cost of the bags (e.g., 50%, 75%, 100%). Before the system is put in place an effort must be undertaken to inform the public on the benefits of such a system and how it would work. It is likely that a combination of open meetings with the public, and meetings with interested community groups, would be needed. Staff from the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection have expressed a willingness to come to Hebron to help with this effort. It should not be a rushed process, so it may be appropriate to set a target of six months to a year for roll-out.

D. Establish one satellite recycling location

In order to increase recycling in town we need to make it more convenient for residents. One way to do that is to locate a satellite recycling facility, as many other towns have done. Hebron could benefit significantly from such a facility since it will soon be paid \$15/ton for recyclables. Locating such a facility should be preceded by an effort to more fully gauge support and preference for a location. It is recognized that a satellite recycling location may not work as well in Hebron as in other towns, however, the Green Committee recommends that the Town do so on at least a trial basis, and if it is determined that insufficient benefits are realized, it can be terminated. Willimantic Waste has indicated that a roll-off for single stream recyclables would cost about \$75-\$150 per month, plus about \$185-\$200 per load to haul away. The cost would be offset partially by the rebates to be paid to the town under the contract with Willimantic Waste starting in November 2012.

E. Composting

Composting should be implemented on two levels in Hebron: at RHAM, and by more individual homeowners. RHAM had a composting system at one time but discontinued it due to problems with rodents. The Green Committee

recently met with RHAM officials and they are very interested in establishing a working relationship with the committee. One of the efforts undertaken as a result should be to evaluate how a composting system can be re-established at RHAM. Many other schools in Connecticut operate composting systems, and in fact the DEEP has developed a manual specifically to assist schools in this effort. A well-run, full scale composting system would result in significant savings for RHAM.

In addition, while the town cannot mandate that its residents compost their food scraps, we should encourage people to do so to remove as much of this heavy waste component as possible from the waste stream. As part of this effort the Town should investigate the feasibility of soliciting donations or grants to offset at least part of the cost of composting systems for its residents.

VIII. Useful Websites

These are only a few of the many websites that are available for anyone looking for information and assistance in solid waste management and recycling.

1. www.hebronct.com/transf.htm
All you need to know about the Hebron Transfer Station, including directions, hours of operation, what you can dispose of and recycle, fees and much more.
2. www.ct.gov/recycle
Part of the website of the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. Includes a great amount of information related to municipal environmental issues, plus many links to other useful sites.
3. www.epa.gov/recycle
From the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Also includes many links to other relevant sources of information.

4. www.nerc.org

Website of the Northeast Recycling Council, an organization made up of 10 northeast states dedicated to “environmental and economic sustainability through responsible solid waste management.” An excellent source of information and assistance, especially for states and municipalities.

5. www.container-recycling.org

Website of the Container Recycling Institute, a collaborative, non-profit organization whose mission is to “make North America a global model for collection and quality recycling of packaging materials.”