

Recycling coordinator thinks education is key to participation



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Sue Van Liere, Staff Writer

City opts for code to reduce illegal dumping

Sarah Archer, of Iris Waste Diversion Specialists Inc., gave an overview of the recycling assessment report at Monday's Hastings City Council meeting.

Iris was hired by Barry County in July 2017 to serve as its part-time recycling coordinator. Archer presented some key findings regarding the city from a report based on several months of research, investigating and talking with representatives of local units of government. Archer, as part of the tasks laid out by the county's solid waste oversight committee, had spoken to various individuals about recycling in Barry County.

Archer reported that most of the recycling in the county is through drop-off services.

"Here in the city, most residents are using the Waste Management facility," Archer said. "But we don't want to ignore the fact that Padnos also accepts materials as a drop-off site."

"That is an important piece for your residents – that they have that drop-off," Archer said, "But they also have the opportunity to recycle as part of their trash service through their specific hauler of choice. This is one area I feel, for the city of Hastings, that the residents could probably be doing a better job of."

"The City could help improve recycling participation, assuming a little more education about those opportunities. We certainly will be helping at the county level," Archer said.

Archer said findings showed Les's services about 350 households in the city, while Waste Management only serviced about 17.

"Given those numbers, I estimate, based on the number of households that you have, you have about 13 percent of your households participating in the curbside recycling program," she said.

It is unknown how many city residents participate in drop-off recycling, since there is no way to track. However, Archer said Waste Management reported more than 3,100 customers at its location in 2017.

"Other really impressive recycling opportunities that residents have throughout the county are the Paper Gator recycling program – those paper recycling boxes that you see at schools or at churches," Archer said.

"Those are getting a lot of good use, so I'm really excited to see that," Archer said. "While I'm not able to gather a lot of numbers to substantiate how well recycling is happening in this county, I really feel that there is a lot going on."

According to Archer, the Kent County material recovery facility, which is where most of the recyclable materials from Barry County end up, reported over 465 tons of material was delivered from Barry County in 2017.

It is impossible to trace from which municipality the materials originated or how much came from residential verses business. However, Archer stressed that a significant amount of material is going into that facility.

"There's a lot of really neat opportunities for inter-local participation and cooperation in expanding recycling, or maybe even improving trash collection costs and services," Archer said.

"I know that Middleville has a single hauler contract; you have your franchise agreement," Archer told the council. "There are also some communities that are interested in partnering with their neighboring communities and local units to see if they can jointly have a collaborative contract which would afford them some economies to scale and save some money."

Such partnerships are among some of the things Archer said she will be looking into in the near future.

Archer said they are currently working on getting a web page set up at the county level, which she hopes will be linked to the Barry County site in order to provide residents with information on recycling resources and locations.

"I have been talking to residents who didn't even realize that their provider offers recycling services at the curbside for just a few dollars a month," she said.

"I really feel like we can increase what's happening here in the county ... just by educating people to what's available to them," Archer concluded.

Dealing with a less permanent form of waste, council members voted on a measure to help reduce illegal or unwanted refuse at the city's composting site on State Road.

Lee Hays, director of public services, presented possible options, including weekly pickup at residences by Les's Sanitation; DPS monthly pickup at residences; resident drop-off site behind the DPS garage; additional gates with secured access at the existing site with staff to provide weekly codes or having staff on hand every other Saturday; continuing the existing practice of staffing the site 14 Saturdays per year.

"I would say, if we are going to put in a gate anyway, we should put in a gate that basically allows the access," council member Brenda McNabb-Stange said. "If it ends up still being a problem, by doing it that way, then we can go to the Les's pick-up or even look at something else."

"We've been debating this compostable problem for a lot of years," Mayer David Tossava said. "I agree with [McNabb-Stange] on this fence. We should try that, with the code, and see how it works."

After further discussion, council members voted unanimously to add additional coded access gates at the existing location with staff to provide residents with weekly codes. If problems with unauthorized dumping still occurs, the issue will be revisited.