

a message from cswd's board chair and executive director

Though CSWD felt the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic acutely in late FY20 and its affects will reverberate well into the future, it didn't stop progress toward long-term planning and capital improvements.

Organics Diversion Facility (ODF) Next Steps

Thanks to the COVID-19 shutdown of restaurants and educational institutions, incoming food waste tonnage was 10% less than FY19 and 12% under budget. Conversely, "victory garden" sales combined sales of Compost, Topsoil, and Garden Mix were 85% above budget in FY20. To ensure we would be prepared for the statewide ban on disposing of food scraps in the trash on July 1, 2020, we moved forward with plans for ODF expansion using matching grant funding from the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources.

Looking even further ahead, a cost-benefit analysis from SCS Engineers presented two options for ensuring long-term sustainability of this operation: 1) Incorporating a food-scrap transfer station or 2) Building a food waste depackaging facility. As FY20 ended, the Board of Commissioners was exploring a possible depackaging agreement with a third-party provider.

Solid Waste Management Deemed An Essential Service

CSWD Drop-Off Center operations were most dramatically impacted by the pandemic, though we also seized on this opportunity to make much needed safety refinements and to fast-track planned facility design and operations efficiencies.

In late March, CSWD briefly closed all District-run facilities to deep clean and assess risk factors. After carefully assessing staff availability and reconfiguring each site to maximize throughput and minimize public and staff contact, we implemented a measured and thoughtful reopening plan. We prioritized locations that could safely provide a baseline

level of service to the areas of greatest need--CSWD Drop-Off Centers in Williston, Essex, Milton and South Burlington reopened by the end of June 2020.

Some new operations, such as mandatory masks and spacing of parking, we implemented as COVID-19 precautions to protect customers and staff. We introduced streamlined fee structures and reduced schedules and materials to ensure we could maintain adequate staffing and successful materials management through an anticipated second wave of Coronavirus impacts in the fall and winter.

The CSWD Environmental Depot hazardous waste facility reopened May 20th with a new appointment system to ensure a safe work environment during the pandemic and beyond. We suspended the Rover mobile hazardous waste collection events for the foreseeable future.

Though we are proud of the flexibility and speed with which we adapted to a demanding and unprecedented new reality, the reduced locations and days of operation, changes to materials accepted, and the "stuck-at-home-projects and cleanouts" effect of the pandemic combined to create a very challenging environment for our all facility Operators and Hotline/Outreach staff.

Hotline calls exploded from an average of 14 calls per six-hour shift to 65 per shift in Q4. Outreach staff pivoted from in-person offerings to providing support to facilities and instructional videos and virtual tours as well as a contact-free system to accommodate a huge jump in demand for backyard composting bins and digesters as July 1 approached.

Envisioning The Future of Recycling

In the recycling sector, the pandemic emphasized the continued need for thoughtful, strategic planning and secure supply chains. The shutdown of redemption centers

and the global demand for recycled paper fiber to make toilet paper, tissue, and cardboard boxes boosted the price of aluminum, cardboard and paper.

CSWD staff visited processing facilities that receive our plastics and fibers to better understand market needs and forces. We continued narrowing site options for the CSWD Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) of the future to replace our outdated facility.

Looking past the pandemic, CSWD staff participated in the Vermont Legislature's Single-Use Plastics Working Group and provided technical assistance and a MRF operator perspective on Bottle Bill expansion and Extended Producer Responsibility proposals for packaging under consideration.

Financials Remain Stable

Staff continued to prepare for the unknown by cutting the District's FY21 budget, which was nearly finalized when the pandemic hit. Though the financial fallout won't be known for many months, end-of-year FY20 revenue was 4.4% below budget, but only 1.9% lower than FY19 actuals.

Perhaps not surprisingly given the well-established relationship between economic conditions and municipal solid waste generation, trash tonnage for Chittenden County was down 3.2%--2.97 pounds per capita per day versus 3.27 compared with FY19.

Still, thanks to three quarters of on-budget operations and quick and prudent actions under COVID-19 conditions, CSWD remained financially healthy. In FY20, the District's total operating expenses were \$11,918,472 while operating revenues were \$12,339,659 for a net surplus of \$421,187.

The extraordinary amount of trip data and observational information generated from the pandemic have given staff a better perspective in addressing operational concerns that needed serious attention before the virus hit. Lessons learned will serve the District and our Members well going into FY21 and for years to come.

In closing, we are immensely grateful for the dedicated and selfless team members at CSWD, and for the support and commitment to waste prevention, reduction, and responsible management shown by our citizens and businesses even under unimaginably difficult circumstances.


Michelle DaVia
Chair, Board of Commissioners


Sarah Reeves
Executive Director



The devastating new strain of coronavirus that swept across the globe will always dominate any retrospective of Fiscal Year 2020. The COVID-19 global pandemic instantly wove new concepts such as social distancing, mask wearing, and quarantining into the fabric of our daily lives. It also highlighted our collective dependence on the workers who keep essential services running while the rest of us stay safe at home.

Solid waste workers are as essential as they come, yet rarely receive recognition. Though a solid waste district is an abstract entity, the staff who manage our discarded hazardous waste, household trash, and recyclables; who process our food scraps into soil amendments, and who patiently answer our questions and interpret new and sometimes confusing requirements are anything but abstract. They are the heart and soul of our operations.

We are exceptionally grateful for the boots-on-the-ground team members who are shown in this report and who keep our services running for our member communities out in all conditions as well as behind the scenes.

