



Juneau Commission on Sustainability

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To: Mayor Weldon & Assembly Members
From: Gretchen Keiser, Chair, JCOS
Date: March 12, 2021
Subject: JCOS Report: Juneau Solid Waste Factsheet

The Juneau Commission on Sustainability submits the *Juneau Solid Waste Fact Sheet* which presents information on the history and current situation of the Juneau community's handling of solid waste. The report also presents recommendations on actions the Assembly can take to tackle waste reduction and waste diversion, and to optimize current landfilling and other waste-handling options. The report is attached and is summarized below.

Current Situation. Juneau generates about 30,000 tons/year of solid waste - roughly equivalent to 1,875 lbs./person annually. Most of it is hauled and disposed of in the Capital Disposal Landfill in Lemon Creek - Juneau's primary disposal site since at least the 1960s. Two private companies handle the solid waste; Alaska Waste is the trash hauler and Waste Management owns and operates the landfill. Hazardous household wastes, junk vehicles and minimal amounts of recyclables are diverted and shipped south under the RecycleWorks program of the City & Borough of Juneau. A strong, pungent and pervasive odor emanates from the landfill due to bacterial decomposition of organic materials (food waste, yard debris, paper and wood products). Methane, a major component of the resulting landfill gas, is flared off and is a potent greenhouse gas contributing to climate change. At current disposal volumes, the landfill is projected to be full in about 20 years.

The overarching waste management issues facing Juneau are:

- 1) controlling the waste stream into the landfill (to buy the community time and begin to address the landfill odor); and
- 2) developing a future alternative timed to replace the current landfill when it reaches its capacity.

Recommendations. Improving waste management will require education, planning, and action. JCOS recommends that the Assembly:

- 1) Conduct an assessment of earlier CBJ documents on solid waste. Update information as needed. Look at current practices in other cities, and explore partnerships with other agencies, non-profits, and entrepreneurs.
- 2) Adopt a Zero Waste plan, also known as a Resource Recovery plan, which focuses on the CBJ's ability to address waste reduction and waste diversion (reuse, recycling, and composting). Develop clear timelines and action steps. Public education is a key component to change the "throw away" cultural mindset toward a more sustainable community approach that prevents waste and reuses resources where possible.
- 3) Initiate work on a new CBJ landfill site.
- 4) Seek funding to support investigations, planning and site preparations.

The JCOS report's information and conclusions support many of the Assembly members' comments and concerns expressed at its 2/22/21 Committee of the Whole meeting:

- A need for current data on the costs of various options and waste composition, updating the Juneau Solid Waste Management Strategy (2008).
- Information on current waste handling technology, recycling costs-benefits, municipal-scale waste diversion.
- Clarification on CBJ's capability and legal authority to take broader actions on waste diversion and waste reduction, within the current framework of regulated private landfill owner (ADEC permit) and private trash hauler (RCA certificate).
- Encouragement for private sector opportunities in waste diversion.

The Juneau Commission on Sustainability is willing to assist the City in its efforts. JCOS intends to convene sustainability sessions on aspects of the community's solid waste situation to provide public education on what is working and what isn't, what other communities are doing, and the actions households and businesses can take to help address the challenges. JCOS will post information on its website and Facebook page, and can help facilitate public surveys or comments. JCOS can also help research options and opportunities as well as participate in scoping contracts or planning efforts.

Every Juneau resident and business generates waste. Time is on our side if the community acts, but inaction won't make the solid waste challenges go away. The community is at a pivotal point in determining its solid waste future. CBJ can either choose to continue to rely on outside interests and export, or it can build the economy through encouraging resource recovery on a local level.

Attachment: Juneau Solid Waste Fact Sheet