For decades, Bowdoinham’s recycling program was known throughout the state – and even gained national praise – for its breadth and creativity. The program has changed over the years, along with economic and market forces, but remained (until the pandemic) one of the most comprehensive in the state. Moving forward, it will be useful to review recycling in Bowdoinham and look at how other communities of a similar size are handling solid waste.

Before the pandemic, Bowdoinham took a two-pronged approach to recycling. Trash was collected curbside, for a fee of $2.50 per bag, and recyclables were collected curbside for free in a hybrid single-stream/sorted model: #1-#7 plastics, metal cans and, until very recently, glass, were combined in clear plastic bags. Newsprint, magazines/glossy paper, mixed paper, and corrugated cardboard were also collected curbside, but had to be bundled separately.

All of these items also could be brought to the Recycling Barn, along with:

* Egg cartons, for reuse by residents who raise chickens
* Styrofoam peanuts, for residents to take for packaging
* Styrofoam – It was *not* recycled, but the town accepted it for free as a service, because it took up so much room in a resident’s trash bag yet could be compacted to a very small and lightweight bale for disposal.
* Tires
* Lightbulbs
* Electronic waste
* Oil and latex paints
* Batteries
* Household hazardous waste (e.g. cleaning solutions)
* Fertilizers/pesticides/insecticides and flammable liquids
* Motor oil (which the town burned to heat the Barn)
* Mercury (e.g. thermometers)
* Household items, toys, and books for reuse by residents
* Shoes, clothing, and other fabric items for reuse by residents
* Small construction materials (e.g. windows and doors) for reuse by residents
* Scrap metal

Curbside collection of both trash and recyclables occurred on Thursdays, while the Recycling Barn was open Thursdays and Saturdays.

In early 2020, The Barn was closed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and has remained closed while the owner and the town negotiate structural changes to the building. In the interim, curbside collection of recyclables was suspended and large receptacles (“Silver Bullets”) were installed at the Public Works Facility. They are open for the single-stream collection of recyclables on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, but the list of materials has been reduced to:

* #1-7 plastics
* Newspapers
* Magazines/glossy paper
* Mixed paper
* Corrugated cardboard
* Metal cans

Additional receptables are available for:

* Scrap metal
* Paint
* Lightbulbs
* Batteries
* Mercury (thermometers)

The town contracts with Casella and pays a per-ton tipping fee on both trash and recyclables. The annual budget for Solid Waste is $191,906.

**Woolwich**

Trash is collected curbside from half the town on Tuesday and the other half on Wednesday, and recycling is collected every other Monday (They don’t have enough to make weekly collection cost-effective.)

Woolwich contracts with EcoMaine for disposal of trash and recyclables, and with Riverside for trucking. They pay a per-ton tipping fee for trash, but not for recyclables. They do not require trash tags – the program is funded 100 percent through taxes. The success of the recycling program depends on compliance by residents to keep contamination to a minimum – if a resident’s recycling bin contains material that is either not clean or not recyclable, it may not be collected. Training and education are an on-going process.

This year’s budget for trash and recycling is $202,194, of which $128,050.92 is the contract with Riverside for trucking.

**Dresden**

Dresden has no curbside collection of either trash or recyclables – residents bring all their trash and recycling to the solid waste facility, which is open on Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. They pay $2/bag for trash; recycling is free.

Residents sort materials into separate bins. Everything is taken to the Lincoln County Solid Waste Facility.

In addition, they also collect:

* Fluorescent bulbs (same program we use)
* Small batteries (no car batteries – same program we use)
* Used motor oil (a local resident collects it to heat his shop)

Dresden has an agreement with the Town of Richmond whereby Dresden residents can bring certain items (bulky waste, latex paint, tires, and household hazardous waste) to the Richmond transfer station. Richmond charges non-residents $15 annually to access the facility, plus separate fees per item.

Dresden had a swap shop for household items and clothing, similar to Bowdoinham’s, staffed by volunteers. It shut down because of COVID.

The town considered single-source recycling but decided against it because of the cost: “It’s very expensive and not worth it.”

The town’s annual budget for solid waste and recycling is $55,800 ($8,300 to operate the Recycling Center; an $18,000 contract with Pine Tree Waste Systems for trucking; and $29,500 for Transfer Station salaries.)

**China**

Like Dresden, China has no curbside pickup of household trash or recyclables. They operate their own 3,000-sf transfer station, where residents (or companies with whom they contract) bring trash and recyclables; residents are not charged a fee for either. Recyclables are sorted by residents.

The town accepts #2 plastic; newspapers and magazines; paperback books that are no longer sellable, as well as hardcovers with the cover removed. The items are baled together, 75 percent paper to 25 percent #2 plastic. Casella hauls the bales to Canada and then pays the town directly the profits of their share of material.

The town has decided not to collect mixed paper because at the moment, it costs money to dispose of it. China used to contract with Fiberite in Hampden, but the plant shut down in June. If it reopens, the town will start accepting mixed paper again; in the meantime, they are directing residents to put it into their household trash.

If there were an adequate water source at the recycling center, it would be possible for town to purchase a $15,000 machine to process the paper into “bricks” that resident could use for fuel in their woodstoves.

China also collects:

* Glass and porcelain (from toilets or tubs or sinks) is crushed and used for clean fill.
* Ames Metal provides a 40-yard container for scrap metals, which they pick up for free. A portion of the profit goes back to the town.
* The recycling center has a slab where food waste is dumped and frequently turned with a front-end loader to created compost, which is then provided to residents free of charge.
* Clothing, linens, shoes, and accessories are collected by Apparel Impact, a veteran-owned business that provides a container at no cost to the town.
* Paint
* Engine oil (which they burn to heat the building).
* Bulky waste, which is crushed before it is loaded into a truck to be hauled away.

The annual budget, not including salaries, is $209,000 ($95,000 for municipal solid waste, $43,000 for trucking, $44,000 for demolition debris, and $27,000 for recycling). Someone at the transfer station estimated that the entire operation, including salaries and benefits, vehicle maintenance, etc., cost the town around $600,000 annually.

**West Gardiner**

West Gardiner collects trash and recycling curbside using their own truck, funded by taxes with no individual fees. They have three balers “going all the time,” processing mixed paper, cardboard, magazines, newspapers, #2 clear plastic, and #2 colored plastic, all of which they then haul to Casella themselves. They also compact their trash. Because they haul their own materials, low market prices aren’t a problem for them, and at the same time, they are able to take advantage of high market prices. Their metal goes to Grimmels.

Residents have access to the transfer station, which is open Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday. They had a swap shop, but, according to their website, they closed it because the rules were not being followed.

The annual Solid Waste budget is $130,000.