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## **MEMORANDUM**

To: Transportation, Energy and Utilities Committee

From: Chapin Spencer, Director  
Lee Perry, Assistant Director DPW Maintenance  
Rob Goulding, Public Information Manager

Date: July 28, 2020

Re: Staff Comments on Consolidated Collection Feasibility Study

### **Background:**

There are many ways communities coordinate the collection of trash, recyclables and food scraps. Consolidated collection is one option. It is a system where one, or more, private haulers are contracted by a municipality for the removal of curbside trash, recycling, and organics. Consolidated collection has been periodically evaluated by the region and the City for years. The Long-time staffers recall a City Council resolution seeking to explore the concept for trash collection around 2000. In 2009, the Chittenden Solid Waste District launched a countywide analysis of consolidated collection that ran until 2014. Here is a summary of the City's recent steps:

- ) In April of 2018, City Council passed a resolution directing the Department of Public Works to undertake a citywide consolidated collection feasibility study with the City of South Burlington and Chittenden Solid Waste District.
- ) In May of 2018, an RFP was released by CSWD on behalf of the City of Burlington and South Burlington to interested parties to conduct a feasibility study for residential curbside solid waste collection in Burlington and South Burlington.
- ) In January of 2019 CSWD, the City of Burlington, and the City of South Burlington entered into a contract for services with Gershman, Brickner & Bratton (GGB) to conduct a feasibility study on consolidated curbside collection in which a private hauler is contracted by a municipality to collect trash, recycling, and organics.
- ) On June 25, 2020, the City of Burlington Department of Public Works held our first of two virtual public meetings via Zoom to inform the public of the results of the recent Consolidated Collection Study. An independent consultant contracted by Chittenden Solid Waste District, on behalf of the City of Burlington, and South Burlington, performed the

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study. The consultant GBB and subcontractors C2Logix, LLC and Shappard Research presented their findings in a presentation. After the presentation the public was allowed time for input, and questions. Those not able to attend would be able to view the recorded meeting in its entirety on the City website, as well as submit questions, and comments via email.

- J We have received 21 comments via email and in person from the first public meeting. Approximately 75% of the comments so far in favor of consolidated collection. Most cite environmental and safety benefits. Some residents have stated they had prior experience with consolidated collection in previous communities they lived in and were happy with their experience.

**DPW Comments on Feasibility Study:**

DPW staff reviewed a version of the feasibility study earlier this year from the consultant and provided comments. Many of our comments were incorporated, but a few key issues are still outstanding. Here is a bulleted list of items we seek to have addressed in the final report.

- J Include estimated cost savings per household or property. The estimated cost savings of a consolidated collection model is aggregated citywide, which is helpful at a high level, but residents should be able to better understand their potential savings under a consolidated collection model.
- J Clarify that savings in the Executive Summary are based on proposed every other week (EOW) trash and recycling – if we understand this correctly. Should we expect the savings to vary if the community chooses different service levels such as weekly trash and recycling pick-up? Please confirm in the report.
- J Revisit the recommendation that the municipality should bill in a private hauler model. We question whether it is practical to have one entity bill and another providing the actual service. With the proposed service options (toter sizes, back door pick-up, organics, etc), it seems operationally complex for the City to bill residents based on variable service levels the hauler provides to individual customers.
- J Clarify whether the billing costs are factored into the total estimated consolidated collection costs and projected savings. Whether the billing is done by the City or the haulers, there are real costs that need to be captured. These projected billing costs must be itemized in the report. While the City does have billing infrastructure in several departments, the added complexity of the bills and the additional customer service required to handle service inquiries will drive additional costs. The projected consolidated collection financial charts on page 44 and 45 need to clarify assumptions on billing costs and any other significant expense that is assumed but not explicitly described.
- J Re-confirm study’s findings on fleet and staffing recommendations for trash, recycling and organics. The report states that recycling collection only requires two trucks. The City of Burlington currently uses three vehicles, and staff are having trouble keeping up with the amount of recycling put out. If the feasibility study is recommending only two trucks because of an every other week (EOW) pick-up, that needs to be clarified and discussed. Based on high recycling levels in Burlington and the difficulty residents have storing recycling in dense neighborhoods for two weeks, it is staff’s recommendation that at least recycling be picked up weekly. Page 47, footnote 57 explains the use of two recycling trucks vs. three based on an EOW collection. It is unclear if this will change for the different

scenarios offered in Table 3 especially in regards to weekly collection where the number of routes double.

- J) The report needs to make clearer the options Burlington residents would have under the recommended consolidated collection model. While residents would lose their choice of hauler, they would retain several key options (whether to opt-out entirely, cart size, whether or not to have backdoor service and whether or not to have organics collection).
- J) Revisit opt-out maximum of 15% of customers. The report states that only 75% of Burlington households currently have solid waste collection service (with the remaining ~25% opting out to bring their trash to the CSWD Drop Off Centers or find alternate arrangements). If the City signs contracts with haulers with a maximum 15% opt out rate but 20% seek to opt out, would we require residents to participate? We recommend bidding the contracts with different bid prices based on participation thresholds – or some other strategy to allow for a wider potential range of participation. The report should reflect this.
- J) Expand the implementation timeline to include the full stretch from the point of City Council decision to the actual consolidated collection operation. The 9-12 months for procuring haulers is aggressive and appears to assume very little community engagement in finalizing the RFP service levels and options. Additionally, it does not appear to factor in the time for selected haulers to acquire equipment, hire and train staff and set-up administrative systems necessary to initiate service.

### **Why the Feasibility Study Evaluates a Private Hauler Consolidated Collection Model:**

At a recent Transportation, Energy and Utilities Committee meeting as well as at the June 25, 2020 public meeting on the Feasibility Study, the question has been raised as to why the feasibility study did not evaluate a municipally operated consolidated collection model. The short answer is that:

- 1) The Feedback from CSWD’s 2009-2014 countywide study showed strong public interest in trying to protect small Vermont haulers.
- 2) The Vermont communities we know about with consolidated collection have had success with a private hauler model (see section at bottom of memo for more detail).
- 3) The private hauler model is more common than the municipally operated collection model according to a survey provided to us by our consultant team.
- 4) DPW Maintenance Division leadership saw consolidated collection with private haulers as a way for the DPW Street Maintenance team to focus more on its core responsibilities – plowing, construction, and sewer line / road maintenance.

When it started, Burlington’s Recycling Program was leading in an emerging industry. Now recycling collection services are commonplace. The Recycling Program’s every weekday operation regularly pulls staff from other critical tasks within DPW to complete recycling activities – whether it is Equipment Maintenance staff to keep the finicky recycling vehicles on the road or Street Maintenance crews to cover for time off for recycling crew members. Lately, we’ve had to double up on some recycling routes because recycling quantities have grown (mostly cardboard) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Staff brought this perspective of studying a private hauler consolidated collection model to three public meeting in early 2018:

1. January 23, 2018 Transportation, Energy and Utilities Committee meeting
2. February 21, 2018 DPW Commission meeting
3. April 30, 2018 City Council meeting

The written memos to each public body described consolidated collection as “a system in which a municipality contracts with one or more haulers to provide curbside collection of trash, recycling, and organics for specific routes within that community, rather than having multiple haulers serve a scattering of customers in each neighborhood.” Furthermore, each memo plainly stated a key potential benefit of consolidated collection – “uniting all residential solid waste collection into a seamless system would allow Burlington Public Works to get out of the recycling collection business:

- Ending administration of Burlington’s recycling tax
- Ending our challenge of high employee turnover
- Ending our need to acquire and maintain expensive collection equipment”

With this clear description of a private hauler consolidated collection model, the feasibility study was favorably reviewed at each public meeting and the Council approved a resolution advancing the evaluation.

**DPW Observations Regarding a Municipally Operated Consolidated Collection Model:**

If the City Council requests the City and our consultant evaluate a municipally operated consolidated collection model, here are some of the considerations we’d need to evaluate:

- J Understand the Study’s Financial & Timing Considerations: To evaluate a municipally operated collection model before advancing a Council recommendation would require additional time – and additional cost if we want the consultant to assist with the evaluation.
- J Vet Legal Considerations: If we advance a service model that replaces existing private trash hauling operations with a municipally run operation, what legal issues would we need to address?
- J Propose an Organizational Structure: Given the size of a consolidated collection operation, we would likely need to establish a new division within Public Works. We would need to propose the organizational structure and project the management costs to oversee this operation.
- J Propose a Staffing Level: DPW would have to hire enough staff to support a fully functioning consolidated collection operation. This includes drivers, and back up drivers, manager, customer service support, outreach and enforcement support, likely another Fleet Technician, as this would add to the City fleet that already has our Fleet team at capacity.
- J Develop Conceptual Operating and Capital Budgets: DPW would have to acquire an estimated six new pieces of equipment required for a consolidated collection operation. DPW would need to procure enough trash, recycling, and food scrap carts to cover the various scenarios offered.
- J Draft a Site Expansion Plan: With the recent moves of Zoning and Water Resources to 645 Pine Street, the building and parking are both at capacity. Parking Enforcement is now proposed to come to 645 Pine Street by the end of the year. Significant effort would be required to develop the facilities, whether at 645 Pine Street or another municipal property, to accommodate the additional vehicles, carts and staff.

**Vermont Communities That Have Consolidated Collection**

- ) **Brattleboro Vt.** - The City of Brattleboro has had consolidated collection of trash, and recycling since the early 90's, and compost collection since 2013. As recently as 2016 they have gone from weekly trash to EOW trash pick up, as the addition of compost collection has reduced the amount of waste put in the trash, and weekly recycling pick up. Currently they offer EOW trash, and weekly recycling, and organics pick up. This service is being offered by use of a private hauler contracted through the municipality. The system is set up as a pay as you throw model where residents buy either a 15-gallon \$2.00 EA, or 32-gallon \$3.00 EA yellow or purple trash bag. These are the only bags that are allowed to be used. Recyclable materials must be in a container clearly marked recycling. Compost material must be in a sealed container/cart.
- ) **Westford Vt.** - The town of Westford currently offers consolidated collection to their residents via a private hauler contracted by the town. They offer weekly same day 64 gallon trash, and recycling per household pick up. Their select board chose at this time not to include foods craps in the collection. The service is funded through residents' property taxes.

**Requested Committee Guidance:**

City staff seeks the following input from the Transportation, Energy & Utilities Committee at its July 2020 meeting:

- ) Does the Committee want a municipally operated collection model vetted at this time?
- ) Are there any outstanding issues that the Committee wants addressed in the final report before bringing the report and the TEUC's recommendation to the Council?
- ) Does the Committee want additional public engagement prior to developing a Council recommendation?
- ) When does the Committee want to develop its Council recommendation and when does it want to bring this item to Council?

Thank you for your interest in this consolidated collection feasibility study. Don't hesitate to contact us with any questions.