

# Recycling Alliance of Philadelphia

... a coalition of organizations and individuals working to promote recycling in

## Member Organizations:

- ◆ Center City Residents Association
- ◆ Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future
- ◆ Clean Air Council
- ◆ Clean Water Action/Clean Water Fund
- ◆ Community Land Trust Corp.
- ◆ Frankford United Neighbors
- ◆ Friends of Pennypack Park
- ◆ Greater Olney Community Council
- ◆ Hunting Park Community Development Corporation
- ◆ New Threads Inc.
- ◆ Northern Liberties Neighborhood Association
- ◆ Passyunk Square Civic Association
- ◆ Penn Environmental Group
- ◆ Pennsylvania Horticultural Society
- ◆ Pennsylvania Resources Council
- ◆ Philly Freecycle
- ◆ Queen Village Neighbors Association
- ◆ Sierra Club- Southeastern Chapter
- ◆ South Philadelphia Environmental Action Coalition
- ◆ South Street Neighbors Association
- ◆ Southwest Community Development Corporation
- ◆ Spruce Hill Community Association
- ◆ Village of Arts and Humanities
- ◆ Washington Square West Civic Assoc.
- ◆ Weaver's Way Coop
- ◆ Whole Foods
- ◆ and many more...



**CLEAN WATER ACTION**  
Evan M. Belser  
(215) 640-8800

**CLEAN AIR COUNCIL**  
Emily Linn  
(215) 567-4004  
ext. 103



  
**PENNFUTURE**  
Christine Knapp  
(215) 545-9692

February 1, 2007

Clarena I. W. Tolson, Commissioner  
City of Philadelphia Streets Department  
7<sup>th</sup> Floor - Municipal Services Building  
1401 JFK Boulevard  
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Commissioner Tolson:

On behalf of the Recycling Alliance of Philadelphia and the hundreds of active citizens working with our Recycle NOW Philadelphia Campaign, we have prepared the attached questions for your consideration at the City Council Streets and Services Committee hearings scheduled for February 22, 2007. We respectfully request the courtesy of your response in writing.

As is consistent with the City Council Resolution of March 16, 2006, our objectives in asking these questions are:

- To understand your vision, plans and strategy for solid waste management and recycling in Philadelphia.
- To hear your perspective on the issues raised in the May 2005 City Controller's review of Philadelphia's residential recycling program.
- To seek the rationale behind various programs directed by the Department in support of increased recycling in Philadelphia.

Given your long tenure with Streets Department as Deputy Commissioner of Sanitation and Commissioner, there is no one in the City of Philadelphia better equipped to address these questions than you. It is our sincere hope that you will help us to understand the Department's perspective and use this hearing as an opportunity to lead us all to a renewed commitment to a effective citywide recycling program of which we can all be proud.

We look forward to your response. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call Maurice Sampson, Chair of Recycle NOW, at the number below.

Sincerely,

Steering Committee, Recycle NOW Philadelphia Campaign  
Maurice Sampson II, Chair (267-269-6912)  
Christine Knapp, PennFuture  
Emily Linn, Clean Air Council  
Evan M. Belser, Clean Water Action

**QUESTIONS FOR STREETS DEPARTMENT COMMISSIONER CLARENA TOLSON  
REGARDING RECYCLING AND WASTE MANAGEMENT IN PHILADELPHIA  
Prepared by the Recycling Alliance of Philadelphia, February 2007**

1. The most asked question among the public regarding recycling in Philadelphia is, "If recycling is happening everywhere else, why not in Philadelphia?" According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the average municipal recycling rate is 24%. Over the last 20 years, recycling has come to be accepted by government and the waste industry as a necessary and integral function of waste management. After 20 years, despite city and state mandatory recycling laws and staff and funding support, Philadelphia's recycling rate hovers at 5%.

*1a. Can you please explain your philosophy of waste management for Philadelphia?*

*1b. What is the Department's past and present policy during your tenure in the Streets Department?*

2. According the 2005 City Controller's audit of Philadelphia's Mandatory Recycling Ordinance 1251A, the Streets Department is out of compliance with 13 of 18 provisions. The most significant of these is the failure to meet the recycling rate of 35 to 40%; a level at which the Controller reported the City would enjoy significant economic benefit: For every 1% increase in the recycling rate, the City would save \$540,000, or as much as at \$21.4 million a year. Several questions:

*2a. We assume the Streets Department failure to comply with 1251A was based on the Department's concern for the public's best interest. Is this true?*

*2b. How does the Department intend to comply with the intent ordinance? Does the Department have or intend to develop a comprehensive plan in this regard?*

2c. Among those the failed provisions, is the Department's (lack of) support for the duties of the Recycling Advisory Council. The RAC and the Department had a history of successful collaboration from the enactment of the Ordinance in 1987 to the departure of Recycling Coordinator Al Dezzi in 1999.

*What has been the rationale for significantly less than full participation and support since that time? Specifically, and as an example, why after numerous recent letters from the RAC Chairman, Richard Babst, why has the Department chosen to not responded to their request for added RAC members?*

3. Single stream recycling can use standard refuse compactor trucks for collection, the same used to collect trash. The Controller's Office maintains that by re-routing the existing refuse compactor fleet, there is no need to increase the number of vehicles or workers in order to provide greatly improved citywide recycling while maintaining trash collection services. The Streets Department disagrees and, in fact, projects the need for \$10.4 million for 64 more vehicles and an annual \$780,000 increase in labor costs in order to meet recycling rate of 35 to 40%<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> **Additional Background, questions 3 & 4:** According to the Controller's Report, "single stream," recycling processing technology used by Blue Mountain Recycling (currently under contract to receive recycling collections), will allow the City to use compactor trucks with 16-ton capacity versus specialized recycling vehicles with only 7-ton capacity. The report also indicated that there are 100 idle trash compactors in the City Sanitation yards and by simply re-assigning compactors for the collection of recyclables, the City can expand to weekly collection of cardboard, plastic, glass, metal and paper. This smart use of resources, the report suggests, would greatly increase recycling rates without increasing costs and would generate \$540,000 in savings for every 1% rise in recycling rates.

According to the Streets Department's response to the Controller's findings, the Department not only disagrees with this assessment, but also maintains that 110 new trucks and crews are necessary to meet projected goals. The Department

3a. *Given the total volume of material (trash plus recyclables) will be the same, can you please explain why the Streets Department would need additional compactor trucks to pick up the same volume of material?*

4. The Partnership Recycling Program has providing thousands of citizens' across the City with the opportunity to recycle plastic and cardboard not collected at the curb. Hundreds of volunteers committing one Saturday a month for 14 years, represents an extraordinary civic commitment. The earnings paid from savings realized by the City for these efforts has generated thousands of dollars since 1993 to community projects across the City including tree planting, community newsletters, environmental education programs and neighborhood watch equipment.

For the more than a year promised funds have been held back with no explanation although volunteer collection programs continue uninterrupted. Rumors persist that not only will funding support be greatly cut or canceled but that funding for past efforts will not be compensated at promised levels.

4a. *What are the intentions of your office for the continued support of the Partnership Recycling Program?*

5. According to the Office of Fleet Management, as of March 1, 2006, there are 268 available refuse compactors. Of this number, 166 refuse compactors are deployed for refuse collection. This leaves 100 idle refuse compactors available to collect recyclables single stream.

5a. *Why are 100 refuse compactors being held in inventory unused?*

5b. *Given the availability of these vehicles, has the Department considered transforming all the current recycling vehicles with refuse compactors and providing single stream (adding cardboard and plastic containers to collections) citywide?*

5c. *Assuming the Department's calculations are correct, why would you need 64 NEW vehicles?*

6. There are five distinct and disjointed recycling programs across the City. The Streets Department is currently overseeing a mix of bi-weekly and weekly collections; some include cardboard and plastic collection and some are incentive-based, as noted in the attached map. Recycling bins are provided in some parts of the City and not in others. Residents are understandably confused. Rumors persist that the Department will add to the confusion with more piecemeal programs this spring.

6a. *Does the Department have plans to merge recycling services into a single method? If so, what is your plan? If not, why not?*

6b. *What metrics does the Department have to measure the performance of these various programs?*

7. The Department has spent over a million dollars annually for the last three years on citywide recycling promotion campaigns.

7a. *What was the purpose of these campaigns and have they been effective in raising the recycling rate?*

---

also claims that there would be an increase in cost of more than \$11 million to cover the increased costs and truck purchases needed to increase recycling rates.

8. The Department's enforcement program is troubling. In the absence of sufficient education programs or warnings, citations are being issued for everything from failure to place recycling containers out for collections (even if recyclable materials are held until the container is full) to describing flower beds as weeds. Taking time from work or business to challenge these citations have left many citizens very angry.

*8a. What is the purpose of the Department's enforcement program and how effective has it been? Can you provide empirical information to support your conclusions?*

*8b. The Controller's Report recommends a three-tiered "Comprehensive Enforcement Program" that would result in few fines and higher levels of participation. Has the Department considered this approach?<sup>2</sup>*

9. The recent introduction in northeast Philadelphia of single container collection will not reach its potential without providing households with weekly collection and large recycling bins. The 1999 weekly collection pilot run by your Department found that volumes increased 20 to 30% with these provisions excluding plastics and cardboard. Programs around the country report a 200 to 300% increase in collected volumes when 32 to 64 gallon carts replace the 7 to 20 gallon bins.

*9a. Why are weekly collection and large bins missing elements from the single stream program in northeast Philadelphia?*

10. In response to the findings of the RecycleBank incentive-based pilot, the Streets Department announced its intent to expand the pilot from 2,500 to a total of 10,000 households divided among several neighborhoods.

*10a. What is the status of these plans and what is the rationale for this "expanded" pilot? Please describe the criteria for this pilot, how data will be collected and what will be done with the results?*

*10b. Why has the Department decided to expand to 10,000 homes rather than 100,000 homes as formally recommended (resolution of November 15, 2005) by the Recycling Advisory Committee?*

11. It is our understanding that northeast Philadelphia would have been an ideal location for an expansion of RecycleBank, but the option was rejected. The RecycleBank incentive-based curbside pilot in Chestnut Hill and West Oak Lane resulted in increased participation rates (90%) and increased collections (from 14 to 85 lbs per month/resident). However, the pilot was too short, too small a sample and the data collected was inadequate to draw conclusions. RecycleBank's willingness to consider and finance a larger pilot as called for by the Recycling Advisory Committee is well within the City's best interest. Northeast Philadelphia, with its wide streets and ample household storage space, is a perfect candidate for such a pilot.

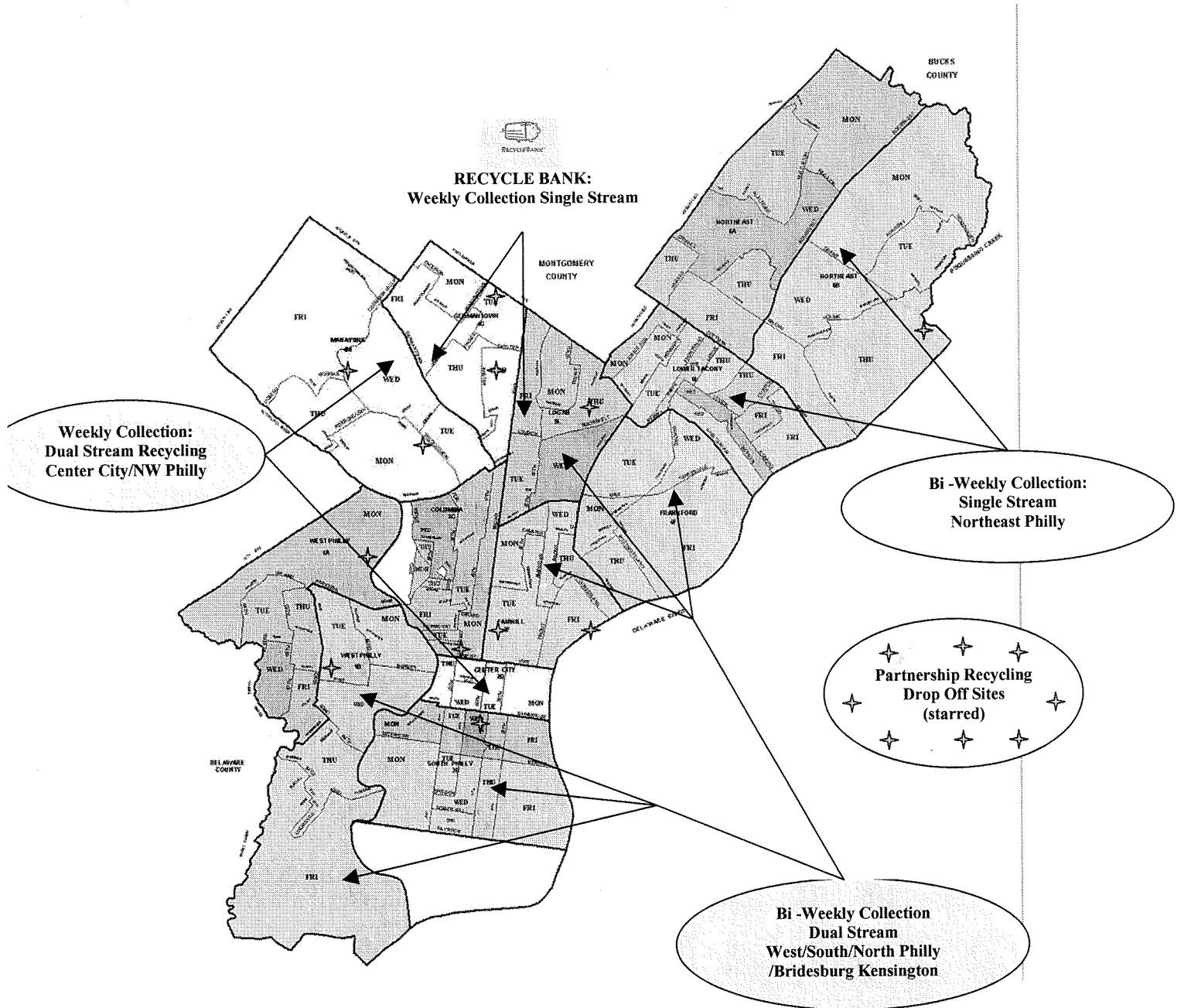
*11a. The proposal, as presented by RecycleBank, appears to be in the City's best interest. Why was it rejected?*

*11b. Your Department has described the terms of a RecycleBank contract as too expensive. Please explain.*

---

<sup>2</sup> City of Philadelphia, Streets Department Review of Recycling Program, May 2005, page 11.

# PHILADELPHIA HAS FIVE RECYCLING PROGRAMS



Dual Stream Recycling – Weekly

Weekly Curbside Collection, Separate Paper from Containers, City Provided. Original Bin: News, Mixed Paper, Glass & Metal – Food & Beverage Containers

RecycleBank Weekly Curbside

Collection, One Bin Provided: News, Mixed Paper, Cardboard, Glass, Metal & Plastic– Food & Beverage Containers Participants rewarded with coupons for participation.

Single Stream Recycling –Bi-Weekly

Bi-Weekly Curbside Collection, All in One Container, Resident Provides Bin: News, Mixed Paper, Cardboard, Glass, Metal & Plastic– Food & Beverage Containers

Dual Stream Recycling – Bi-Weekly

Bi-Weekly Curbside Collection, Separate Paper from Containers: News, Mixed Paper, Glass & Metal – Food & Beverage Containers

Partnership Recycling Drop-offs

Community run drop off programs, once a month for plastic and cardboard. City pays groups.