

## THE FUTURE OF OUR TOWN'S RECYCLING PROGRAM

*By the Town of Bow Solid Waste and Recycling Committee*

Similar to many communities throughout the United States, the future of the recycling program in our town is currently being reviewed. Over the last two years, China has imposed restrictions over the acceptance of recycling loads that are deemed to be contaminated. The market for recycling has seen a downturn, and many contractors are having a hard time finding a home for our recyclables. The cost to process recycling now often exceeds the cost to send trash to the incinerator or landfill. For those materials that are sorted at recycling centers, stockpiles are frequently exploding as contractors try to find a home for them.

In July 2017, Pinard (the trash and recycling collector for the Town) was charged \$20/ton to deliver single stream recyclables to the Casella recycling facility in Allentown. This fee steadily increased to over \$100/ton by April 2018, but the current contract protected residents from those costs. Under the town's current contract, Pinard "owns" the recyclables and is responsible for paying their disposal. Bow residents are not charged for recycling disposal while trash is charged at \$69.05/ton. The contract expires on June 30, 2019, and the town administration and selectmen are currently reviewing options. Possible options being reviewed include: (1) extending the current contract and allowing Pinard to dispose of the recyclables at the incinerator or a landfill in the event that the price exceeds the cost of recycling; (2) putting the contract out to bid (note: an extension of the Pinard contract will probably be necessary due to bid time requirements); and (3) modification of the current approach to recycling by, for example, moving to dual stream recycling or abandoning recycling glass because it is costly (due to the weight of glass), as well as because it can contaminate other recyclables if it breaks.

In the short term, the Town administration has allowed Pinard the flexibility to respond to the market pressures that have pushed recyclable processing costs significantly higher than trash disposal. This flexibility currently allows Pinard to dispose of recyclables as solid waste when the processing fee for recyclables is excessive (*i.e.* more than the cost of processing solid waste.) Other towns such as Hooksett and Franklin have had to take similar actions.

For the long term, the Bow Solid Waste and Recycling Committee has recommended to the town manager that the contract with Pinard be extended to allow sufficient time for exploration of the available options and that the town should go out to bid for a long-term contract to fully evaluate the cost and best approach for the handling of trash and recyclables.

At this point in time, the best way to ensure the success of our recycling program is to avoid contamination in our curbside recycling totes. Many of us are "aspirational recyclers" and will include items in our recycling tote hoping that they can be recycled. However, this often creates more harm than good. The avoidance of contamination is important because a load of recyclables will only be accepted with a 2-3% contamination rate. All other loads will be rejected and will go to the landfill. The most frequent items that contaminate recycling loads are plastic bags and Styrofoam. Those items should not be placed in the recycling bin, even if they have a recycling number on them. Styrofoam should be placed in the trash. Plastic bags can be recycled at several local supermarkets, otherwise they should be reused or placed in the trash.

Pinard Waste has created a new flyer called “Can I Recycle This? Know When It’s a NO!” The flyer helps identify the types of items that should not be recycled. The new flyer is also posted at the website at <https://bownh.gov/289/Trash-Recycling-Services>.

Of course, the best way to reduce the amount of our waste is to change our habits, whether it involves reducing, reusing or composting. With the future of recycling in flux, this has become increasingly important.

If you have specific questions about whether an item is recyclable, please visit [www.recyclesmartma.org](http://www.recyclesmartma.org), or send an email to the Town of Bow Solid Waste and Recycling Committee at [bowrecycles@gmail.com](mailto:bowrecycles@gmail.com).