

Salem City Council Committee on Public health, Safety and Environment.

May 3, 2023

Purpose: Discussing a draft ordinance to create a composting ordinance

Attendance

C. Cohen
C. McLean

Absent

C. Merkel
C. Watson-felt

Speakers

Patrick Schultz of All Souls
Kathleen Rogers of Spitfire tacos

Chair: We do have our draft ordinance here. So, this ordinance is going to be about municipal buildings and our businesses. Municipal buildings, I do have a letter from our waste reduction coordinator that we're going to read into the record as well. We started this draft ordinance, we did have schools in here and after some long conversations with the school Committee, counselor Cohen as well and our superintendent Dr zreich we did come to an agreement that I believe the schools will compost on their own through policy. So, we will not be introducing this as an ordinance with the schools in it. So, with that when it's concerning municipal buildings it's going to really come down to a couple of buildings here in why Hall City Hall Annex the DPS.

Letter submission: Janelle Rook. May 3rd, 2023, Dear city council as a waste reduction coordinator for the City of Salem. I am pleased that a discussion is taking place regarding food waste in this role. I'm working on initiatives to reduce Solid Waste tonnage by Salem by coordinating events such as the book swap, repair Cafe textile drive and more. I am also attending events and participating in speaking opportunities at Salem public schools, the Housing Authority farmers markets and other community events. In addition to encouraging the practice of reusing proper recycling composting is a major area of focus in my conversations with our community. combating climate change is the largest benefit to composting food waste by diverting food waste from Solid Waste stream greenhouse gas emissions are drastically reduced instead of food waste is turned into nutrient-rich soil the City of Salem has an opportunity to make a massive positive environmental impact by raising awareness in our community of importance by composting. While I cannot speak to the business owner piece of this proposed ordinance, I do believe there are a handful of municipal buildings that can

Implement composting food waste with little effort. These buildings include City Hall City Hall Annex, TPS, Salem public library multiple fire stations and police headquarters locations such as Forest River Park Willows McGrath Park will need to be addressed separately and likely further down the line. I would be honored to be a part of the increasing compost beautiful city. There will be an important educational component in this initiative and a clear plan must create how Municipal composting will be introduced monitored and maintained. I can say with confidence that I am able to and willing to partake in introducing and maintaining composting programs to the municipal buildings stated above. I look forward to working with you on this initiative Janelle Wilk waste reduction coordinator City of Salem.

C. Cohen: In 2013 I was hired as the city's first at the time a mandatory recycling enforcement coordinator. During the three years I did that, we received a grant to do Residential composting free of charge, free bins, free pickup for 18 months. We were able to extend that a little bit further we did extensive Outreach myself and other people with the city and although we were able to do 1500 pickups, we never got past 1200. since that program went away and people have to pay for their compost bins and pickup, we've probably lost maybe six or six hundred or so, of the 1200 so education is really a key factor I do also want to state that Ms. Rooks concept about how this helps the climate mitigate. the climate crisis is really important so when food is deposited in the landfill it becomes methane is about forty times more harmful to our environment than carbon and the only way that we can mitigate the climate crisis is to reduce carbon significantly because these contribute more than anything else to the increased temperature of the Earth. and that's what amounts to The Climate crisis. so, I'm very excited as a counselor now to work with consulars and McLean and other people in the council to start the process of educating people through a municipal program I also feel like one of the real advantages to this is that we pay a lot of money to remove our trash and recycling. and a significant amount of our trash is compostable items. It's not just food but there's a lot of things that can go in a compost bin like paper towels and gum and you know other things that are not necessarily food items. but they do contribute significantly to weight. We don't have any data in the city, but I believe in some communities it is a higher ratio than people would expect., so we pay per ton of trash to be removed from the city. and anything that we can divert into composting is a real benefit. I do also want to come to chair Varela for producing a concept that hopefully will through grants or other kind of funding be able to implement at some point which is to be able to process our own composting at some point. and that would not only enable us to expand the program better to residential, but it would enable us to create Revenue. which will help us offset some of the costs for whatever trash and recycling haul that we use. so, I'm a big fan of this and once again I appreciate very much chair Varela you are bringing this ordinance to the council.

Chair: this ordinance right here, it does have a component of Education not only for let's say the director who's responsible in the city level but also the manager or the business

owner this this will ensure that there's a very vague training on letting new hires know and existing hires or existing employees that this is how what we're doing with composting so with that you know there's not a huge lift I don't believe with City buildings but the biggest lift is going to be with our businesses I was able to talk to about 14 Food Service establishments the last couple of days ranging from small operators to operators that have multiple restaurants with high-capacity seating as well and going over the concerns it seems like most of them can be mitigated by just a little bit of education but again, this is a big conversation, and we need a to have our business owners let us know what they're thinking about it what are their thoughts and concerns how to implement this so with that I think we should definitely start out with our two attendees here Mr. Schultz and Miss Rogers.

Kathleen Rogers: I own Spitfire tacos at 105 Lafayette Street. We started composting almost a year ago and it did take some teaching to the employees, and it took a few months to really get it down but once we did, we were actually saving lots of money we produce way less trash most of our waste is food. So yeah, overall, I think that it's an easy decision for businesses to kind of jump on.

Chair: as far as the expense of the composting program and your general Solid Waste contract, can you explain how you're able to save money?

Kathleen Rogers: we were producing way more trash at that time. so, we were paying about \$600 a month for trash at one of our locations. then that went down to about \$350 once we started composting well yeah and then for, so we have one tote in Salem from Black Earth compost and that is seventy dollars per week We get it picked up once a week.

Chair: are you able to talk about the concerns you are having to work through when it comes to contamination of the compost?

Kathleen Rogers: there were a few weeks that the bin was contaminated, and black Earth let us know and the first couple times they did take the bin and then once we had to kind of sift through it and remove the contaminated items. Once we taught everyone at the at the restaurant you know what can go in and what cannot, it got much better.

Chair: when it comes to the customers that actually dine into your establishment. and when do they actually throw out their refuse if there was that an issue to kind of let the customers know?

Kathleen Rogers: that's actually still an issue. We just have like we kind of Mickey Mouse three bins so compost trash Recycling and at the end of the night we would sift

through it to make sure that we didn't contaminate the bigger bin. but you kind of have to guide people you have to really guide them it's I mean it's not easy but it's doable.

C. Cohen: do you currently use compostable materials for takeout?

Kathleen Rogers: we use compostable Forks, to go containers and napkins.

C. Cohen: do you feel that over time customers have gotten more Savvy about what they should put in the containers?

Kathleen Rogers: the regulars for sure

C McClain: can you speak a little bit more to the contamination issue in terms of what would have sort of been the most common pitfalls that you wrestled with along the learning curve?

Kathleen Rogers: so, we use you know avocados in each individual avocado that has a sticker on it. So, you have to remove the sticker which was you know some of our employees didn't want to do that. But you know we started doing that and it was fine, but we have to push our bin outside at the end of the night and put it in front of the restaurant. so sometimes people walk by and put random stuff in there, so we have to sift that out. but lately it really hasn't been much of an issue at all and everything else we use there is pretty much compostable.

C. McClain: how did you go about educating your customers who were dining on site about what they should and shouldn't be putting into the bin?

Kathleen Rogers: so, we just laminated a piece of paper that said very clearly what can go in and what cannot. You know it's pretty straightforward the tacos just one container napkins and forks can all go on the same Bin.

C. McClain: all of your materials are compostable, essentially everybody's able to put most of their food waste right along with the container.

Patrick Schultz: I'm a co-owner of the All-Souls Lounge at 282 Derby Street. I'm here to support this ordinance wholeheartedly. It's about time that the municipal government didn't step in to help Drive these sorts of programs. It's not going to happen on its own to the extent that would actually make a significant difference. We have all compostable takeout materials right now. that's where the cost comes in. the cost doesn't seem like it should be a factor in anybody's decision you know whether or not they like this program or not in terms of just you know because of Kathleen clearly stated they're saving money because their weight and trash has gone down and their compostable weight has gone up and it sounds like black Earth is fairly reasonable in in what they're charging as well so we're one hundred behind this one hundred behind this our problem

is not going to be cost because we were able to absorb the cost of the containers and the forks and knives and everything that is compostable but we are just you know we just adjust costs elsewhere we try not to pass anything on to the customer but if you have to do that for kind of a larger purpose that's appropriate too. our issue is going to be space, you know where we put you know how we separate we have a tiny little Space. So how do we figure that out, but you know that's just geometry. You know we'll figure it out. The training's not going to be hard because we don't do take out really. So, it's all in-house so it's just the employees managing the separation of trash, compost, and recycling. I would encourage that in this ordinance of its if I missed it and it's not already there that landlords be required to provide space for the bins. I know and we don't really, we don't foresee a problem with that, but I know other restaurants do have outside space restraints. and so, the landlord's going to have to kind of step in at least at the level of cooperation but there needs to be some sort of mechanism too to require that landlord's help establishments you know abide by these new rules.

Chair: I know you have a mixed you share trash with another couple of establishments yeah do you see any concerns with that?

Patrick Schultz: I don't think so I mean this is the kind of the beauty of the of the city driving this issue is because if we're all required, we already share the cost for the trash and the recycling right so we don't each have our individual separate bins we have a combined bin and we share the cost so we would do the same with composting in fact bit bar our neighbor on one side has already begun to compost they have compost bins in the back and then, there are a couple of other restaurants, Jody B's next to us on the other side. I think they would be all about this program but again there just has to be some help in facilitating kind of the effective implementation of this.

Chair: I did want to mention that there's a couple of things that are kind of driving this and why I felt appropriate to introduce this. one being that the Massachusetts food waste disposal ban effective November 2022 the threshold went from one ton to half a ton of food waste so if you are an institution a business, you're required by mandate in state law to have an adopt a composting program so, I believe this is appropriate and furthermore I did have a conversation with one hauler in general Black Earth hauler which does service our area and I wanted to make sure talking to Connor the owner that if this is something that we were to implement city-wide in our businesses would there be a concern for not being able to keep up and I was assured by Connor that that wasn't the case they are ramping up their production next year they are actually leasing another site in Manchester by the Sea as well so that's just telling me that when it comes to the composting industry here it is a growing budding industry. I hope to see more haulers with site assignments in the Commonwealth adopt this, because This can also be a revenue producing situation as well like counselor Cohen said. There is a void here as far as food waste diversion.

Karen Khan: 17 Sutton Avenue want to express my full support for the ordinance. I really appreciate counselor Varela they for you're introducing this I there are a few things I just wanted to say in terms of context some of which have been alluded to but that one of the issues that I think is really important for us to understand is that how much food is wasted 1.3 billion tons of food is lost or wasted across the world, and this is like this is just a great way of helping with that issue instead of just throwing everything out we return it to the Earth, and we enrich the soil rather than burning it or filling up our landfills and having more as Jeff said nothing leaking into our air so that and another issue that we rarely talk about is global soil erosion and again, this is you know it's a way of attacking that problem to create more compost that will enrich our soil and mitigate that problem for our small farmers and for our Gardens and that this is a really positive approach one thing I wanted to just add is that as somebody who lives in Salem and uses Black Earth, we have reduced us trash by at least 50 percent maybe more just in a household of two people and so I really would encourage you to if this is successful to think about as we enter the new trash contract considering how we can incentivize composting among residents because I think it really could make a huge difference environmentally and I do think people would do it if they were educated about it and understood how much impact it really can have it really with recycling being a rather poor system right now A composting could have much more of a direct impact on our ability to enrich our environment so I would really encourage you know reducing our crash stream through composting incentivizing that through maybe a pay as you go program for trash or something like that that would give people the benefit of choosing the right path.

John Hayes: 13 Hancock Street, Salem. I'm calling in to support the ordinance I my wife and I did the composting with the pilot program with black Earth by the city when it was initially free, I believe for the first six months or something and then when it became that you had to pay we just of course continued it we believe in all the environmental merits of composting like Karen Khan just said reducing the weight stream waste stream we noticed the same thing in our household with the great reduction in trash volume when we began to compost I happened to be a chair of the city sustainability committee and we have given our support to this ordinance so I don't know if that was in the introduction by you counselor Varela or not but just in case there's more public here so the sustainability committee heartily endorses a composting ordinance with us with business the business sector and I also agree with Karen Khan that the more we can do to incentivize more of the resident's renters and homeowners to compost that would be beneficial I think in so many ways there's so many I'm a professor of Salem State and we talk about co-benefits there are so many co-benefits to just the action of composting you know in terms of mitigating climate change is a wonderful co-benefit reducing trash volume that the city has to haul away.

Pat Gozemba: I am the co-chair of Salem Alliance for the environment, and I want to say that safe is definitely behind this ordinance and we're grateful to you for bringing it Forward I am both an environmentalist who cares very much about the atmosphere and emissions and the idea that food waste from us home at in is 17 Sutton would be sent over to wheeler braider in Saugus and burn there and for the polluted polluting environmental justice communities in Revere and Saugus and Lynn in particular not that the pollution doesn't want our way as well I think would really be really very problematic bordering on criminal almost and Karen Khan mentioned before that in our household we have enormously reduced the amount of trash that we that we put it out in our bins every week so in terms of reducing emissions and really, I think that's number one priority for me when it gets either burned or put into landfills I think it's problematic I also want to say that from being away from Salem for five months and being in an environment where in Honolulu where we noticed where there is no composting there except composting in Community Gardens that we would make the effort to draw to when we were going by the community garden to make sure that we could dispose of our compost in the community garden compost pile and that made me feel good but again it's really sad that we had to drive our compost granted we didn't make a special trip for that, but we had to drive it to an area where they would take care of recycling that comp that composted material the other thing is I'm a gardener and a miniature farmer not of the Maitland Farm stature but certainly, I love growing my special tomatoes in my yard and the kind of soil that gets that that that that gets regenerated from composting is really important and I think we should encourage find strategies to encourage more people in Salem to do the composting if possible so I think both in terms of economic savings and in terms of preserving the environment that we have that we definitely should be encouraging other people to compost and so giving them the supports that we can make it possible.

Flora Tonthat: 30 Northeast Street I just I am in full support of this composting ordinance as I was you know part of Salem recycles when the pilot program was rolled out and you know I have a small business the bed and breakfasts and, in the winter, I mean you know because you know it offsets so much trash that, I usually only have like zero to one bag you know I don't have to take out the trash which is great but I do have like a small compost bin in the kitchen next to the sink and the guests they see this the note and they see they see it and they you know they put their food scraps in because it you know so it educates every guess whether they need it or not and I think it's it is great I just heartily agree with everything that you know previous folks have said about how good it is there was I do have a comment about the setting aside a space for the compost because some once I won't name any names but there was a business that was that had really, I mean great effort you know with composting containers and spoons and you know you know all that but I they all went to this plastic bag trap line trash and I'm just like I was just like that's such a waste you know it's like got this resource going to the trash so maybe it's because they didn't have room in the back you know for composting, they all had to go in the trash I don't know what the deal was, but it was really bothersome, but I really truly support this effort.

Julie Potter Brown: 2 Gidney St court. So, I am speaking in favor I'm not going to take a lot of time because everyone who spoke before me said pretty much everything that I would say that it's I was I participated at the residential level with black Earth even before the free pilot program in the city and I still do it does reduce the waste that goes away, but Pat said that this would go over to get burned is just abhorrent to me I think there would be some level of Education needed for this at the institutional level but you know hands learn it is what we are meant to do so I think it is possible and I also think that there's probably a good portion of businesses that need a little guidance and they need this little push they want to they want to do the right thing I'm sure there might be some pushback however I do believe that there are probably ones who just need to be shown how and that it can be incorporated into you know what we do I have a large party every summer and I always set up this is recycling this is compost this is trash and trash are the smallest portion of that part of the disposal process so thanks you for bringing this forward I am in favor.

Bonnie Bain: 22R West Avenue. I have been really looking forward to this day that we see a composting ordinance in Salem I'm a transplant from California and wherever I lived there maybe I just got lucky, but it was just part of our municipal process to have compost be part of everyone's trash pickup, so I was a little surprised that that wasn't more integrated here in Massachusetts and I'm really proud that Salem seems to have the energy and eagerness to make a shift and make a statement here so just really grateful for all the work that has been put into this and spent a lot of time on the recycling committee and we tried to do what we could but this is this is really necessary to move us forward so thank you so much and full support

Chair: I did want to mention that A lot's coming about cost with this and after talking to a couple larger restaurants specifically Finn's sea level Siri Keyser as well as Matt O'Neill of Ledger you know oh sea level has tried this in the past about I would say about four years ago they did try to compost only because the rising costs of their Solid Waste contract was going up out of control and they ended up I believe dropping the program not because it didn't work but it just seemed like there was just it was maybe too early in the conversation with the access to the haulers but it seems like Siri is willing to give this another shot he does believe that this is something that not only will benefit his business but the environment as well and that they have a responsibility after speaking with Mr. O'Neill of Ledger today he's informed me that his Solid Waste contract over the year has gone from fifteen hundred dollars to twenty-five hundred dollars in the last couple of months So within this conversation the really the benefit is cost savings as we know hauler fees are based on trucking and trucking is not getting cheaper so I really think this is a good start to a conversation concerning composting and the bigger the bigger discussion are going to be what is the City of Salem doing with their Solid Waste contract come up 2025. So, I believe that these conversations are warranted, and we need to start them now before we kind of get continents too late.

C. Cohen: following up on something Miss Bain said about her coming to Massachusetts so when I was the recycling coordinator, I learned that New England which many people think is a very green region is absolutely the worst region in the country as far as diverting waste, so this goes back to 2015 and we were diverting about eighteen of our waste Austin Texas was doing about 40 percent Seattle 65 percent and San Francisco are over 90 percent. There are also people from other countries who are in a much different cultural regiment. where you know here in the United States, we want someone to come to our house or business and pick something up. we don't want to clean it we don't want to take the labels you know do whatever it takes to make sure it's not contaminated but in many countries in Europe and other parts of the world people are used to bringing them their waste and separating it so I do want to mention that we talked a lot when I was in the job about residential composting and communities like Manchester have it as mandatory but I'm concerned in Salem, I don't you know Counsellor Verela and I have talked about this I do want it to be on our radar and something that we use as a goal, and I think starting with Municipal properties and businesses might be a good way to educate and get us there especially when the schools adopt a program and part of that is that we do have parts of our we have neighborhoods that are very dense and people may not you know it's a lot easier to convey these kinds of programs when you have a lot of suburban single-family homes. I do want to make a couple of suggestions. Chair Verela and I spoke a few times before obviously in writing an ordinance or adopting an ordinance we're not going to commit to any specific vendor however we do want to have a meeting and we'll have it off site before we reconvene the subcommittee because we have some ideas about how we can convey this so that a vendor can realize enough revenue and profit to significantly offset any increase in costs you know to do the pickups for example when I ran the solarize program this was not a guarantee like a mandatory composting program you have known for businesses but whatever vendor was chosen by the city and the state to be the solarized vendor contractor installer they knew that they we're going to get based on history of other communities a certain amount of installations and so the cost to the consumer whether it was a business a residential was in many cases 40 percent less. That's because they knew that they could buy using economies to scale and what I'd like to do is accountable and I spoke before this meeting is for us to have a meeting with someone like black Earth and kind of go over that program. Because they would be guaranteed sixty restaurants or whatever it is in Salem all you know municipal buildings outside of the schools I do want to make a motion I don't want to you know I will make a motion after we've all deliberated here to keep it in committee so that we could potentially bring a hauler in so that we have the whole committee, and we can go over the language you know line by line as we've done before but I do want to move that we add one line to the ordinance and that is that it will go into effect 12 months in one day after the ordinances passed on second Passage. So, I am going to make that motion right now.

Chair: All right with a motion from counselor Cohen that this ordinance be effective one year from second Passage one year and one day one year and one day from second passage.

C. McLean: I seconded that

Chair: matter carries three votes including my own and Council McLean

C. McLean: Some points that have already been made you know I think the environmental benefit of adopting an ordinance like this in terms of diverting solid waste from our trash stream from our landfills from our incinerators and turning our food waste into usable organic material is pretty self-evident even in the absence of the climate crisis I think that would be self-evident but it's especially urgent in the context in which we exist now I am not going to lean too far into speaking to the cost considerations for individual businesses because I imagine that's going to be different on a business-by-business case, but I do think that Mr. Schultz earlier comments about the need for an approach that is collaborative both in terms of how the city works with our businesses as well as how we approach the actual property owners in which a lot of these businesses operate is a really important one because oftentimes it is really a matter of which Logistics and space constraints especially where you are talking about many locations which have established a configuration for the collection of trash and recycling and so I think adding additional bins and devices not only inside these spaces but for the sort of mid-tier collection points rights for the for the dumpsters that you're tossing your waste into when it leaves the actual restaurant spaces is going to be a really important conversation and I agree with counselor Cohen that having the opportunity to have that conversation directly with the haulers and collectors and get some education about what kind of equipment can be made available to facilitate that is going to be really important as well as being able to take advantage of those economies of scale which were referenced, I think adopting a requirement municipally along with for our businesses is really important because it allows us as a city to help them take advantage of those economies of scale and say we also are going to be sort of a guaranteed outlet for you and so let's work together to make sure that we can support the business Community as they enter this the situation with us, so I just wanted to notice those few points but and I'm certainly in support of moving forward with this and continuing to craft it in such a way where it's going to be effective and something that we can be proud of.

Chair: before we move on to the second motion I like to say that you know this is an ongoing conversation you know we really need more participation from our business community on this matter and as well as like you both expressed bring in the haulers figure out the details of this so I'm looking forward to extending this conversation as I feel like this can be a real impact to our city.

C. Cohen: Although we can't put this in the ordinance, I do want to make sure and I know you'll make sure verify this that when any application or RFP goes out for whatever you know hauler contractor we end up with that and there their Outreach to the community is considered you know one of the reasons we went with well one of the many reasons, we went with waste management is that they committed to an education program sometimes as simple as putting a sticker on a bin and sometimes you know participating in the farmer's market or whatever and I think there's no reason that our hauler shouldn't be helping us and helping our trash reduction coordinator in the same way but I'm going to move that we keep this in committee and once we've had the appropriate meetings that we have a meeting soon as possible so we can get this in front of the council

Three votes: it'll remain in committee

Adjourned