

Community Sustainability through Recycling

By: Alicia Archibald

Why should we recycle? What's the big deal? If we don't want something anymore, then surely it has no value! If each person operated in a vacuum, without any impact on anyone else, maybe that thought could be true. Everyone in the community is impacted when items are disposed of in a trash can, picked up by multiple trash trucks that travel through a neighborhood, and hauled to landfills where hazardous air emissions, windblown litter, and loss of otherwise useful resources are the end result. Value is determined by need and desire. One person's trash is another person's treasure.

The reasons to recycle are numerous. They include a broad range of environmental stewardship concerns as well as a practical interest in local economic opportunities, which include: cost savings, extended landfill lifespan, resource conservation, energy conservation, economic development, pollution prevention, greenhouse gas and methane gas emissions reductions, and fostering a sense of community involvement and responsibility. Recycling also addresses the overall need for community development and collaboration. The need to dispose of unwanted materials by one stakeholder can meet the needs of another stakeholder when proper collaboration and education take place.

Economic development can be enhanced by the opportunity to find a new use for products beyond their initial purpose. Jobs are created when we collect, store, separate, transport, and process materials into their second life. One example is glass. Brown wine and beer bottles have significant value, as they are needed to remake the same brown glass products. After enjoying their contents, brown bottles can be collected and sent to the plant that initially manufactured them, creating a closed loop system – no waste. However, environmental benefits and recycling cost efficiencies are lost when recycling points are far from manufacturing centers. Recycling challenges local entrepreneurs to come up with creative solutions to logistics issues. For instance, there are a variety of reuse opportunities for glass. Glasphalt is a product that takes crushed glass and mixes it with asphalt to create roads. You are probably now thinking about who is going to collect all the glass, where will it be stored, who will crush it, and who will transport the crushed glass. We have just identified at least four jobs from one waste-stream that would otherwise have no value. Imagine plastics being heated and molded into blocks for building homes, paper mixed with concrete to make Papercrete and shredding cardboard to make animal bedding!

Why isn't recycling free? Why is there an extra cost? As we just identified, there is a lot of work created by recycling and, therefore, associated costs. But that shouldn't be a limiting factor. The money gained in recycling returns to the community through the jobs created and new products sold. It is a systematic approach. Thinking systematically, the individual seeking the recycling service should be able to control their "disposal" costs by decreasing their trash fees, thus eliminating the "extra cost for recycling." Consider this example: Weekly curbside



www.BettrRecycling.com

Continued Page 6

Changing the World - One Yard At A Time

By: Jess Lundie



Have you ever wished you could eat home grown food, but you just don't have the time? Are you an apartment-

dweller tired of being limited to countertop herb gardens? Or are you like me – a big yard, large beds to plant in, and absolutely no clue how to tell a baby bean from a baby thistle? They both just look like little green things to me! If so, there may be hope. Hope for local, healthy eating. Hope for strong, resilient communities. And hope for a growing separation between the food chain and the fossil fuels that now shape them. Hyperlocavorism is here, and it's here to stay.

A growing number of people are finding food sourcing alternatives through Hyperlocavore.com, a free online community dedicated to uniting gardens and gardeners all over the world. Through the online community interface, users are able to organize and coordinate "yardsharing" groups within their area. Yard-sharing groups are a way for people with yards, people with tools, people with knowledge, and people with time to join forces to grow shared food in a shared space. An alternative and complement to community gardens (many of which have very long wait lists!), yardsharing makes use of existing space that has tremendous, but unutilized, productive potential – our yards. At the same time, yardsharing brings people together and builds communities in an increasingly isolated urban and suburban world.

So if rising food prices are hitting your pockets a little too hard; if you want to eat healthy, affordable, organic food; if you want to reduce your carbon footprint, and the miles your food travels from farm to fork; if you want to be not just a locavore, but a hyperlocavore; then maybe yardsharing could be for you. Go find out at Hyperlocavore.com.

Jess Lundie grew up in Boulder, CO, a community with a strong commitment to green living. After obtaining degrees in Political Science and Spanish, she recently landed in Olympia, WA (via several years in Los Angeles and Washington, DC), where she is devoted to finding outside-the-box solutions to the challenges of living sustainably in a modern world. She is thrilled to be working with the That's Natural! team to develop a growing collection of resources on the internet.



Community Sustainability Through Recycling, Continued

pickup of a 96 gallon trash can costs \$16 per month. Bi-weekly collection of single-stream recycling costs \$7 per month. As I reduce my trash volume by the amount recycled, my trash service frequency and bill should decrease as well. I now have half the trash service, which should equate to half the trash cost – \$8.

With the combination of trash and recycling services, each collected bi-weekly, I now pay \$15 a month to manage my discards. I just saved money!

Environmental stewardship is also a driver for the sustainable management of unwanted materials. When products are reused, energy, land, and water consumption are reduced, decreasing the mining of virgin materials from often-distant lands. For example, the aluminum can manufacturing process is very resource intensive. Recycling one aluminum can saves enough energy to power a laptop for 11hrs. According to the Aluminum Association, the aluminum can recycling process saves 95 percent of the energy needed to produce aluminum from bauxite ore as well as precious natural resources. Along with energy conservation, our natural resources are also in need of conservation. Water, soil, and air contamination occur when items containing hazardous materials are deposited into landfills. Air

emissions from landfills carry toxins and other unwanted gases into the atmosphere, which are deposited into local streams and other bodies of water. This contaminated water is concentrated when applied to crops and water systems. Consider who drinks the water and eats the crops – we do.

Community collaboration is the key to successful recycling. When stakeholders with different expertise and areas of interest work together, nothing can stop their progress. Recycling provides the opportunity for constituents that otherwise wouldn't associate with one another to actually work together and change the economic and social climate of an entire community. One group may be the expert on composting organic materials, while another has the market on curbside pickup. Together they can build a system that will provide the collection of food and yard waste from homeowners. This, in turn, could be used in the local community gardens, which could provide organic foods to the low-income community at a "work to eat" premium. If the income level prohibits the ability to purchase the foods, then the opportunity could be made to work in the garden to earn the purchase. What an idea! It is almost as if we must go back to the days of taking only what we need and then

making sure our neighbor has what they need. As we take care of our neighbors and ourselves, our whole community benefits.

Recycling also begins at the purchase point, so it is important to limit your purchase to only what you need – reduce your consumption. Before purchasing, consider the second life of your purchase– is there a reuse when the initial use is complete? Lastly, find out if your desired products are made from recycled content – close the loop. We recycle to extend resources, reduce waste, and minimize upstream and downstream impacts.

Please join us at the Southern Colorado Sustainable Communities Technology Conference and Expo, July 31-August 1, at the Pueblo Convention Center to learn more about how your community can better engage recycling and improve your community. Check out <http://www.southerncoloradosustainability.net/> for more details and to register!

Alicia Archibald is President of BETTR Recycling, Inc., a corporation that provides education and consulting services in the areas of recycling, alternative fuels and sustainability planning. One of Alicia's biggest commitments is to educate communities about the importance of recycling and the role it plays in community sustainability.

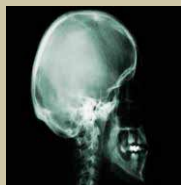
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