

A Department of Public Works
December 29, 2021

Introduction

Currently, the Highway Department performs a variety of functions: road maintenance; cemetery maintenance and burials; sewer maintenance; parks maintenance; and assisting related department and committees as necessary and possible. These represent all of the functions of a standard Public Works Department except two: 1) operation of the transfer station and 2) oversight of buildings and grounds maintenance.

Current duties include road maintenance; cemetery maintenance and burials; sewer maintenance; parks maintenance; and assisting related department and committees as necessary and possible.

Transition to a DPW

Since the Town is responsible for the upkeep of the transfer station, the only area that would require Town attention would be staffing (assuming the waste hauling is contracted out). In building and grounds maintenance, the only change would be administrative, having the Building and Grounds Supervisor report to the Director of Public Works instead of the Town Manager.

With those changes, the Department could continue to operate as it has in the past; no further re-organization would be required. In terms of staff duties, the current Highway Superintendent has indicated that it would be preferable for all staff to be cross-trained so that all employees can work in all areas.

It would meet more long-term objectives (see below) to plan the position at 32 hours, whether to expand the hours the station is open or to manage additional amenities such as a swap shop or electronics shed. The good news is that this cost would still be paid through the dump sticker and bag costs.

In budgetary terms, the Transfer Station Attendant would be Grade 2, Step 8: \$18.91/hr. For 32 hours to allow for additional responsibilities, this means a total salary of \$31,618, plus the additional cost of benefits (maximum benefits costing approximately \$19,000), for a total cost of about \$50,618.

Considerations for Buildings and Grounds

A DPW includes all public assets, functions, etc., so this would normally include the buildings and grounds function. Specific areas of overlap are mowing (equipment, areas); parks (buildings, maintenance, cameras, lights); plowing (Town buildings); and maintaining the electric charging station(s) (possibility of more). There is also the possibility of cross-training sometime in the future, depending on the need and the staff.

Considerations and Proposal for Town Operation of Transfer Station

The contract with Casella is due to be renewed. There are a number of considerations regarding a possible restructuring of the Transfer Station operation.

Putting the operation of the Transfer Station under the Highway Department, in a fully functional Department of Public Works, would have other benefits. DPW “ownership” of the facility would allow for much more personnel and time flexibility, not only for improving the physical facility, but allowing for the eventual addition of options such as a swap shop, bulky waste disposal, and an electronics shed, which other towns have found popular—functions Casella isn’t interested in but would be in the interest of residents. There is also the possibility of splitting the contract for solid waste, recycling, and metal at some point—right now, Casella gets all the revenue from scrap metal and plastics. Other benefits include being able to be more responsive to resident concerns and suggestions. All these factors point toward a better operation if the Town runs it.

I understand that Casella has indicated they would prefer not having to provide a transfer station attendant, as this is outside their core business model. At the same time, their model of gaining revenue per bag provides no incentive for reducing waste, while they retain the revenue from scrap metal.

Currently, Casella provides the containers, compactors, and an attendant, all paid for through transfer station and bag fees. Casella does not share their finances, so the number of car stickers and bags sold are not currently known, but evidently are sufficient to make the operation profitable. The Town, however, would have to either own or rent the compactors and containers.

With fees going to the Town, the Town could create a revolving fund for Transfer Station operations from bag (or better, sticker) fees as part of a transition to a new model of operation. Eventually, the operation could become an Enterprise Fund, capable of having its own stabilization account, though at this time I would not recommend such a model, as part of the point is to integrate its operations within the new DPW.

Bag stickers, instead of the blue bags, could be made widely available and would decrease the amount of plastic bag waste, as existing bags would not have to be fit into the blue bags.

These considerations lead to the following proposed timeline for Transfer Station transition:

To June 30, 2022:

- Negotiate Casella contract—pay for hauling, compactors/containers rental – Town Manager, Solid Waste Committee
- Plan and budget for Town staffing of Transfer Station – TM, DPW Director
- Create stickers—Town gets revenue – DPW Director and staff
- Town Meeting creates revolving fund for Transfer Station – TM

First year:

- Create budget for swap shop, electronics shed, other items – SWC
- Consider splitting the contract for solid waste, recycling, and metal – SWC

Second year:

- Assess funding stream and options; consider fee adjustments – SWC, TM
- Fund and implement swap shop, electronics shed – TM, DPW Director
- Split the contract for solid waste, recycling, and metal if advisable – TM, SWC, DPW