Minutes of the Putnam County Composting Task Force Meeting

June 27, 2025

The fifth meeting of the Putnam County Composting Task Force was called to order at 10:02 a.m.

Members' Present
In Person: Ilona Campo, Jen Lerner, Brian Stevens, Savannah Usher, Vicki DiLonardo, Sean Bennet
Microsoft Teams: Joe Montuori
New Attendees:

- **Peyton Capolino**, *PILOT Intern*

1. **Open Discussion: Comments on Februarys meeting**
   - Ilona provided a brief recap of topics covered in previous meetings. Her update included ongoing planning efforts and new opportunities related to the food scrap recycling initiative.
   - Savannah attended the recent Organics Summit Conference and had some valuable takeaways.
   - The proposed composting operation location is expected to be located on the 5-acre site behind the hay fields at TFF that is outside of the WAC easement. This location was noted as a viable space for developing compost infrastructure while avoiding regulatory conflicts.
   - During February's meeting, Savannah suggested the possibility of using Arc Mid-Hudson for volunteer support as needed based on previous conversations. Their involvement could help bolster staffing for initial collection or outreach efforts.
   - It would be beneficial to plan a waste audit at the senior centers to assess the volume of food scraps they generate. The data collected will help inform program design, resource allocation, and collection logistics.
   - The most pressing challenge identified is obtaining the necessary permits and registration from NYSDEC. This regulatory step is critical for moving the composting operation forward and ensuring compliance with state requirements.

2. **Discussion: Compost Program under SWMP**
   - Savannah started the discussion by saying if it's a county run facility it should fall under the solid waste management program since Savannah will be the one they contact for all the regulations.
   - Residential education and an introduction to food scrap recycling were identified as key first steps in launching the program, along with developing a clear strategy for engaging residents in the process.
   - As we work toward establishing a compost facility, it's important to develop a plan for educating all county staff. While we can begin collecting food scraps and recyclables at county facilities, the composting infrastructure itself is not yet in place. Our goal is to implement both efforts simultaneously to ensure a smooth and coordinated rollout for the potential expansion of the facility based on the results of the pilot at county facilities.
   - Savannah requested everyone to pitch in, particularly with the grant potentially reopening in October this year since the solid waste program is only staffed by her and there are other priorities that impede timely completion of a grant application.
   - In the Local Solid Waste Management Plan, the alternative assessments identified will focus on four main areas: waste reduction, reuse, education and outreach, and waste disposal. These categories will serve as the foundation for shaping and evaluating our program strategies for the county-facility compost pilot.

- Incorporating a 10-year implementation schedule is the approach required by the DEC for the Local Solid Waste Management Plan. This extended timeline allows for phased planning, resource allocation, and measurable progress across each assessment area.
- Jen mentioned that CCE is working on developing a dedicated compost education staff position, including identifying funding sources to support it. This role would take on key responsibilities and can help support Savannah in this project.
- Savannah emphasized the need to review the specific requirements for operations at Tilly, particularly those outlined by the DEC regarding composting and food scrap recycling. This review is critical to ensuring that any facility development aligns with state regulations and avoids potential compliance issues. Savannah will have an intern start a regulatory spreadsheet for composting.
- An assessment of the operations at TFF is necessary to comply with the registration guidelines and to see what actions are necessary based on regulations. Pending this assessment, Savannah believes that the locations currently being considered for composting operations are unlikely to exceed the thresholds that would trigger full DEC permitting requirements. This means that while registration is still necessary, full-scale permitting will not be needed.
- Ilona noted that she does not anticipate issues with the DEP, as the site does not drain into the reservoir screening area. She also mentioned that, during the February meeting, Chris stated the concrete pad behind the property cannot be expanded due to capacity limitations. Additionally, the pad is not currently registered with the DEC, even though it should be since it is still considered a manure composting operation and falls under regulatory requirements.
- Conducting a waste analysis at the senior centers is a valuable first step to understanding our current status in relation to DEC regulations.
    - The data collected from this waste audit will play a key role in informing the County Executive during the upcoming presentation. It will help demonstrate the need for the program, its potential scale, and how it complies with regulatory guidelines.
    - It may not be as fruitful to conduct a weigh and sort operation during the summer months due to the influx of vacation/snow birds at the senior centers. This operation should ideally be performed in the coming months in order to be used as a data point in conversations with the CE.
- The possibility of the County Executive deciding not to move forward with the project was discussed. It was noted that, if that occurs, the initiative may need to be put on hold until a future administration is willing to support it.
- **Goal**: Over the next two months, the goal is to identify a suitable location for the facility and determine the regulatory requirements that must be met.
- **Action**: If the facility is not county-owned and operated, and another department or entity is managing it, there must be formal legal documentation stating they are acting on behalf of the municipality or the county (NYSDEC language).This legal clarity is essential to ensure the project remains eligible for grant funding and financial assistance, similar to how transfer stations are supported.
- Ilona asked Savannah what information needs to be prepared for the upcoming presentation to the County Executive. Savannah responded that the presentation should include a comprehensive review of the proposed facility, specifically focusing on the following **action items**:
    - The current condition and suitability of the site if it were to be county-owned.
    - The estimated costs required to modify the facility in order to meet DEC regulatory requirements.
    - The anticipated costs associated with registering the facility with the DEC.
- Savannah also outlined three potential operational models for the facility:
    - County-run facility: Fully owned and operated by the county.
    - Operated by an outside, non-county agency: This option would require a formal land lease agreement with the county.
    - Municipally run facility: Managed and operated by individual towns or municipalities.

- Her goal is to present these options clearly to the County Executive to support an informed decision on how to proceed and to give him the opportunity to weigh the pros and cons of each before determining the best path.
- Savannah noted that historically, the County has not shown interest in operating its own facilities, and it's unclear if that stance has changed.
- The former dump in Carmel was mentioned as a point of comparison, but Brian clarified that the proposed compost program is fundamentally different in that its environmental focus and the public perception is generally more positive and supportive compared to the opposition the dump faced.
- Savannah highlighted the challenge of potential additional costs to residents for food scrap collection services. She noted that although the volume of regular garbage may decrease due to the diversion of food waste, residents' garbage bills are unlikely to go down and not all residents are willing or able to pay extra for this new service.
- She suggested exploring options to make participation voluntary or to provide alternative models, such as a drop-off system similar to what is used in Philipstown.
- Joe proposed a solution involving modifications to AAA collection trucks, suggesting they be split down the middle, one side for garbage and the other for food scraps. This dual-collection method could help reduce overall program costs and minimize environmental impact by lowering the number of collection trips and associated carbon emissions. Savannah will discuss this alternative further with the haulers in a separate focus group.
- Savannah noted that decisions about collection methods and cost models will need to be addressed after the initial two-month planning phase.
- During the next two months, the focus needs to be on determining the projected costs of operating the facility under different management structures whether it's county-run or municipally operated.

3. **Other Business/Comments:**
- Ilona shared details about past facility tours, including visits to CompostED and McEnroe's.
- The tour of McEnroe's, located in Millbrook, took place on April 14th. She described McEnroe's facility as massive, highlighting its large-scale operations.
- The CompostED tour, located in Valhalla, was held on May 29th and featured a much smaller, more scaled-down facility.
- Ilona shared photos she took during the facility tours, providing visual insights into the operations and scale of the sites.
- The county Fair will be held on July 26th and 27th.
- There will be a compost operations training course in Millbrook New York July 21-25. The cost for non-USCC members is $1,585. Savannah mentioned that CTE offered this training for free.
- A tentative follow-up meeting was set for July 16th

Meeting adjourned at 10:58 a.m.

See waste stream tour notes below

Waste Stream Tours Notes

- Pleasant View Farm, Brewster
  - Site visit: 01/08/2025, hosted by Ervin Raboy (pvfllc@gmail.com)
  - EASP method ineffective (see Jan. 2025 Compost Meeting Minutes)
  - Ervin shared his feedback as to why the EASP project was unsuccessful including:

    • WAC installed three of O2's designed systems in different locations, none of them worked and were all discontinued within a few years.

    • The forced air system (see pic) was way too small for the size of the structure. The system consisted of perforated pipes in three rows in each bay which were then covered by wood slated floors. These floors were clogged by the compost piles laid on top which prevented air flow through the bottom.

    • The slanted roof design was also a poor choice because while intended to control rainwater runoff, there was not enough water getting into the piles themselves (an essential part of composting). As a result of the dry piles, PVF installed a separate 1,000+ gallon water storage tank that still couldn't keep up.

    • The wooden floor slats started rotting (organic material after all), didn't hold up against heavy machinery, and required frequent replacements.

    • Conclusion: The project was too much maintenance on a large scale but may work better on a smaller scale with a different design. Static piles may also perform better.

- Wheelabrator Dutchess Tour (Win Waste), Poughkeepsie
  - Site visit: 03/18/2025, hosted by Christian Dunnigan (cdunnugan@win-waste.com)
  - Waste incineration facility: self-sufficient, produces virtually no byproducts besides fly-ash and carbon filters, produces energy, 24/7 facility
  - http://www.dcrra.org/faq.html describes the process well

- Republic Services Recycling, Beacon
  - Site visit: 03/21/2025, hosted by Dave Kahn (dkahn@republicservices.com)
  - Only a few materials recovered locally (cardboard, paper, metal), glass is sent to PA, Only M-F 8-9hrs/day, 25 tons/hr, all plastics get pressed by bailor into giant cubes which are then shipped out internationally (India, Vietnam, Indonesia, etc.)
  - https://recyclingsimplified.com/

- CRP Sanitation Compost, Cortlandt/Peekskill
  - Site Visit: 04/01/2025, hosted by Anthony Carbone (anthony@crpsanitation.com)
  - https://smmcompost.com/
  - Started in September 2020
  - CRP is the food scrap hauler. Sustainable Materials Management Inc. is the composter. They started off as a team of one with organic summits as guidance. The facility doesn't even take two full time jobs to manage.
  - They provide food scrap hauling and contract with 28 towns in Westchester and Philipstown.
  - Seven different bays with concrete bricks ($75/brick) for sides and backs. Relatively small operational footprint (less than 1.5acres). Garbage totes are kept near each bay for contamination. Whatever does not breakdown gets placed into other bays for the process to continue. Segregated piles are easier to maintain and easier for the waste hauler to drop off according to the number of the bay (landmarks).
  - Uses EASP method for 5mins at a time every 30mins for 30 days. The blowers run on 1.5hp/bay, 8 blowers total. Their method was different in that they faced the holes in the pipes down so that they would not get clogged. The pipes do require constant replacements though because they're easily crushed by large equipment. The piles themselves are self-insulating and hold roughly 20x their weight in water. They prefer to aerate the piles for 45 days then move them to unaerated bays to cool down and finish for another 30 days. The facility operates year round.
  - The piles themselves do not need to be watered down unless they dry out too much in the summer (rare).
  - Look for an internal temp. of ≥ 131°F for three consecutive days to kill off pathogens and seeds. Generally, the piles are "done" when mushrooms start to pop out.
  - To be USDA certified they do not allow compostable products with the exceptions of certified, BPI compostable materials. Penn State's Ag. lab does a 10 day test of the finished compost with a 7 page report detailing composition and safety. They also do a cucumber seed tests to determine viability.
  - They have run into pests such as rats, flies, and seagulls. Rats tend to come in the winter and the gulls in the summer. To combat the rats and not contaminate the piles, they use a mixture of 50% Jiffy cornbread mix/ 50% baking soda. There is also a resident owl that keeps the rodents at bay. In mid-May one year, they had a fly infestation but were able to fix that with store bought fly attracting bags left by the bays. There is generally no strong smell in the summer besides the short time following dump days.
  - The finished product is screened to ½ in and produce stickers are almost always left. Any bags that screened out are thrown out.
  - A grinder can cost anywhere from $500k – $1mil and a small screener typically costs $100k.
  - The finished compost is typically sold to landscapers and nurseries. It is sold by the yard not by bags. 1 yard = $10 + delivery fees. *Cheaper if you buy in bulk*

- McEnroe's Organic Farm Compost, Millerton
  - Site visit: 04/14/2025, hosted by Erich McEnroe
  - DEC permitted est. 2000. The permit period is every 5 years.
  - They have 6 full time employees.
  - There is a 6-8 month turnaround period between dumping and reaching maturity.
  - They use local horse and cow manure as carbon sources.
  - They operate on roughly 4.5 acre footprint with drainage for leachate surrounding the site. Their wells are tested monthly for excess phosphorus, nitrogen, and salt. The entire footprint is on a geomembrane lining to prevent groundwater contamination.
  - They use a 2 Carbon to 1 Nitrogen ratio and see the results firsthand in their own greenhouses. They add more nitrogen sources (food scraps) in the summer for added moisture. The piles reach 140-160°. Invasive seeds are hard to control as it can take 180° to kill them.
  - The piles range from 80-140ft long x 16ft wide x 8ft tall. They usually combine or move the windrows, 6→1 or 4→1 ratio. They got a vertical auger in 2018 to turn the piles. They have to replace the blades twice a year for $60 each. CAT also offers lease programs.
  - They collect food scraps from residents, grocery stores, Hunts Point Produce Market (Bronx), and commercial kitchens. They charge $20-$40/ton to dump which is way more economical than dumping it at the Seneca Meadows landfill. They prefer pre-consumer waste (produce not sold at grocery stores) to post-consumer.
  - They have received some complaints about the smell, they typically add more woody material to combat this.
  - They process 25 tons per year but are only permitted for 15,000 tons per year?
  - They screen the mature compost to 3/8-1/2in then they feed it into their own compost bagging machine which can process 30 bags per minute. They typically do this 2-3 months out of the year during bad weather seasons. They've used the same compost blend for 30 years. Mainly farms and retail stores (Lowes, Home Depot, hardware stores) buy the finished product.

- CompostED, Valhalla (Westchester)
  - Site visit: 05/29/2025, hosted by Aleks Jagiello (aqjj@westchestercountyny.gov)
  - https://environment.westchestergov.com/composted
  - Site facility was completed in 2021 and was designed by Woodard & Curran for an estimated $2.5 million cost all in. The facility runs year round but tends the piles tend to decompose a little slower in the winter, as long as the piles are rotated and the blowers are on, the process continues.
  - Westchester started a pilot program in the 90s to address keeping leaf litter/scraps within the municipality. 29 municipalities now participate in some kind of leaf collection program which accounts for 30-40% of the County's yard waste.
  - Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling (SWIFR) grant program.
  - They process 100,000 tons of yard waste (per year?) at about $69/ton

- CompostED is more of a demonstration facility for other municipalities. “Efficiency happens at (a larger) scale”
- *Check with PC DPW to see if they have materials/staff in house.
- 1 part food scraps to 4 parts yard waste. Incentivize municipalities to hold onto yard waste!
- StonyBrook conducted a food waste assessment for them (?)
- Residential Food Scrap Transportation Division (RFSTD) program. Interest for the intermunicipal agreements originated from a team of two individuals who started a compost program in Scarsdale. “Scarsdale's composting program originated with a village-wide effort to manage leaf litter and later expanded to include food scraps. The village's "black gold" program, started years ago, demonstrated the viability of community composting and was a pioneer in Westchester County.”
- They source their food scraps from 3 food pantries within the County for free and arrange the pickups themselves. Their #1 concern is contamination which is preventable when being able to source the pollution from the 3 locations. They don’t really collect pre-consumer waste.
- They process about 2 tons of food scraps per week which is the equivalent to 12, 64 gallon totes that Aleks empties himself into an empty bay.
- They mix the food scraps and leaf litter/wood chips with a skid steer in a large bay first, then dump them into an empty bay to start the heating process.
- They maintain the piles at 140°-150° for 30 days then flip the piles into two other bays to run the process again. In most cases, the outsides of the piles need to be reincorporated into the center to prevent weed/fungi growth. **It’s still necessary to turn the piles in ASP setups to ensure everything gets an opportunity to break down.**
- Their ASP pipes run every 30mins for 3-5mins at a time. This is done by manually controlling the blower timers *optimize conditions*(see pics), it changes depending on the volume of the pile and how long it’s been sitting. The fresher the pile, the more air needed (higher oxygen demand). Aleks recommended a digital recycling timer if he had the chance to do it over. He also has to de-compact the ASP pipe slots after every dump (this can be avoided by laying a layer of wood chips/thicker substrate first).
- Earthy smell in the center of the pile = good, garbage smell = bad. Dig into pile to test.
- They like to keep the piles at a 60-40% moisture rate, if they drop below that (i.e. hot summer temps for days on end) they’ll water down the piles.
- They are also proactive with pests (rats, mice) and will lay traps when needed.
- 14 weeks from initial dump to maturity.
- The mature compost is sent to a Soil Control Lab in Watsonville, CA. They typically get results back within a week.
- Caution tape and gloves/extra plastic comes from yard waste collection.
- The mature compost is screened to ¼ inch with a $17,000 screener. In the fall, they’ll typically rent a bagging machine to bag the mature compost once completely cooled.
- **They do not sell the finished compost**, it is given away to residents for free at community events and to other local partners that grow the food. This is a way to incentivize participation and hand out fact sheets about the operation. They generate about 200 yards of mature compost per year.

- They applied for a $300,000 USDA grant but the funding was pulled in early 2025 before the grant was executed. This would have covered operational costs as well as two years of salary. They are still looking to hire an educational director/staff person to run tours of the facility.
- While they do have drains around the facility, they do not feed into a leachate capture tank or retention pond, instead the runoff was designed to feed into a ground water tank that has to get pumped out regularly (after 2in of rain). The better method would have been a 10-30 gallon leachate tank or retention pond.
- They had a compost machine tank set up more for looks, while the machine does produce compost through a series of heating and turning, it does not produce mature compost. Aleks suggested checking out the Green Mountain Technologies Earth Flow system for an all-encompassing unit.