

Minutes of the Putnam County Composting Task Force Meeting

August 1, 2025

The sixth meeting of the Putnam County Composting Task Force was called to order at 10:59 a.m.

Members Present

In Person: Ilona Campo, Joseph Bellucci, Gary Redlon, Barbara Barosa, Savannah Usher, Maya Rosner (Intern), Victoria DiLonardo, Shanna Siegel

1. **Review: June Meeting Minutes**

- No comments, questions, or concerns.
- **Recap:** At the June meeting, we discussed that a county run facility should all under the Solid Waste Management Program, waste analysis/audits at the senior centers in Fall 2025, residential/county staff education as a key first step, incorporating a 10 year implementation program, DEC registration(s) necessary for the proposed location (Tilly Foster Farm), CCE trying to incorporate a new staff position dedicated to compost education, and three models for consideration: 1) county owned and operated, 2) operated by a non-county agency (with a formal land use agreement), and 3) municipally run facilities (i.e. towns/villages run their own programs).

2. **Open Discussion:**

- **Weigh-and-Sort Program:** There was agreement that all facilities should conduct a weigh-and-sort before presenting findings to the County Executive. Additionally, the cost of transporting food scraps from county sites needs to be quantified. A Fall 2025 start was suggested, with Savannah proposing a Q3 2025 launch. Barbara raised the possibility of separating vegetable waste at the TFF restaurant for animal feed, despite the original intent being to avoid this. She questioned whether, in cases of excess food, this could be a viable solution. The group agreed that further assessment is needed before implementing changes or making recommendations—particularly distinguishing between food prep scraps and post-consumer waste. Stonybrook may be able to conduct a business waste audit, though liability and insurance issues must be addressed through a formal agreement. They currently have such agreements with transfer facilities. A proposal was discussed for Stonybrook to collect data by auditing one county facility per week. For residential waste audits, they typically receive garbage from trucks, sort and weigh it, and report on the food scrap content. Barbara and Ilona inquired about conducting facility audits on-site, which Savannah clarified would apply only to county facility collection programs. County haulers typically collect on Mondays at Somers Sanitation (serving Kent and Carmel), and Tuesdays at Peekskill Waste-to-Energy (serving Mahopac), among others. Barbara asked about restrictions related to municipal boundaries. Savannah explained that since the facilities are privately operated, waste must be kept separate by origin, and transfer stations must report volumes to the DEC. The group agreed that a clearer response from the transfer facilities is needed before reaching out to Stonybrook. There is potential to run two separate programs with them, given they carry liability insurance and conduct waste characterization studies. Jen may have mentioned that CCE could assist with weigh-and-sort efforts using volunteers, and Maya may explore this further. It was noted that having someone experienced with the weigh-and-sort process would be essential. Stonybrook can provide preliminary data within a week of collection, but their full report takes about a year. Barbara suggested coordinating internal weigh-and-sorts at county facilities, and Savannah noted the potential for an educational campaign alongside the program. Vicki recommended starting with the EPA's [toolkit](#) for school waste audits as a reference. Savannah mentioned the need for large scales, and Ilona raised concerns about the point at which waste might

be considered a biohazard. Savannah assured that Stonybrook staff use gloves and Tyvek suits during audits.

- **Action Items:** Explore resources and partnerships related to waste audits, specifically looking into guidance from Stonybrook, CCE, and the EPA. If working with Stonybrook or CCE, a contract or MOU would be required. However, if the work involves only data collection and there is no cost, the formal bidding process would not be necessary. Joe inquired about the need for a formal RFQ. It was clarified that an RFQ is not required if there is no cost associated. For projects exceeding \$20,000, a competitive bid is required; for amounts over \$50,000–\$75,000, an RFP would be necessary.
- **DEC/DEP Requirements:** Savannah noted that registration will be required and emphasized involving Neal and the Soil & Water Conservation District (S&WCD) early to avoid overlap in responsibilities. Barbara pointed out that, similar to MS4 requirements, reporting must include all properties, not just TFF. A State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) will also be necessary. The Planning Department prepares SEQR documents, which are then referred to the Legislature to establish a Lead Agency. This step is essential, especially since both a SEQR and resolution are required to apply for grant funding. Barbara added that Planning has historically handled Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP) work and maintains relevant records in the County’s records center. The proposed site remains the five-acre parcel behind the hay field at TFF. However, the site’s location raises several regulatory considerations:
 - **DEP Restrictions:** Outside of the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC) agreement, it is unclear what specific DEP restrictions apply. Joe noted this has been previously discussed in other composting meetings, and Barbara confirmed that if the project falls within the TFF easement, site plans must be submitted to DEP. A map of the property was shared with the task force via the smart board.
 - **Environmental Factors:** The current site is used as a dumping ground for screened topsoil, wood chips, and grass clippings. Gary cautioned that the Middle Branch Croton River is located very close to the proposed site. Barbara provided neighboring land use context, explaining that the County acquired the property just to the north of the proposed project location after a private gun range proposal was replaced by a distillery and conference center nearby. There is also a condominium development in proximity.
 - **Land Use Constraints:** The agricultural focus of the WAC agreement may pose limitations. Barbara questioned whether composting can be classified as an agricultural use. Savannah asked whether the full five acres were usable; Ilona responded that the facility footprint would likely require only about one acre, referencing the small scale of similar operations like CompostEd and CRP.
- Barbara noted that DEP and WAC currently allow on-site composting of manure, hay, wood chips, etc., but importing outside waste could face resistance. If we keep the proposed facility outside of the WAC easement (within the 5 acres) then we face less restrictions. She emphasized that access to the site should be restricted to county personnel. Savannah added that a residential drop-off area could be established near a road for easier oversight and pointed out that many upstate composting facilities are fenced and operate on set schedules.
- Barbara also inquired about the status of Putnam Valley’s food scrap collection proposal. While the original project appears to have been abandoned, Shanna mentioned a local farmer who collects food scraps at the farmers market for his chickens. Community momentum seems to be growing in other directions, with residents pulling back from pressing the Town Supervisor at this time.
- Savannah emphasized the importance of beginning with an education campaign focused on food scrap separation at county facilities. This foundational step would help prepare staff for the eventual rollout of a food scrap collection and composting program.
- Shanna raised a point of clarification about terminology, noting the need to distinguish between “food scrap recycling” and “composting.” For any proposal going to the County Executive, clear and specific language will be essential. Savannah explained that the initiative involves both concepts:

encouraging behavioral change among employees to separate food scraps, which the county would then collect and compost.

- Currently, the County composts manure and wood chips at TFF. This proposal would expand those operations to include food scraps. To avoid confusion, the term “recycling” should be removed—this is a food scrap **collection for composting** initiative.
- Barbara suggested considering whether some scraps could be fed to animals instead. Shanna proposed a phased approach: divert a portion of the food scraps for animal feed, with the remainder going to compost. However, this would require careful sorting based on animal dietary needs, potentially complicating the process.
- Opportunities for targeted diversion were also discussed. For example, the senior center’s scraps may be easier to repurpose, and educational tie-ins could be explored through programs at BOCES where students could learn about and help facilitate scrap diversion.
- Savannah expressed concern about overall volume: if food scraps from the jail and senior centers are fed to animals, there may not be enough material left to justify composting. It was suggested that scraps generated directly by the farm itself might be sufficient for animal feed.
- Many restaurants in Putnam County are currently not participating in food scrap recycling. However, upcoming changes to DEC regulations will require stricter compliance. Specifically, the food scrap donation/recycling threshold will drop from 1.5 tons per week in 2026, to 1 ton per week in 2027, to 0.5 tons in 2028, moving closer to universal requirements for donation or food scrap recycling. It was noted that most restaurants do not currently separate food scraps, which may present challenges.
- The group agreed that clarity is needed on the County Executive’s expectations. If Solid Waste Management (SWM) practices can be adjusted to reduce costs for residents, it could support long-term sustainability goals—putting waste to beneficial use without increasing the financial burden on the community. Further discussion is needed on how to effectively offset these costs.
- Shanna inquired about the food scrap regulations affecting local operators. Vicki noted that the DEC had previously provided a [list](#) of regulated food scrap generators when the laws went into effect. There are currently seven generators in the County listed. However, it’s possible some are avoiding full compliance by donating food rather than recycling scraps, which may keep them under the regulatory threshold. It was also noted that ShopRite is in contract with Second Chance Foods and the Hudson Valley Regional Food Bank. DeCicco’s is not on the DEC’s list, perhaps they are able to donate a majority of their food before recycling?

3. **Discussion: Presentation to the County Executive**

- In the third week of August, Rian, the County’s Public Health Director, will contact the County Executive to request a presentation focused on the Solid Waste Management portion of the Plan. Although the presentation targets SWM, it includes related topics such as organics management, food scrap recycling/collection, and future compost facility plans within Savannah’s update of the SWMP. The identification of a compost facility is also noted as part of countywide integration with the Climate Smart program. The County Executive will need to determine priorities and short-term goals.
- Barbara inquired about Construction & Demolition waste (a CS action we applied for but did not receive points). Savannah confirmed that a policy, based on the previously submitted C&D Waste Plan, is included but requires implementation. This is also part of the countywide integration efforts of the SWMP and CSC program.
- **Projected timeline:** Health Dept. personnel will begin drafting a presentation based on the identified phases. Initial steps include reaching out to CCE for a waste audit, which will inform the timeline. County Executive approval is needed before conducting audits, so the presentation may precede the audits. An October presentation is targeted. Savannah has planned 2026 for planning, funding, and study application phases, with organics management work starting in 2027. Ideally, the presentation will occur by year-end. This topic will also be addressed during the SWMP open comment period. The SWMP is scheduled for Legislative Committee review by September and DEC approval thereafter.

4. **Discussion: Other Business/Comments**

- DEC has experienced significant staff turnover, with limited cross-division collaboration.
- Further progress will resume after the SWMP presentation is completed.
- DEC projects Putnam County's population to decline by 2% annually based on the 2020 census. While specific demographics are unclear, approximately 30% of the population is over 65, contributing to overall shrinkage due to mortality. Savannah must use DEC's population calculator for SWM standardization, which may cause inconsistencies. Despite population decline, solid waste generation is increasing.
- Maya will investigate CCE's weigh-and-sort opportunities in more detail.
- Another meeting will be scheduled once the SWMP presentation concludes.

Meeting adjourned at 12:01 p.m.