

Reaching Critical Masses: Creating Political Support for Recycling

Harvey Gershman's Comments at the National Recycling Coalition Congress, Minneapolis, MN; August 30, 2005 about Nashville, TN

- ❖ In 2000, new Mayor of the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County (Metro) was asked for \$1 million by Nashville Thermal Transfer Corporation; this gave pause to look into Thermal's performance;
- ❖ Thermal was quasi-public organization that implemented district energy fueled by waste-to-energy facility; started in early 1970s; see www.nashville.gov/des for background on Thermal and replacement Metro Nashville District Energy System (DES); there were approximately 40 buildings in downtown Nashville on this system, including the State Capital buildings, Metro Courthouse, and familiar places like the Ryman Auditorium and the Wildhorse Saloon.
- ❖ Metro has 40 member Council;
- ❖ New Mayor interested to see better recycling programs as well; Thermal was WTE and recycling level in 2000 was at 8 percent level; most diversion from brush recycling with a small pilot curbside collection of paper and containers;
- ❖ GBB hired in 2000 to do a strategic review of Metro Nashville's solid waste management system, including Thermal; based upon a menu of alternatives that GBB presented, Administration and Mayor selected a Solid Waste Plan approach termed: "Clean, Green, and Lean"; this meant closing WTE facility and replacing Thermal with the new DES, contracting for transfer and disposal services, and implementing new efficient collection and processing services solid waste separated into four streams: single stream recyclables, yard waste/brush, bulky waste, and trash/waste.
- ❖ Closing Thermal was met with resistance and joy. Resistance, as it had been a Nashville tradition and there were 80 or so jobs associated with the facility's operation; however, during the planning, it was discovered that many of the customers were not that happy with Thermal service as it had become less dependable over the years; and joy from those who felt its emissions in downtown Nashville were harmful and that Metro, as Thermal's deep pocket, was having to pay more and more to subsidize its disposal operation every year.
- ❖ A series of new services and equipment were essentially funded with savings from the past level of expenditures when Thermal was disposal part of the set of solid waste services, these included:
 - City wide curbside recycling using carts and automated trucks operated by Metro crews; new trucks and 115,000 carts were purchased through RFPs.
 - Long term transfer and disposal capability added through a contract awarded after competitive procurement; this included new transfer facility construction.
 - Full cost management system implemented with supervisors given budgetary responsibility.
 - 361 day a year permanent household hazardous waste facility; upgrading of existing convenience centers.
 - Improvement of the brush collection system through the use of boom crane truck; a mixed Metro and private contractor system replaced the contracted "chipper" system; service improved and cost per ton collected was reduced.
 - A yard waste processing contractor was selected to operate the Metro site at a significant saving in cost and increase in diversion.

- City wide refuse collection system was automated using carts through a competitive procurement in some Metro areas collected by private contractors and some by Metro crews.
- ❖ To implement DES, a participatory process ensued after the Mayor's announcement that closely involved the customers of the Thermal district energy system; with the customers, a contractor was selected, contracts with customers renewed, and a \$66 million project financing achieved to implement the new DES.
- ❖ Along the way elected officials were briefed through the Council's Solid Waste Committee; many Council members outside of the committee would also show up as this was a topic that attracted attention;
- ❖ Prior to proceeding and gaining Council approval, the major procurements that would substantiate the savings projected had to be conducted; they were, and they more than confirmed the estimates GBB had made, thus providing economic certainty to proceeding with real contractors and contracts to put in place; with that done, the necessary and voluminous contracts, bond resolutions, ordinances, service agreements, etc. were approved and implementation proceeded.
- ❖ Metro improved solid waste management services, lowered costs and increased recycling with over 30 percent diversion. In addition, Nashville now has a more reliable district energy system with an equitable cost structure. For more information see:
 - www.nashville.gov/Recycle/main.htm;
 - www.nashville.gov/des;
 - www.gbbinc.com/projects/metro_nashville_routing.shtml; and
 - www.gbbinc.com/services/quals/index.asp?service_id=3&service_title=District%20Energy%20Systems&qual_id=44.

Thank you.

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