

## **Frequently Asked Questions:**

### **Save Money and Reduce Trash (SMART)**

#### **Overview Questions**

1. Q: What is Save Money and Reduce Trash (SMART)?  
A: SMART is a system in which we pay for the trash that we generate. SMART allows each household to minimize the volume of trash and encourages waste reduction and recycling – when we recycle more and discard less trash, we will pay less. SMART has been implemented by more than 147 communities in Massachusetts including Acton, Ayer, Bolton, Groton, Littleton, Northborough, Shirley, Shrewsbury and Worcester.
2. Q: Did the Selectmen vote to adopt SMART?  
A: Yes, the Select Board voted to adopt SMART on December 18, 2018 for a two-year trial period.
3. Q: Why now?  
A: SMART programs have been shown to reduce the amount of trash that we create and to increase recycling. A SMART program gives the residents control over their trash bill. By reducing trash, there's a financial savings for both residents and the Town.

#### **Questions about the trash bag**

4. Q: What is a “bag”?  
A: Harvard will use 15-gallon and 33-gallon trash bags made by a company called WasteZero. Residents will buy bags at locations in and around Harvard. Only those trash bags will be accepted at the Transfer Station.
5. Q: How big (small) will the trash bags be?  
A: Harvard will use 15-gallon (tall kitchen size) and 33-gallon bags (standard large size). They will be sold in rolls of 5 trash bags.
6. Q: Will the SMART trash bags be strong?  
A: Yes. Harvard's trash bags are 1.5 mil thick. A Hefty® 33-gallon bag is 1.1 mil thick.
7. Q: Will the trash bags be biodegradable?  
A: No, the trash bags won't be biodegradable, but they do have recycled content.

## Questions about how SMART will work

8. Q: Will there be specific trash bags to purchase from the town for a fee or would they just charge depending on size of our own bags?

A: Residents will buy specific bags from 6 local vendors. There are only two Transfer Station attendants and using standard bags is easiest for them to monitor.

9. Q: Where will the bags be sold?

A: At 6 local vendors: The Harvard General Store, Harvard Outdoor Power Equipment, Westward Orchards, Moore's Lumber (Ayer), Shop n Save (Ayer), and Bolton Orchards.

10. Q: What if I have a special event that generated a lot of trash in a given week, despite a usually small trash output on average? Is the limit on bags an annual limit or a weekly limit?

A: Neither. There is no limit on the number of bags. We buy a roll of bags, and we use them as we need them. If you have a special event and you have extra trash, you would just use and take more bags to the Transfer Station.

11. Q: Is there a limit to the number of SMART bags I can bring to the Transfer Station?

A: No, there is no limit. That's one advantage of the SMART program.

12. Q: Do I have to use the Transfer Station? Can I switch to a private trash hauler?

A: Yes, you can use a private trash hauler. There is a list of approved private haulers on the town website (Board of Health, "Environment, Trash & Recycling"). Note that Massachusetts is tightening the regulations for private trash haulers as well and the Harvard Board of Health updated these regulations in November of 2017 to bring them into conformity. All trash haulers are required to provide customers with both trash and recycling services and to encourage customers to separate out recycling.

13. Q: What happens with the current senior discount for a permit?

A: All households who want to use the Transfer Station will buy a Transfer Station sticker for \$80. Senior households (only) will receive either 30 of the 15-gallon bags or 15 of the 33-gallon bags in June 2019 at no additional cost. The Select Board and the Transfer Station Committee will review the program in one year to see if fees can be adjusted.

14. Q: Is there any way to offer incentives for *very low* trash households, maybe a mini bag?

A: The SMART program is an incentive program.

15. Q: How will you dispose of something which doesn't fit in one of the approved bags?

A: The bulky item punch cards will still be used. The Transfer Station attendants are already skilled in handling and pricing bulky items.

## Financial Questions

16. Q: How will the finances work under SMART?

A: There will be two costs: the vehicle sticker will cover the operating costs of the Transfer Station (electricity, labor, etc), and a fee for each bag which will cover the tipping costs (the costs to dispose of trash). The official proposal that was presented to the Select Board contained a spreadsheet with details comparing the existing system to the new SMART system. The spreadsheet is available on this website.

17. Q: Does the Transfer station pay for itself now?

A: The goal in setting the annual permit fee is that the Transfer Station breaks even every year.

18. Q: How much does it cost to operate the Transfer Station?

A: The cost in 2018/2019 was covered with the \$250 annual permit. The official proposal that was presented to the Select Board contained a spreadsheet with details comparing the existing system to the new SMART system. The spreadsheet is available on this website.

19. Q: How much does recycling cost the Town?

A: The commodity price for our recycling varies. The current international markets for recycling are uncertain, with anticipated increased costs.

20. Q: How much will the bags/roll of trash bags cost?

A: The 15-gallon trash bags will cost \$1 each; they come in rolls of 5, and the cost is \$5 per roll. The 33-gallon trash bags will cost \$2 each; they also come in rolls of 5, and the cost will be \$10 per roll.

21. Q: Why do we have to pay so much for each bag?

A: The bag fee is calculated to cover the “tipping costs” – the price the town pays to truck out and dispose of trash. The cost of the bag itself is a small part of the bag price, the rest of the cost covers waste disposal costs.

22. Q: Can you show us potential for money saved by increasing recycling and reducing trash?

A: Yes. Many towns that adopt SMART see a decrease in municipal waste of 30-50%, including cities like Worcester. A 30% reduction in waste in Harvard works out to about \$100,000.

23. Q: What would happen if many current users chose not to get a permit?

A: If a large number of people stopped using the Transfer Station, it could mean a short fall. However, our advisor from Mass DEP (who has helped many other towns change to a SMART program) says that in her experience only a few people drop out. And other people realize SMART is a more economical option for them and join the Transfer Station.

## **Transition Questions**

24. Q: Will the traffic flow change? I think the more streamlined and obvious things are, the easier and more accepted practices will and could be.

A: This is on our list of things to discuss, but it won't happen in 2019. Groton has just added color-coded signage to the different collection areas of their Transfer Station (ReUse, Recycling, Waste, Special Handling, etc) to match the recycling information cards they sent to each household. But color-coded signage is not something we can do in the first year of the program.

25. Q: Will there be volunteers there the first couple of months helping people?

A: We think that would be a wise idea. Do you want to help? Please send us an email.

## **Recycling Questions**

26. Q: Is there a limit to the amount of items I can recycle?

A: No, there is no limit on recycling.

27. Q: Can Harvard go to “single-stream” recycling? Can you make recycling easier like the private haulers do?

A: We don't recommend single-stream recycling. Because our recycling is separated, we are paid the highest amount possible for it. Once a town goes to single-stream recycling, the price that companies pay drops significantly, as does the amount of recycling that can be used. In one study we found, if glass is combined with cardboard, the facility loses 40% of the revenue and 40% of the useable cardboard due to glass contamination.

Right now Harvard has “three streams”: 1) paper, 2) glass, and 3) plastic/metal containers. You have the option of separating out bottles with a deposit to donate to the Boy Scouts.

## **Questions about alternative systems**

28. Q: Does it have to be a special bag system? Could the trash be weighed instead? I know a town in NY which uses a small platform scale. Put your garbage on the scale, weigh it, and have your punch card punched.

A: We discussed this. If everyone has to stop and weigh their trash, we think that would slow down the flow of traffic. Also, there might be some logistical challenges: we would need a scale, shelter for the scale, and another attendant. Paying for those could increase the operational costs of the Transfer Station and therefore the sticker cost.

## General questions

29. Q: Is one paper compactor adequate? As more people switch to online ordering, there is more and more cardboard at the Transfer Station.

A: The Town voted at Special Town Meeting to buy a second paper compactor. It should be running by the time SMART starts. The additional compactor will allow for more efficient operation by allowing the Town to transport full containers.

30. Q: If more people begin to recycle, will the cardboard and/or plastic compactors fill up partway through the day?

A: We discussed this. Soon there will be two paper compactors, and two glass bins, but just one plastic/metal compactor. Historically, the plastic/metal compactor does not need to be emptied more than once a week. But if the compactor looks too full at the end of the day Wednesday, it can be emptied before Saturday.

31. Q: Can the traffic flow at the recycling area support more cars?

A: This is on our list of things to discuss next fall.

32. Q: Can the Transfer Station be open more hours?

A: This is on our list of things to discuss.

33. Q: Can the town return to accepting Styrofoam as it did a few years ago? Styrofoam can be large and awkward to bag.

A: The town stopped taking Styrofoam when the facility in Fitchburg that was taking Styrofoam went out of business. This isn't a perfect solution, but the Recycle Your Reusables event held in October in Ayer has taken Styrofoam the last couple of years. Can you save it and take it there? <https://recycleyourreusables.wordpress.com>

## General Comments

34. Q: It feels as though I am being forced into buying special trash bags that I ordinarily would not buy in order to effect more recycling. I guess there's no way around that, and in truth, it's a small matter.

A: Most residents already buy trash bags; this program would just mean we buy green bags with the town seal. They will come in a roll, like any garbage bag, and should you run out, don't forget – your neighbor probably has one you could buy or borrow in a pinch.

35. Q: Personally, between recycling and composting, I only take one bag out every few weeks and would absolutely welcome savings over the flat-fee sticker system. Thanks!

A: You're welcome!

36. Q: Please get trash bags that fit standard-sized trash cans, the same as you might purchase at the grocery store (preferably with some easy mechanism to tie them off). In one town I know in NY, the SMART bags are a weird size that don't fit properly into any garbage can.

A: Noted. The trash bags are 15 gallon and 33 gallon.

### 37. More information

38. Q: How can I get more information on this program?

A: We are updating the Transfer Station webpage on the Town website. There are updates to this FAQ and recycling information posted there, as well as through a link printed right on every bag. The Transfer Station Committee webpage lists contact information for the committee members, and our meeting agendas and minutes. And come to our meetings.

39. Q: How can I find out more about what I can recycle?

A: A town-wide mailing is planned for May; each household will receive an introductory letter and some recycling reference materials. We have collected other recycling resources on the Transfer Station website.

- One of these is for MassToss, the North Central Regional Solid Waste Cooperative. Their website has some very useful information including pages on Recycling, Hazardous Waste disposal, and information on textile recycling. Go to [www.masstoss.com](http://www.masstoss.com) and click on Recycling in the left-hand column.
- RecycleSmartMA.org gives recycling tips and has a “Recyclopedia” where you can look up 400 different items.
- The Recycle Your Reusables event in Ayer/Shirley each fall also takes hard to recycle items.
- The Recycling Tips on the Transfer Station website give specific suggestions.