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WEEK**

SINCE 1786

# THE PRINCETON PACKET

**SOLUTIONS**

**Huck Fairman**

## Curbside waste pickup program

Folk singer Tom Chapin reminds us, in his song "Good Garbage," "... half of all our cash, we're spending on our trash!" It may not be quite that dire, but we do spend a fair amount, first paying for the packaging of goods we purchase, and second paying to dispose of that packaging and our other garbage. And there are other costs associated with our disposal systems that most of us don't think of.

Fortunately Princeton Township has had award-winning Janet Pellichero as its recycling coordinator. Why fortunate? Because she has conceived and established a new curbside food and paper waste program (among her other ideas) that saves the township money while it reduces the amount of trash sitting in your favorite landfill.

Princeton's is in Tullytown, Pa., near Levittown. It is important to note that solid waste going to landfills is 50 percent more expensive to dispose of than recycled, compostable waste. Saving 60 tons of waste from going to a landfill saves \$7,500 in municipal trash disposal costs. Mercer County has the highest rates in NJ. Now, instead of sitting in landfills, Princeton participants' food garbage, paper plates, napkins, and towels, pizza boxes (at last!), and any other organic waste, including most yard waste, are collected from your curbside once a week and taken to Delaware where it is composted commercially and more efficiently — meaning the composted material is covered, cooked and transformed into usable, saleable compost, available for purchase by commercial farms and businesses such as golf courses.

This commercial composting is more thorough than our backyard compost piles are and accepts a wider range of waste. Eventually the Princeton program hopes to have its own composting facility here — the university and businesses like McCaffrey's are interested — saving the

trucking to Delaware and possibly providing a revenue stream for the town.

Not only does the composting deal with our organic garbage, but it can provide a source of soil enrichment for well-used, nutrient-depleted New Jersey farm and garden soil. In forward-looking communities like San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle, this composting is mandatory.

On top of saving the town and its taxpayers money, and providing valuable, salable compost for farms and gardens, this composting could expand enough to reduce the size and number of landfills. This is important because eventually we will run out of nearby landfills, and because landfills produce methane, a more-efficient heat-trapping gas than CO<sub>2</sub>. (Landfill gas is 40-60 percent methane and the rest mostly CO<sub>2</sub>.)

An additional problem is that landfills collect or produce toxic chemicals, compounds, and minerals, including mercury, dioxin and furans that seep into the ground or are released into the air.

To sign up for the curbside food and paper waste program e-mail Janet Pellichero at [jpellichero@princeton-township.nj.us](mailto:jpellichero@princeton-township.nj.us) or phone 609-688-2566. Participants receive free:

a. One kitchen collector to sit on a counter or in a cupboard. b. Compostable food waste bags that fit in the kitchen collector. c. A green wheeled organics container to take the food waste bags, soiled paper products, and light garden waste and to be placed at the curbside once a week.

Residents who sign up may continue with their current trash collector or may combine that trash collection with the curbside organics pickup.

Yellow barrel recycling will continue as has been the recent case, accepting bottles, cans, designated plastics and clean paper and cardboard.

Again, soiled paper, such as napkins,

paper towels, pizza boxes, etc, can now be placed for pickup in the green wheeled organics container.

For township and borough residents this green barrel pickup service costs \$20 per month. If township residents want to combine this with trash pickup, it costs \$30 per month. Borough residents will continue to receive free trash collection.

When consolidation goes into effect, the program's future will depend on how many households have signed up. Currently the number is over 300. It is hoped that the number will reach 500, which would allow it to become a town-wide service, possibly governed by a municipal trash collection contract.

Pellichero and Sustainable Princeton members Andrea Malcolm and Callie Hancock urge residents to join the program for both the cost-saving and environmental benefits mentioned above. Malcolm notes that the combined food and trash pickup cost is slightly lower than her prior trash collection service. She urges Princeton residents to try the program and see how easy it is.

An added benefit, she observes, is that it encourages families to become more conscious of how much waste and trash they generate. Pellichero points out that the program is easy, "not icky," as well as beneficial. Hancock would remind residents that it saves money, is tidier than the old method of disposing of food wastes, and the pickup is more frequent by far than the current leaf-collection schedule. All three encourage Princeton residents to sign up now!

*Huck Fairman is a local writer who in the course of researching another project was confronted by the overwhelming evidence that we are changing the earth's environment. And that will affect life as we have known it. He hopes to present the many good local responses to this situation that are already under way.*