

## **A Reuse Center for Tompkins County** *Program Planning and Next Steps*

Reuse of goods and materials is the most efficient, environmentally friendly, and economically viable way to reduce the waste stream. Creating a convenient alternative to disposal in landfills and making used materials easily available to the community is the best way to encourage reuse.

Tompkins County has committed to developing a reuse center as part of its 20-Year Solid Waste Management Plan that was approved in 1995. After 10 years of implementing the other components of the Plan, our community has reduced waste by over 50%.

### **Benefits to the community**

- Enhancing current efforts to further reduce the waste stream
- Preserving valuable material resources
- Creating jobs and job training opportunities
- Hosting educational programming to promote reuse (both practical and creative)
- Providing educational and creative studio space
- Promoting environmental awareness
- Strengthening existing programs by partnering and avoiding replication of services
- Reducing dependence on trucked-in goods
- Supplying affordable and/or free materials to non-profits and educational institutions
- Increasing supply of quality materials at reduced costs
- Keeping money in our local economy

### **Acceptable materials** may include, but not limited to:

- |                                    |                                |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| - Building materials (old and new) | - Household goods              |
| - Appliances                       | - Computers & home electronics |
| - Furniture                        | - Art materials                |
| - Clothing & textiles              | - Books                        |

### **Services** may include:

- Pickup and delivery
- Deconstruction (the environmental practice of disassembling buildings by hand)
- Repair of select materials
- Educational workshops on both practical and creative reuse
- Skill-building workshops

Tompkins County Solid Waste Management Division (TCSWMD), Significant Elements, Cooperative Extension, Ithaca College and Cornell University have been collaborating in preparing plans for the reuse center. The planning team has developed and administered extensive surveys with cooperation from Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce and TCAD (Tompkins County Area Development) as the first phase of its planning process. Detailed results of these surveys can be found in the *Reuse Center Survey Summary Report*. The information gathered indicates that a suitably sized facility, accessible location, extended hours of operation, and proactive efforts to pick up and deliver materials would ensure maximum diversion and help provide a sustainable and community-friendly reuse operation.

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While recycling has been the primary means for reducing waste in recent years, TCSW has been able to focus on more progressive waste reduction practices to promote reuse and education through its partnerships. TCSW's partnership with Historic Ithaca's Significant Elements program has provided alternatives to the waste stream for building materials and other household items. Other TCSW partners include two computer reuse programs: the Ithaca Youth Bureau's Computer All Stars and the Sciencenter's Babbage's Basement.

TCSW accepts residential household hazardous waste at no charge to Tompkins County residents. In an effort to eliminate these particularly toxic materials in the waste stream, a partnership with Sustainable Tompkins has launched an online resource called Finger Lakes Buy Green ([www.fingerlakesbuygreen.org](http://www.fingerlakesbuygreen.org)). The website is dedicated to educating consumers to purchase environmentally friendly products. TCSW also has continued its long-standing partnership with Tompkins County Cornell Cooperative Extension to provide community education in composting and to provide educational programs in classrooms and for other interested groups and organizations.

Significant Elements (SE) has been successfully diverting building materials from the waste stream since 1991. Like other existing reuse programs in the County, SE will be strengthened by partnerships with existing programs, and shared (as opposed to replicated) services and overhead. This includes retail space, educational workshops and space, and a pickup and delivery service to ease the distribution of larger items.

### **Reuse Center 2006 Planning Team**

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Jonathan Wood, *County Attorney, Tompkins County*  
Rob Young, *Environmental Assistant, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County*

The survey work was made possible by the dedicated work by the above participants, as well as TCAD (Tompkins County Area Development), the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County, and the Department of Applied Economics and Management students in the Certificate of Business Management program at Cornell University.

In addition, students in Rob Young's Green Cities class at Cornell University have submitted a separate report entitled *A Vision for Reuse in Tompkins County, New York (12/7/06)* which explored ongoing, positive efforts to create incentives for reusers, generators, and consumers in the U.S. and abroad. We'd like to thank Rob Young, and his student group: Jay Corbalis, Antonia Daniels, Grayson Fahrner, Matt Hendren, Julie McIntyre, and Tamar Sharabi for their excellent research and results. Their research on the economic benefits of deconstruction (vs. demolition), legislative incentives (requiring construction and demolition deposits that are only returned once a 50% diversion of waste is documented and proved, a waiting period for demolition in Florida), ways to incentivise donors, diversion credits, successful partnerships, and arts-related reuse activities to promote reuse in communities will be very useful as a component of the business plan.

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### **Current Planning Efforts**

The reuse center will be an independent not-for-profit 501(c)3 program and will both divert valuable materials from the waste stream and resell or otherwise make them available to the community. The facility will include a large retail space and warehouse, as well as classrooms and workshops for educational and repair purposes, and a collection area where donated items will be received and processed for resale.

The following questions were asked as a part of the first phase of the planning process:

- What materials are available locally, but not currently being reused?
- What are other successful reuse centers doing around the country?
- Who is currently active in reuse in our area?
- Who is interested in working with a reuse center, and how?
- What needs could be better served by a reuse center in Tompkins County?

The following surveys were developed and conducted in order to address the above questions. The methods and results of these surveys may be found in the following pages.

1. Survey of Selected U.S. Reuse Programs *conducted by Kat McCarthy and Diane Cohen*
2. Local Tipping Floor (RSWC) Observations *conducted by Kat McCarthy and Sean Williamson*
3. Locally Active Reusers Survey (local non-profits and individuals active in reuse) *conducted by Diane Cohen and Jeff Klein*
4. Generators Survey (Local Small Businesses) *conducted by TC Chamber of Commerce*
5. Generators Survey (Local Retailers) *conducted by Rob Young, Cornell Cooperative Extension of TC, and Diane Cohen*
6. Generators Survey (Local Manufacturers) *conducted by TCAD*
7. Educational Institutions Survey *conducted by Diane Cohen*
8. Collegetown Consumers and Generators Survey *conducted by CU Certificate of Business Management students*

*Note:* One very important arena that has not been addressed in this document is the potential for partnerships with existing social and education programs. A comprehensive investigation of how a reuse center can provide opportunities for skill building, empowerment, and community understanding will help to form some of the programs and opportunities that the center will be providing. There are exciting possibilities to explore with the Department of Social Services, Challenge Industries, Tompkins Community Action, alternatives to incarceration programs, and educational institutions, such as BOCES and Trumansburg Schools Prevocational Studies Work-based Learning program. This investigation will be conducted in conjunction with development of the business plan, which will begin in early 2007.

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Partnerships with existing programs already active in reuse will increase waste diversion, maximize outreach, support local non-profit organizations, and both strengthen and avoid redundancy of services in the community. TCSWMD's partnership with Historic Ithaca's Significant Elements program has provided an alternative to the waste stream for building materials and other household items. Other TCSWMD partners include two computer reuse programs: the Ithaca Youth Bureau's Computer All Stars and the Sciencenter's Babbage's Basement. Both programs have expanded as TCSWMD has begun to accept all household electronics.

### **Next Steps**

In order to undertake the necessary next steps, the following working groups have been set up:

- *Siting Committee* (meeting since October 2006). Currently tasked with the discovery of and consideration of potential sites.
- *Development & Outreach Committee* (first meeting in January 2007). Initial tasks include development of a case statement, identify funding sources and partnerships, enhance community awareness, and generate funding for both capital and operational costs.
- *Operations Committee* (transitioned from the 2006 planning team, the first meeting will be in January 2007). Responsible for obtaining legal status, board development, and budget issues.

As the planning process continues, it is hoped that a site (or an interim site) will be identified in the near-term, in order to develop a budget and plan for an opening in summer 2008. Achieving non-profit status is a priority in order to attract funding, both private and public. All of the working groups will contribute components to the Five Year Business Plan, which is targeted for completion at the end of the summer 2007.

For further information, please contact:

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