

MICHAEL BARDSLEY — FOR — MAYOR



Inclusion...
New Ideas...
Change.

Our city government *must* take a more active, creative role in preserving our environment and in conserving our natural resources—to maintain Northampton’s quality of life for the next generations.

Achieving a sustainable city requires an engaged city. Positive environmental change mainly comes about through many small actions made by a large number of people on a consistent basis over a period of time. There is a relationship between the sense of civic engagement relating to the environment, and the ability of a community to provide the supportive infrastructure needed to achieve its environmental policy aims.

Of course, while every citizen can play a part, some actions necessarily must be taken by businesses, institutions, and government. Yet in order to achieve them, community involvement and support are necessary. As Mayor, I will work to encourage increased community involvement in environmental protection and conservation issues. And I will strengthen city government’s efforts to achieve sustainability.

I will especially focus on the following priorities:

- Improvement of the city’s recycling rate
- Development of long-term plans to address the issue of solid waste reduction and management
- The strengthening of wetlands preservation regulations
- Reduction of the energy consumption and costs both of city government as well as of energy consumers in the city

In taking action in these areas, I will draw on the advice of local experts as well as our citizens—and from the experience of other communities that are tackling these issues.

In this report, we look at these issues in more depth as well as at strategies to address them. And in it I have included specific steps I will take as Mayor.

The Environment



***See the specific steps
I will take as Mayor
on environmental and
conservation issues in
this report.***

The Environment

Improving Northampton's Recycling Rate

In 2006 the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MDEP) set a goal to bring the state's overall recycling rate up to 56%, which combined with expected source reduction, would meet its 70% waste reduction goal.

But as of 2007 the statewide recycling rate was only 47%, and many Massachusetts communities had rates well below that figure. One of them was Northampton—which had a 30% rate.

Unfortunately, since 2001 Northampton's recycling rate has slid downwards from a peak that year of 62%. (See the chart at left.) This decline is not unlike that of a number of other cities and towns across the state and within western Massachusetts.

However, over the same period several other nearby communities saw notable gains in their recycling rates: for example, Greenfield's rose from 29% to 42% and East Longmeadow's rose from 36% to 63%.

While several factors may be behind the decline in our recycling rate, one may well be the absence of municipal leadership in actively and aggressively promoting recycling.

What are ways we could increase recycling in Northampton?

- Concerted public awareness/education campaigns conducted in other communities across the nation—led by local government but involving citizens, businesses, and other institutions—have improved recycling rates.
- In cities like Northampton, where much of the housing stock includes rental apartments with trash pick-up, a special outreach focus needs to be targeted on landlords and tenants to find ways to easily separate recyclable materials from other refuse.
- A progressive block-rate pay structure for overall trash disposal has been very effective in many communities. In other words, small quantities are relatively low, but larger amounts are increasingly costly. This has provided an incentive for people to recycle.
- Increasing the number of locations where recyclable items can be deposited would encourage recycling. School parking areas could be such an option worth considering—and so might other city-owned facilities.

Northampton's Yearly Recycling Rates

CY 2007	30%
CY 2006	48%
CY 2005	45%
CY 2004	54%
CY 2003	53%
CY 2002	56%
FY 2001	62%
FY 2000	48%
FY 1999	44%
FY 1998	44%
FY 1997	45%

SOURCE: Massachusetts Dept. of Environmental Protection, Massachusetts Municipal Recycling Rates: Fiscal Years 1996-2001 and Calendar Years 2002-2007. (The state changed the reporting from fiscal to calendar year in 2001.)

The Environment

■ Schools could play a greater role, too. They could serve as pilot projects for enhanced recycling, composting, and purchasing programs. By actively incorporating efforts to raise consciousness about the role that recycling plays in preserving our environment, we could reach the newest generations of Northampton residents about its importance. In turn, they could have an important influence on the practices in the homes where they live.

Some models of effective recycling programs exist in other cities around the nation. While several of them involve cities much larger than Northampton, they still are applicable to us.

For instance, San Francisco has attained a 70% diversion rate. It has done so through increasing composting, establishing block-rates for bin sizes, enacting bans on bottled water sales, styrofoam, and plastic shopping bags, and requiring the use or recycling of construction materials. Chicago has a “Waste to Profit” program in which city government has become a clearinghouse for the synergistic transfer of one industry’s waste to become another’s materials or source of energy.

Northampton can learn from these cities and others about how to improve its disappointing recycling rate. As Mayor, I will examine these models and then launch aggressive recycling, composting, and reuse programs appropriate to our city.

The Northampton Landfill Controversy

I have actively supported a referendum on whether or not the landfill will be expanded. That way, Northampton voters can have a full debate to weigh all the drawbacks and benefits of going ahead with the project. But before the expansion could occur, by 2011 the landfill will have reached the maximum capacity allowed by the state and will **have** to close.

I have consulted with a range of experts and citizens to get their views and I have examined various public documents.

Many questions about expansion have been raised. And many remain unanswered. As I’ve explored each question, I’ve discovered that what the incumbent mayor interprets as a green light for expansion, is instead a flashing yellow light.



Northampton’s schools could play a role in boosting recycling rates in the city. They could serve as places to drop off recyclable items and as pilot projects for enhanced recycling, composting, and purchasing programs.

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The Northampton Landfill opened in 1969. Even before it did, there was controversy over the process and the site that was chosen. At the time, a consulting engineer hired by the city raised concerns about its placement over a large supply of underground water.¹

The landfill stands over the northern tip of the Barnes Aquifer, which extends all the way to Westfield and which is the source of drinking water for about 60,000 individuals who obtain it from public and private wells. It also is close to Hannum Brook.

It lies within an existing Water Supply Protection District. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection now has a policy of not permitting landfills within such districts.

¹ "Calduwood Site is Selected for Sanitary Landfill Here," *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, March 2, 1969.

In my view, we have to satisfactorily answer hard questions:

- Health impacts—both short- and long-term—of the existing landfill on people nearby.
- Possible seepage into the aquifer below it, which provides water to 60,000 people in several communities to our south, extending all the way to Westfield.
- The impact on air quality for people living near the facility and those in the surrounding neighborhood.
- The costs to the city and its taxpayers of expansion, of maintenance over time, of meeting state and federal standards and rules, and potential liability costs—versus the revenues the city may or may not realize in the future.
- The fact that the city on several occasions (1997, 2003, 2007, and 2008) has been found out of compliance with state law and regulations in managing the facility, and was ordered to remedy the problems or pay fines.

The Water Supply

A 2009 Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) report found that: "people can come into contact with chemicals in sediments or surface water when they take part in recreational activities in the streams or wetland areas downstream of the [Northampton] Landfill. Based on the available information, levels of chemicals in sediment and surface water that could get into a child's, adolescent's, or an adult's body during these activities are below levels that would result in health effects."¹

While the risks might not be high now, that may not be true in coming years. Leakage occurs over time. Some now-closed areas of the landfill have no liners, and there are reports from across the nation of landfills with liners that have leaked. Moreover, at least one expert has raised concerns about potential seepage into the Barnes Aquifer from two closed Easthampton landfills and the possibility it could co-mingle underground with leakage from the nearby Northampton landfill.

Impact on Air Quality

For many living near the landfill, at times the air outdoors smells bad. Odor is one issue, but just as important is what is in the air to cause the stench—as well as what is in the air when it doesn't smell. These are other issues for us to consider.

Two studies (in 2003 and 2007) detected potentially dangerous contaminants in small quantities in the air.² Yet they were *limited*—and did not account for weather and other factors.

The Environment

In July 2009 MDPH reported that it “cannot currently conclude whether breathing outdoor air in the neighborhood surrounding the Northampton Sanitary Landfill could result in health effects. The information we need to make a decision is not available.”³

Public Health Impacts

MDPH also did a study (released in September 2008) to look at cancer rates and other health issues that might be influenced by the Northampton Landfill.⁴ It went back to 1982. Essentially, the study was inconclusive. For instance, there were problems with the size of the data sample. Also, the study did not include incidents of cancer among people who had lived in the area after 1969 but who had moved away. Moreover, in some cases it takes decades from the time of exposure to hazardous waste until one is diagnosed with cancer or another serious disease.

While some have decided that these studies are conclusive that the landfill has not resulted in health hazards, they are *not*. In fact, MDPH made the same point in a 2008 letter to the city. (See key excerpts from the letter in the sidebar at the right.)

In short, we *cannot* yet adequately determine the public health impacts from the Northampton Landfill on area residents over the past 40 years. And we cannot know how they will unfold in the future, or how potential seepage will affect people in other communities to the south. The data simply are not there.

The Costs of Expansion

Meanwhile, some who want to move ahead with expansion have argued that the city will be hit with a revenue loss when the landfill closes. Perhaps *short-term* revenue gains for the city might be realized if the landfill is expanded, but perhaps *not*.

To expand the facility, the city would have to obtain financing for the project. The city would be responsible for remediation costs if problems occur (and significant problems *have* surfaced in the history of the landfill). It would have to cover the costs of management and maintenance under increasingly strict federal and state mandates. It would risk potential liability costs. Once it is filled, Northampton taxpayers would be obligated to cover any closing costs for another 30 years. And meanwhile, the city could be forced to absorb legacy costs due to litigation.

Over time, would the city continue to gain revenues from other towns that send their trash to the landfill? Possibly. But a

“Unfortunately, this [2008] review of health statistics cannot address some of the issues that residents continue to raise, particularly those related to offsite environmental impacts. Only with more comprehensive environmental monitoring can some of the questions that are being raised be answered....”

“Based on our understanding of the environmental sampling done to date, MDPH does support better delineation of the groundwater flow, particularly in the southwesterly direction from the landfill. In addition, additional air monitoring would help address the concerns expressed by residents about air emissions associated with the landfill and it is these types of data that seem particularly important in relation to landfill decisions. MDPH supports any additional monitoring deemed necessary by MDEP [the Mass. Dept. of Environmental Protection]....”

—Letter from the Massachusetts Dept. of Public Health’s Bureau of Environmental Health to the City of Northampton, October 2, 2008

The Environment

The state is developing a new plan as to how it will handle solid waste. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MDEP) in 2008 released a preliminary assessment in advance of developing its strategic plan for solid waste management. It has implications for Northampton.

The assessment places strong emphasis on enhanced recycling and other methods to move towards the goal of "Zero Waste".¹

The Grassroots Recycling Network defines "Zero Waste as a philosophy and a design principle for the 21st Century. It includes 'recycling' but goes beyond recycling by taking a 'whole system' approach to the vast flow of resources and waste through human society. Zero Waste maximizes recycling, minimizes waste, reduces consumption and ensures that products are made to be reused, repaired or recycled back into nature or the marketplace."²

¹ See: MDEP, <http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/priorities/dswmpu01.htm>

² See: Grassroots Recycling Network, http://www.grrn.org/zerowaste/zerowaste_faq.html

major expense for communities that send their waste to regional landfills is transport. Rail is cheaper than trucking, and some private landfills in our region have rail access. So, if it is expanded, would the landfill be a competitive or even viable enterprise in coming years—or just a cash drain for the city?

Compliance with Federal and State Laws and Regulations

The city's management of the landfill—in a period when state and federal requirements are becoming stricter—has presented questions as well. In late 2003 the city was compelled to sign a consent order with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MDEP) to remedy seven violations of state regulations or pay fines. In 2007 and 2008, the city again was forced by the state to remediate problems with the landfill.⁵

Meanwhile, there has been extensive anecdotal evidence that materials trucked into the Landfill are not routinely monitored or checked to see if they comply with regulations.

Will Closure of the Landfill Increase Illegal Dumping?

Some have suggested that when the landfill closes, illegal dumping in Northampton's woods, fields, and yards will increase. Yet Massachusetts has 351 cities and towns—but only 17 of them now have municipal landfills. It is hard to find any reliable study showing that illegal dumping is more prevalent in those towns that lack landfills, than in the 17 towns that still have them.

Increasing Wetlands Protection

Our woods and wetlands—both in town and in our outlying areas—buffer against floods and reduce summer temperatures, and their beauty helps attract and retain residents.

I would urge the City Council to revisit the wetlands ordinance that was passed in 2007, which encourages developers to encroach as close as 10 feet to wetlands in several in-town districts. This measure, which was intended to give homeowners more leeway in building minor accessory structures, has begun to be misused to permit extensive new developments that threaten water quality and put homeowners at risk of flooding. Scientists find that buffer zones of 50 feet are necessary to give wetlands protection.⁶ I support returning Northampton to this standard—which is more in line with wetlands rules in other Massachusetts communities—while allowing for modest exceptions for small accessory structures, driveways and landscaping.

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Reducing Energy Consumption and Costs

City Facilities

The city could take additional steps not only to conserve energy, but to increase its utilization of renewable energy sources. Here are some examples.

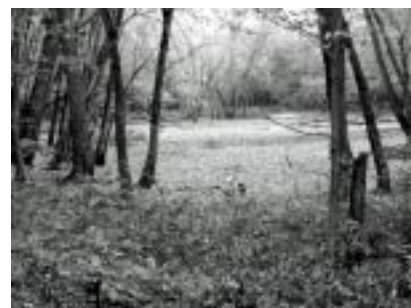
- The city annually produces a large quantity of wood chips from regular tree work. If it needs to upgrade or update the heating system for any of its buildings, it could invest in a pyrolytic wood-fired (or dual fuel) co-generation system. These systems could be tailored to the city's wood-chip output. Because it is pyrolytic, its emissions profile would be very clean. Rather than adding more wood to the landfill, by using a renewable fuel that the city already produces we could reduce the city's costs for heat and electricity.
- The city owns a number of small dams. Many could be repaired and retrofitted with small run-of-the-river hydro-power generators. This could potentially turn these properties into assets.
- The city's water supply system is mostly powered by gravity. In fact there are some portions of the water supply system that have flow restrictors in place to reduce pressure. These could be replaced with turbines to transform excess pressure into an asset (electricity).
- In its municipal vehicle fleet, the city could move towards the use of electric vehicles for light-duty needs.

Yet municipal energy consumption represents only about 3% of Northampton's total energy use. Of course, it is homeowners and businesses whose activities comprise the rest.

As Mayor, I would do much more to encourage community energy users to reduce consumption and increase renewable energy production. The city can help businesses and individuals in part by tying Northampton's civic identity to energy conservation and the environment.

Residential and Commercial Buildings

- A 2% increase in efficiency per year for next 40 years is possible. Setting such a goal is important—not unlike the working towards the goal of Zero Waste.
- I will launch a campaign to reduce residential energy use for heating, hot water, and lighting. For example, I will work to make homeowners in the city aware that they are eligible for



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We should revisit the wetlands ordinance that was passed by the city in 2007. Scientists find that buffer zones of 50 feet are necessary to give wetlands lasting protection. I support returning Northampton to this standard—the one to which many other Massachusetts communities still adhere.

The Environment



For more information about Michael Bardsley, his positions on the issues, and the latest on the campaign:

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an energy audit and a reduction plan from MassSave which potentially could yield them \$2,000 in energy savings.

Transportation

As Mayor, I will take the following steps:

- Continuously enhance, promote, and expand the human-powered modes of transportation with a critical eye towards safety for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Work to develop an expanded role and routes for PVTA, including enhancing service for congested routes.
- Launch infrastructure planning criteria for the emerging first-generation plug-in hybrid vehicles for distributed energy systems.
- To fulfill the requirements for a trained and qualified work force that would deploy energy improvements, we should emphasize continued development of a renewable energy curriculum at the Smith Vocational School.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Massachusetts Department of Public Health, "Health Consultation: Evaluation of Sediment and Surface Water Sampling Data at the Northampton Sanitary Landfill..." (July 9, 2009), http://www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/dph/environmental/investigations/northampton_health_consultation_2005.pdf
- 2 For the 2007 study, see: "Northampton Landfill Health Comparison Report" (Prepared by Tech Environmental, October 2007), http://74.94.173.233/DPW/Landfill/air/TechEnv-NOHO_Air_Risk_Report_23Oct07.pdf
- 3 Massachusetts Department of Public Health, "Health Consultation: Review of Proposals for Air Monitoring and Risk Assessment at the Northampton Sanitary Landfill..." (July 9, 2009), <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/HAC/pha/NorthamptonAirMonitoringReviewofProposalsforAirMonitoringandRiskAssessmentattheNorthamptonSanitaryLandfill7-9-09.pdf>
- 4 Massachusetts Department of Public Health Bureau of Environmental Health, "Evaluation of Health Outcome Data in Northampton and Easthampton, MA and among Neighborhoods in Closest Proximity to the Northampton Regional Landfill" (September 2008), http://www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/dph/environmental/investigations/northampton_report.pdf
- 5 See: MDEP Administrative Consent Orders with Notice of Noncompliance of December 19, 2003, and of April 8, 2008.
- 6 See: North Street Neighborhood Association, Hyla Report, <http://northassoc.org/2008/07/15/hyla-report-northampton-ma-wetlands-buffer-zones-narrow.aspx>