

Dwight Mercer (Regina), DG Mercer Eco Research at the SpeakUp on Garbage Expo, November 13, 2010.

<http://www.speakupwinnipeg.com>

Transcript

>> Richard:

Thank you so much Tom.

Dwight Mercer is here. Eco Research formed in March of 2010 and it is a company from Regina, it restricts its consulting services to small urban and regional strategic land use planning, municipal capacity building and sustainable development and sustainable subdivision. Solid waste management mainly with emphasis on waste minimumization and aquifer protection. Comprehensive floodplain management with emphasis on land use control.

DG Mercer Eco Research currently operates on contract with several urban and rural municipalities in Saskatchewan and completed the original conceptual plans for what is becoming the multi-model complex west of Regina. In addition the company also has partnerships with other private consultants for special projects including land development, house construction and commercial real estate development.

Specific to solid waste management DG Mercer Eco Research is currently completing five solid waste management contracts for the City of Regina, as part of the implementation of the waste plan Regina 2010. Previously Dwight was the waste diversion officer for the City of Regina, from 1989 until the end of 2006, when he started his own consulting business.

Please welcome Dwight Mercer.

>> Actually I have a lot of connections with Winnipeg. I first came here, went to Red River Community College, met my wife there, and my son currently works in Winnipeg and I also worked for the City of Winnipeg digging ditches while she was the city commissioner's secretary.

So I'm not a foreigner to Winnipeg. I'm going to give you a presentation to shakeup a little bit and get you thinking about some stuff. Just in terms of let's say some myths, most of the stuff will be from a Saskatchewan perspective. But I have been looking at some of the Winnipeg stuff. And solid waste management what it is, it is within the context of an overall sustainable community plan.

What I learned yesterday is there are a number of other strategic plans going on in the city you just completed, master city plan, in terms of transportation, what you are here today you are part of a couple spokes in a larger wheel a city can do a sustainable

community plan you have to look at demographics, how is the plan changing, look at water supply, treatment, I will look at that somewhat.

You have transportation, land use planning, housing, development of emergency services. So what you got here is this maybe here in the city' lumps in terms after solid waste management plan, it is one component that smart cities do as they look at the strategy of all components in a holistic manner.

Very briefly, elements of waste management whether it is recycling or garbage there is a process involved, and every time something changes hands it costs money.

So you are collecting things, you are transporting, processing or recycling, you are disposing of stuff and if you have residual waste and hazardous waste you have to monitor it.

It is a system, a flow chart, it always happens, every time a product is picked up and it changes hands, it comes with cost.

Now there is a hierarchy to solid waste management regulations. Municipalities have to look at the public health and safety and they have to look after the protection of the environment, these are overarching regulations, there is no option but to comply to that. The thing that the public sees most commonly is the utility service, you put your garage out someone picks it up and it goes somewhere.

Most people don't know what happens, and it is much like you say, you turn the light switch on, most people don't care where the power comes from or when you flush the toilet. As long as it doesn't come back you don't care. And the final thing is called the waste system, the waste management is the last in line to get money at budget time.

Very important, remember that, in terms of public health and safety, the department is regulatory, has to be complied with, you have to allocate resources, the garbage must be picked up every week without fail, if there is money left over as was mentioned, if you could find the money then the last weak sister is waste minimization.

Remember that.

And within waste minimization, there is a hierarchy, this is also very important, because a lot of the presentation today, everyone is talking about zeros waste and recycling and recycle, you recycle tons and tons of stuff. Not necessarily why are you generating so much waste.

So within the hierarchy of waste minimization, you want to reduce your waste and consumption, the second thing is you want to, with reduced, today's family heirlooms were not bought at the dollar store, if you buy quality it lasts a long time, when I got married before a lot of you were born, we got some knives, and we still have them.

You buy them at the dollar store you are back next year.

The use is extend product life, pass on, pass down, garage sale.

The last option of generally highest cost, the last option of generally higher costs, is to recycle. Recycling treats the symptom it does not treat a cause.

Remember that, you are not going to recycle yourself so there is that hierarchy, reduce, re-use, and recycle,.

So can recycling solve your waste management issues, no not really.

Unusual, the second couple slides I have got, just sort of shows some of the inter-connections, we have social, capital, we have environmental capital and we have economic capital.

Next slide is like a propeller and what you need to do as a community is find out where you are in the propeller and find the sweet spot for your balance of the, if the propeller is out of balance it is not going to function very well.

And as an example you could say, well I will use the extreme examples, some westbound a complete environmentalist, saying the earth will be kept in pristine state, will not cut down trees and not have any people there, the earth will be kept as virgin.

Or you could do, cut down all of the trees because it makes it cheaper for us to produce these products.

It is doing but in the long term not sustainable.

If you go after the Utopia and you don't care about the environment or economics, before too long they are starting to hit.

What you need to find for your city is where you are and where you want to go in terms of the right balance for you going into the future.

And everything is interconnected.

Next thing is a schematic of waste characterization.

You have to know what you are generating, you have to know what you are handling and for the recyclables you have to know what you are going to market.

If you don't have a market for recyclables, you then have very very expensive garbage.

This is not to scale, but in general and I had a quick glance at some of the Winnipeg stuff.

With the glue and paper of the fiber is as clean and it is usually the first thing that a household will introduce in terms of recycling and in Winnipeg I think you are fairly good in access to markets.

So if you can take your cardboard out, in some cases you can reduce your waste generation by 25 per cent, Lake Winnipeg has a lot of big cardboard, it is a little higher than that.

In terms of yard organics, and I have trained 60 master composters in the City of Regina, we have also used 12 year old girl guides with power tools who make the bins.

If you have 12 year old girls explaining to middle age men how to make the bins and compost. So with organics, if you can get one household in five to compost, I can do a course in 55 minutes, especially in the summertime you can reduce the organic load by 55 per cent.

You can get people composting not on the site, it is not being transported.

If the organics go to the land fill it will be covered by dirt every day to deny access to rats and seagulls, that will produce methane gas which is 23 time more potent.

Now food waste, that's bigger for emphasis.

Food waste is what smells and attracts, the flies, the rats and vermin.

So it is one of the main issues that solid waste has usually, especially in the summertime, you have to move it from the back yard and front yard as quickly as possible, and when it gets to the land fill you have to cover it every day as well. So it is no longer a vessel for disease and so on. You have your plastics and metals and you have got your waste.

Classed as glass as a material is easy to recycle if you have to haul it more than 50 miles it is uneconomic, there is no market for coloured glass. Some cities, City of Regina will take the glass and stock pile it in the land fill and use it for road base or.

I'm getting the signal here.

I want to leave this with you as well, a lot of you put pressure on the municipality to do something. They have one hand tied behind their backs. What we lack at economic development we talk about gross domestic product. The Government of Canada and all of the provinces when a new good service is created, it generates personal and corporate income tax, for the Government of Canada and the Government of Manitoba.

At the point of retail sales, the Government of Canada collects GST, and the province picks up the retail sales tax. This is big big money for not a lot of work.

They don't have to handle anything or process anything they don't have to do anything at the land fill. If it is moves and it is new they tax. So if you reduce consumption it hits Treasury Board fairly significantly. If you extend product life it hits their product.

But the way the system is stacked, if it is overpackaged as long as it sells fast or there is seven types of plastic polymer as long as it sells fast or it runs out just at the end of warranty, you will be purchasing more goods and more GTS and PST.

The problem is the municipality using the property tax base has to close the loop.

So people put pressure on the City of Winnipeg to do something, they have one hand behind their back, they only have the property tax base, it is the province and Federal government that have the shaft, the city and gone is the sphere but the shaft is the Provincial and Federal governments.

In terms of money, seven per cent sales tax, these are taken from the website, \$1.6 billion on just 7 per cent of the goods and services sold at the retail sector in Manitoba.

The other 93 per cent was into the marketplace to pay no retail sales tax.

So that's the numbers you are looking at.

I guess the second final thing is people in the audience that are involved in the industry of solid waste collection or process and recycling and with your city, you are moving millions and millions of pounds of material, so you are into material management, you are picking up, transporting, so in terms of unit costs and what not, that has a huge impact on mill rate taxation or that has a huge impact on the profit margin of the company.

One part is material management, the second part for the community activists, how many people told your neighbours that you were coming on a Saturday to talk about garbage, but on in terms of the social side, getting people to do what you want and getting them to do it well is the social engineering component and there is a lot of energy in the room that will add to that.

Going back and to sort of wrap it up, solid waste management in terms of the strategy that the city is launching is one component of an integrated community plan that looks like Winnipeg is in a good position to sort of move forward with that type of thing.

So what you are doing here, the energy that you guys will bring to the system, will help the city move forward in terms of the best decisions that they can make from an economic and environmental social perspective, and you are the ones who take this message back to your neighbourhoods, so thank you.