



MEMORANDUM

TO: City of Ann Arbor Mayor and City Council

FROM: Molly Maciejewski, Public Works Unit Manager

DATE: September 30, 2020

SUBJECT: **Clarification Regarding Amendment No. 2 to the Recycling Plan Tours and School Recycling Education Contracts with the Ecology Center**

Following City Council's postponement on September 8, 2020 of the *Resolution to Approve Amendment No. 2 to the Recycling Plan Tours and School Recycling Education Contracts with the Ecology Center*, staff met with representatives of the Ecology Center and pass on City Council's questions and concerns regarding this item. In particular, staff noted that City Council raised:

- Why is the contract escalator 6%?
- Isn't it less expensive to put together a video and have students/classes run it when desired (new approach) than doing in-person sessions (previous approach)?
- Is this the right way to spend this solid waste fund money right now, or should we be spending it on something else in the solid waste program area?

The Ecology Center has provided the attached memorandum adding more background to their adjusted scope of work and to provide their responses to the concerns raised by City Council.

Upon further contract review, City staff found an error in the escalator calculations. The actual contract escalator is 3% rather than 6% as listed in the resolution. Staff discussed with the Ecology Center the possibility of a reduction beyond 3%, but the Ecology Center stated the 3% increase is a necessary increase, as explained in their memo.

Attachments: Ecology Center Memo, Clarifications about Proposed Solid Waste Education Contract Renewals

CC: Tom Crawford, City Administrator
Craig Hupy, Public Services Area Administrator

September 29, 2020

To: Molly Maciejewski, Christina Gomes, Cresson Slotten
From: Katy Adams, Ecology Center
RE: Clarifications about Proposed Solid Waste Education Contract Renewals

Thank you for inviting additional clarification about the Ecology Center's solid waste and environmental education services. It has been our great pleasure to provide these services in partnership with the City of Ann Arbor for a number of years, and we have taken extensive measures to adapt these services to the current extraordinary circumstances.

1. The value of K-12 education to advancing the goals of the City of Ann Arbor's solid waste programs is as great as ever.

For over 35 years, the City of Ann Arbor has invested in K-12 environmental education to support its solid waste and stormwater management services. We understand that it is easy to lose sight of the purpose and value of services when they're provided consistently for many years. But while the cost of K-12 solid waste education has never exceeded 1% of the City's total solid waste budget, that commitment to education has provided the generational foundation for Ann Arbor's high-quality recycling, composting, and solid waste programs.

There is a substantial body of research which demonstrates the impact of K-12 education on environmental behaviors, such as recycling, composting, water conservation, energy conservation. Introducing recycling education to other school districts in Southeast Michigan has shown 61-78% increases in recycling knowledge within school communities after participating in Ecology Center education. Our partnership with eight other school districts in Washtenaw County revealed school recycling rates averaging 71% in schools that participated in recycling education. Schools that did not request recycling programming had school recycle rates averaging 38%.

Our 2016-2018 partnership with the City of Dearborn to provide recycling education in schools led to a documented 35% reduction in contamination in the City's residential curbside recycling and a 56% increase in recycling knowledge among residents. This evidence confirms the anecdotal understanding that "students bring what they learned in school home to their parents," and influence the household's actions. This is as important as ever today, since recycling end-markets are demanding new levels of "quality control" in the preparation of materials.

Year after year, the Ecology Center programs are given the highest possible ratings by AAPS teachers and students. The majority of contracted programs are typically booked within weeks of the moment they're made available for scheduling. In spring 2020, during the COVID-19 school closures, teachers continued to request environmental education for their students and appreciated our ability to offer online alternatives to a classroom visit. Here are sample comments:

"This video and activity will be so wonderful for our students! Take care and we will miss your presentation this year!" -1st grade teacher, Allen Elementary

“This is amazing! We will use it this week. We still are teaching our composting unit.” - 1st grade teacher, St. Francis of Assisi

“Thank you! We are loving it! Such a great idea!” - 4th grade teacher, Lawton Elementary

In addition to being well received by schools, the virtual programs provided great evidence of positive impact. Interactive features within each lesson allowed us to gather detailed data on how students were learning, and showed significant improvement in pro-environmental knowledge and attitudes. For example:

Fourth and fifth grade students were able to identify recyclables with average accuracy of 86%.

97% of kindergarten students named paper, plastic, metal, and glass as recyclable materials. The remaining 3% named one of these four items but not all of them.

96% of first grade students were able to identify appropriate ingredients for compost.

In response to a question about how to reduce plastic packaging waste, 37% of middle school students said recycle plastic/paper, 23% suggested using reusable containers instead of disposable packaging, and 40% said eating more fresh, unpackaged foods or gardening.

2. It takes more labor and resources to provide “remote learning” education services than conventional in-class programs.

As all school officials (and households with K-12 students) are now aware, the delivery of virtual classroom programs is labor intensive and complex. This is equally true for education programs brought “into the classroom” by a third party like the Ecology Center. “In-class” time is a relatively small portion of a teacher’s workday, as it is for a third-party program.

Comparison of Labor and Resources of Original Service to Virtual Program

| Original programming cost was calculated based on the following: | Adapted virtual programming cost is calculated based on the following: |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use of classroom-ready lessons, with staff time for minor edits based on teacher feedback or changes to Michigan Academic Standards ● Staff time for in-person delivery of programs ● Staff time to advertise programming ● Staff time to schedule with teachers and schools ● Staff time to collect and report data ● Restocking lesson materials ● Printing costs ● Overhead costs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Staff time to design lessons & workshops ● Staff training on software and equipment used to create virtual lessons ● Staff time to research best practices for virtual education and online teaching ● Staff time to host live online lessons ● Staff time to advertise programming ● Staff time to coordinate with teachers ● Staff time to provide ongoing support for schools and families using online resources ● Staff time to collect and report data, which is far more extensive because of recorded student responses ● Purchasing materials for new lessons ● Film production equipment |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly charge for subscription to online service that allows lessons to be interactive • Monthly charge for online storage of large online lesson files • Overhead costs |
|--|---|

Under the original contract, all costs were rolled into one per-program fee, which included not only staff time to prepare and deliver lessons, but also the administrative, material, and overhead costs. We would be happy to provide the City with the line item breakdown of our expenses, upon request. The original program hired us to deliver pre-prepared programs, so the bulk of the per-program fee was tied to staff time going into schools to deliver lessons and doing administrative work associated with scheduling programs.

The work that was done in March-May 2020 (redesigning lessons and coordinating 110 delivered programs) required a total of 576 staff hours. These staff hours included new lesson planning, creation of new education materials, and staff training and practice with new skills and tools required to produce professional online lessons. Under the 2020-2021 contract, additional training is to be pursued in the skills and tools to create exceptional lessons. Hours per program are budgeted for uploading, managing teacher and student access, and responding to technical issues with each program, adding to the hours under personnel costs for lesson redesign and delivery.

3. These education contracts are cost-effective for the City of Ann Arbor.

The annual cost escalator for services is 3% for both contracts. Our total price for the School Education program, if all programs were to get billed, is \$103,520.

In May-June 2020, the Ecology Center spent far more to convert the solid waste education programs to a remote learning application than the contracts provided in compensation. We absorbed those costs to help cope with the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic. In the proposed renewal contract, we have held costs at the contract’s existing level plus the 3% increase, despite increased remote learning expenses.

We would also note that, during the last three years, the Ecology Center has not billed for the entire value of the contract in any year. While classroom programs are in extremely high demand and get scheduled rapidly, the staff trainings have not been fully scheduled. Through the per-program billing structure of the contract, the City only pays for programs rendered.

Thank you again for inviting this clarification of the proposed renewal contract for solid waste education. We are very grateful for the opportunity to provide these services for the City of Ann Arbor, and for teachers and students in the community.