WASTED OPPORTUNITY?

Confronting NYC's Solid Waste Challenges

Closing the Loop on Non-Recyclable Solid Waste

Five policy recommendations for New York City

Re-evaluation

The primary goals of the 2006 Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP) were to advance environmental justice and to shift to a more environmentally sound and economically sustainable method of waste transportation. These goals should remain paramount. However, in the six years since the release of the SWMP, technological developments and economic factors have created a changed landscape. The City would benefit from a re-evaluation of the best methods for achieving these goals.

Variety

Given the vast amount of municipal solid waste (MSW) managed by the Department of Sanitation (DSNY) and the complex tradeoffs between various disposal options, a combination of methods will be needed. Economic considerations, environmental factors, and neighborhood equity must be balanced as the City seeks to create a more sustainable waste management system. As the City recalibrates the composition of future waste disposal contracts, efforts should be made to integrate desirable new options that have demonstrated feasibility and ensure that all capital-intensive projects meet the long-term goals of the SWMP.

Local Disposal Options

Increased reliance on local disposal options could potentially allow the City to limit the capital expenditures proposed in the SWMP. In particular, the construction of some waste containerization facilities/marine transfer stations may prove to be unnecessary if environmental goals can be achieved by processing portions of MSW at in-city, or nearby, facilities.

New Technology

The City should regularly assess improvements in MSW technology in order to remain on the forefront of the developments that could play a role in New York City's waste management efforts.

Waste Prevention and Recycling

While these recommendations focus on the non-recyclable fraction of the City's municipal solid waste stream, we cannot lose sight of the importance of waste prevention and an aggressive recycling program. Both reduce the volume of waste that needs to be managed and the associated environmental, economic, and equity impact.