

**June 24, 2020**

## **Washington County Board of Commissioners workshop discussion on yard waste sites**

### **Executive Summary/Outcome**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners met in workshops on Tuesday, June 9, and Tuesday, June 23, to review yard waste services provided throughout the county. The workshops were in response to a May 19 email sent to the county by the owners of Composting Concepts in Woodbury announcing their intent to close operations of their yard waste and compost business by the middle of June.

Based on information shared at the workshops, and feedback from residents, yard waste service providers, and city officials in Woodbury, the board determined that convenient and accessible services for yard waste drop off in the southern portion of the county continues to exist through operating private businesses, even after the closure of Composting Concepts. The board directed staff to prepare information on the location of the existing sites for Woodbury residents and share through the appropriate communication channels. The county will continue to work with private sector businesses to ensure county residents have access to convenient yard waste services, through private businesses, private/public partnerships if necessary, and through curbside pickup provided by many solid waste haulers within the county.

### **Background Information**

In 2016, the county completed an analysis of county-wide yard waste services. That analysis showed the southern portion of the county was being well served in a variety of ways, including by private businesses, but gaps in service delivery existed in the north and central portions of the county. In those areas, the leadership in municipalities expressed no desire to provide the service and no private businesses had stepped forward to provide the service.

In 2019, the county opened a temporary location for residential yard waste service in the City of Hugo to serve the northern portion of the county and entered into a reciprocal agreement with Ramsey County to provide options for individuals in the central portion of the county. Based on input from stakeholders, including the current owners of Composting Concepts, the county did not locate a Washington County site in the south-central portion of the county, so as not to compete with the private businesses providing the service in the southern portion of the county.

The Composting Concepts property is currently operated under an interim special use permit (SUP) from the City of Woodbury that requires yard waste activity to cease when surrounding properties develop into residential

use. The property is guided to be low-density residential (3.5 units per acre), according to the Woodbury Comprehensive Plan. The city staff has stated that the city is not interested in taking over operations of a yard waste site, but that there is a desire for this service to continue for residents.

The Gerten's site in Denmark Township, located off Manning Avenue and 70<sup>th</sup> Street, is also a privately owned and operated site that accepts residential and commercial yard and tree waste. The Cottage Grove site is on private land, and the City of Cottage Grove contracts with a private entity (Rumpca) for the operation of the site.

### **June 9 Workshop**

During the June 9 workshop, staff from the Department of Public Health & Environment provided an update on the 2016 evaluation and the actions taken by the board as a result of that study. Staff also provided information on the services being provided in the southern part of the county, including Composting Concepts in Woodbury, Gerten's in Denmark Township, and Rumpca in Cottage Grove.

After discussion, the County Board directed staff to meet with the owners of Composting Concepts as soon as possible to discuss options for the on-going operation of the facility for use by county residents in Woodbury and the surrounding communities. The board also directed staff to meet with the two other privately run composting and yard waste facilities in the southern part of the county. Finally, the board asked staff to work with the City of Woodbury staff to clarify the special use permit necessary to operate a yard waste and compost site on Composting Concepts property, the zoning of the underlying land, and a timeline for development of the property.

The County Board reiterated its support of the private sector efforts to provide this service and remains committed to only providing services in the portions of the county where no private sector business is interested in providing the services the residents expect to receive.

### **June 23 Workshop**

At the June 23 workshop, staff reported back on its discussions with the owners of Composting Concepts, including that the business has closed as of June 14. The owners provided a potential lease cost if the county were interested in leasing their property for continued yard waste services. In addition, staff provided information on discussions with the other private businesses in the southern portion of the county. Representatives from Gerten's, which has a full-service yard waste site just a few miles from the Composting Concepts site in Denmark Township, provided comments to the board during the workshop as well.

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