

HOME NEWS TRIBUNE

"Eco-park" slated for Woodbridge

Facility to turn food scraps into fertilizer

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WOODBIDGE — On the Keasbey waterfront, a new recycling company plans to turn table scraps into green lawns.

Converted Organics, a Boston-based company, is preparing to open a facility that will take food waste and make it into fertilizer on the Bayshore Recycling Corp. property in Keasbey. Expected to open in the spring, it would be the first indoor facility of its type in New Jersey.

Both companies, along with Tilcon, a New York-based asphalt and recycling plant, will form what Mayor John McCormac calls a "recycling eco-park" in Keasbey, embracing the area's current industrial usage as opposed to attempting to force a residential redevelopment.

"I think it's shaping up exactly the way it should," McCormac said. "Some towns want to reinvent their waterfronts, and they are nowhere. The housing market goes up and down, the hotel market goes up and down. But there is always a need for industrial uses and especially recycling uses."

Wednesday, Converted Organics and Bayshore participated in a food waste recycling forum at the Middlesex County Fire Academy in Sayreville sponsored by the county and Rutgers University's Solid Waste Resource Renewal Group. It was the first of 21 forums planned around the state.

Priscilla Hayes, one of the university group's founders, introduced the event by mocking the general public's illusion that "trash is magic" because it gets buried and becomes invisible.

"Sustainability begins when things go from invisible to visible," Hayes said.

According to the state Department of Environmental Protection, the state produces 22 million tons of solid waste each year, 1.6 million tons of which come from food. At the current rising rate of disposal and declining rate of recycling, the state could produce as much as 33 million tons of waste annually by 2015.

"That is simply not sustainable," said Guy Watson, chief of the DEP's Bureau of Recycling and Planning.

And aside from the glut of garbage clogging the state's landfills, Hayes pointed out that the methane gas produced by organic waste can contribute between 22 and 62 times as much of an impact on global warming than carbon dioxide.

"Capturing that methane is certainly something we need to do," Watson said.

Attendees at the forum proposed food-waste recycling as the answer. It would help counter the environmental stresses while saving money for garbage producers and creating a new industry of sustainable substitutes for petroleum-based products. And, Hayes said, it's only fair.

"We can conserve resources rather than stealing from our children," she said.

Jack Walsdorf, chief operating officer of Converted Organics, explained how his operation will work.

Trucks will haul up to 500 tons of food waste from supermarkets, produce suppliers and fish mongers each day to its Keasbey facility for a tipping fee. Workers will sort through the pile of garbage, pulling out non-organic material before it gets pounded by a machine and placed into a tank with water to create a slurry. A digesting machine adds heat, water, oxygen and microbes that eat the waste while increasing the temperature to kill all pathogens. After six days, the final products are dry pellets and a highly concentrated liquid for lawns, gardens and commercial fertilizer.

Valerie Montecalvo, president of Bayshore Recycling, praised her new tenant and its self-contained, indoor business.

"There are no (outdoor) odors," Montecalvo said. "You're not dumping it in a field. It's a very technical, neat operation."

Tuesday, the Township Council introduced an amendment to the land use ordinance encouraging the use of recycled construction material for public works projects and private non-residential projects. Though not binding, the ordinance states a preference for the type of products provided by Bayshore.

In May, Bayshore offered to pay the township a host community benefit of \$1.50 per ton of construction debris and \$.25 per ton of concrete and asphalt. Under the agreement, Bayshore would contribute a minimum of \$1.1 million toward the 2008 budget.

The township plans to negotiate similar, voluntary agreements with Tilcon and Converted Organics.

"We wanted our town to promote recycling," Montecalvo said of the ordinance. "We did it for everyone. We need to start taking care of our environment as citizens."

And according to Stephen Paul of Trenton Fuel Works, another forum attendee, citizens need to start understanding the true nature of garbage.

"Garbage in, garbage out," Paul said, borrowing the computer programmer's credo to describe the ecological cycle of garbage byproducts. "All of this material has to go somewhere. There is no out anymore. Everything is visible, and nothing goes away."

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