



Despite the rain the event was well attended.

Reuse: Options for engaging, citywide initiatives

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All too often, we in the solid waste management field do not have the luxury of working outside the area of residuals management and are busy managing the “end of life” of materials.

One of the great things about city-led reuse initiatives is that they give us the opportunity to play a role in a circular system that has multiple positive outcomes, to name a few; diverting waste from landfill, reducing illegal dumping, and redistributing items to those that need them.

Even though there are many websites and apps that focus on used goods there is still a whole trove of items out there looking for new homes and there are lots of people who love to hunt for bargains. We currently host two different types of reuse events: a trunk sale and a citywide swap meet.

Trunk Sale

A “car boot sale” is a very common event in my native England; it involves vendors meeting at a central location and selling used items from the trunk of their car. Despite the fact that they are popular events at home, I was not sure how it would go down in Canada. However, I was spurred along when I met with some staff at the Regional District of Central Okanagan in BC who also hold this type of event to much community hype each year.

Last year was our inaugural event and was purposely kept relatively small. The event was held in the parking lot of the Curling club. One hundred vendor spots were advertised and I was relieved when they were snapped up in a period of two weeks.

When event day came, the variety of vendors was quite impressive. We had

many people who perhaps did not have enough wares to necessitate a garage sale but for whom our venue was perfect; similarly, residents of apartment buildings were also drawn to the event. Then came the upcycling! I was amazed at how many beautiful goods were made from used items; to name a few, we had shopping bags handwoven from old grocery bags, upcycled china tea services, and upcycled clothing (bags made from jeans and children's clothes made from old sweaters).

Feedback on the event was overwhelmingly positive—every one of our vendors asked us to host another event this year and we were asked to expand it by offering more spots. Bargain hunters asked for more amenities—they wanted somewhere they could grab a coffee and a doughnut from while browsing!

Here are some top tips for running your own trunk sale:

- Keep it free or almost free. We don't charge our vendors though many have said they would be willing to pay \$10-\$20 for their spot.
- Restrict what can be sold to only used items or upcycled items.
- Use it as an opportunity to promote other initiatives; you have a captive audience so make the most of them.
- Advertise heavily in advance using multiple media. We used online, newsprint and radio advertising. Next year we plan to include a reminder of the event in our annual collection calendar. Social media was a great way to gauge the public's interest in the event; we created a special Facebook event for the trunk sale and encouraged residents to sign up and share the event. We also had the radio station conduct a live broadcast on location during the event.
- Invite some local charities along to the end of the event to clean up any unsold items. Most vendors will not want to take their unsold items back home, so to avoid any illegal dumping and to keep the



Happy bargain hunters

reuse trend going it is a great idea to have charities come and accept any remaining unsold items.

- Plan for the basic necessities: wash rooms, coffee facilities, and a hard surface to keep mud at bay.
- Be prepared to help vendors park; to keep the area organised you will need parking attendants.

This year the event will be back by popular demand, only bigger and better than before. We plan to double the capacity for vendors and invite a few food trucks along. I also plan to invite a few more charitable organisations in order to “share the wealth” a bit more.

The only thing that could have been better about our event was the weather. We had been enjoying an Indian summer and hadn't seen much rain at all in the previous three months, but the heavens opened a half hour into our event and it stopped raining fifteen minutes before wrap up! I'm chalking that one up to Murphy's Law. Despite the rain, spirits were not dampened and the “Nanaimo Recycles Trunk Sale” was a success.

Citywide Swap Meet

Reuse Rendezvous is our Citywide Swap Meet held every year on the same weekend in spring. The City has been “hosting” and promoting this event for over fifteen years. Each year the popularity of the event depends greatly on the weather.

The event is run at almost no cost to the City apart from some small advertising costs. During the swap weekend residents are encouraged to mark items with a free sign and place them on the edge of their property. Bargain hunters

are asked to drive slowly around neighborhoods and respectfully collect anything that they wish to take. The event spans the entire weekend and homeowners are asked to take in any uncollected items after the weekend.

In previous years, City staff used City vehicles to collect leftover items after the weekend; however, this proved to be quite costly and it was felt that some residents took advantage of this opportunity to “spring clean” their home by placing out items that were not reusable, so the practice was stopped.

In summing up

The two reuse events offer great opportunities to engage the community in the topic of reuse. While the trunk sale takes considerably more time to plan and host, it comes with the added bonus of giving you a captive audience to which you can promote your other recycling messages. The swap meet event is very much a hands-off event; yet, in years of good weather, it can be a really great event. My feeling is that the events complement each other and provide our residents with a good City-led reuse program.

In looking to expand our repertoire of reuse events, the next step would be to look into hosting and/or sponsoring a suite of repair workshops where residents are taught the skills that will allow them to breathe life back into damaged household items. It would be possible to host these through our parks and rec activity guide and it could make for a great collaborative project.

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