

New Paltz leads way on recycling

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A customer looks at some recycled items for sale at the New Paltz ReUse Center. / Submitted photo

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ZOOM

The ReUse Center is a warehouse in New Paltz filled with used items for sale. / Submitted photo

Resources

For more information on the New Paltz ReUse Center, visit www.newpaltzreuse.org or call 845- 255-8456.

More

Behind some of the latest waste-reduction strategies from the Environmental Protection Agency and the state Department of Environmental Conservation is a simple idea: Garbage that used to be thrown away or recycled can be turned into a commodity.

To that end, the Town of New Paltz recently opened its ReUse Center at the town transfer station and former landfill site at the end of Clearwater Drive.

The brand-new warehouse holds all kinds of materials — from windows and fabric swatches to doors and tissue paper — that can be purchased at pennies on the dollar.

“Really, there is no such thing as garbage,” New Paltz recycling coordinator Laura Petit said.

The building houses a cornucopia of odds and ends that can serve any number of uses, from crafting and the arts to home building.

Among the items:

Boxes of surgery scalpels that have passed their expiration date, but can be used as very precise crafting knives. Cost: \$2 a box.

Tissue paper that can be used to fill those shirt boxes at Christmas time. Cost: \$1 a roll.

The list goes on: shipping boxes, wooden frames, bolts, screws, ceramic tile, postcards — you name it.

The most expensive item on the list: 48-inch or larger windows at \$10 each.

“It would be nice if we could get some of the larger retail stores to jump on,” Petit said. “If they have old and obsolete or unsellable materials that they would be able to donate to us, I think we would be able to move those along rather than landfilling them.”

The project was inspired by the Hudson Valley Materials Exchange, which was privately operated for a while at the town dump site.

The town’s project was partially funded by a \$175,000 grant from the Department of Environmental Conservation.

The warehouse building is a model of high-efficiency energy use, featuring a radiant heating system that supplies heat directly under the building’s concrete floors.

The idea not only seeks to reduce the amount of stuff that enters the waste stream, but also the amount of energy it takes to get it there.

Behind the ReUse Center is the town’s blossoming food compost program. What began with food waste from the State University of New York at New Paltz has grown to include food waste from other local colleges and some supermarkets.

Indeed, New Paltz is at its capacity. Again, the idea is that food waste that would have been trucked to some landfill somewhere stays local, where it is converted to compost and then sold as a commodity, providing revenue to the town. Petit hopes other towns will jump on.

All of these efforts jibe with New Paltz’s role as one of 13 communities selected by the EPA to serve as “zero waste” models. Good ideas like this one will be collected and promoted by the EPA to other municipalities.

In many ways, the town’s effort is quite similar to those who seek to reduce water pollution by controlling stormwater runoff.

These are not battles that can always be won with huge, regional projects. Rather, they are won in tiny increments, one town, one building or one person at a time.