

**Shiawassee County Recycling Listening Sessions**  
***January 2025 – June 2025***

**Summary Report**

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July 1, 2025

With support and funding provided by the Cook Family Foundation.

## **Introduction**

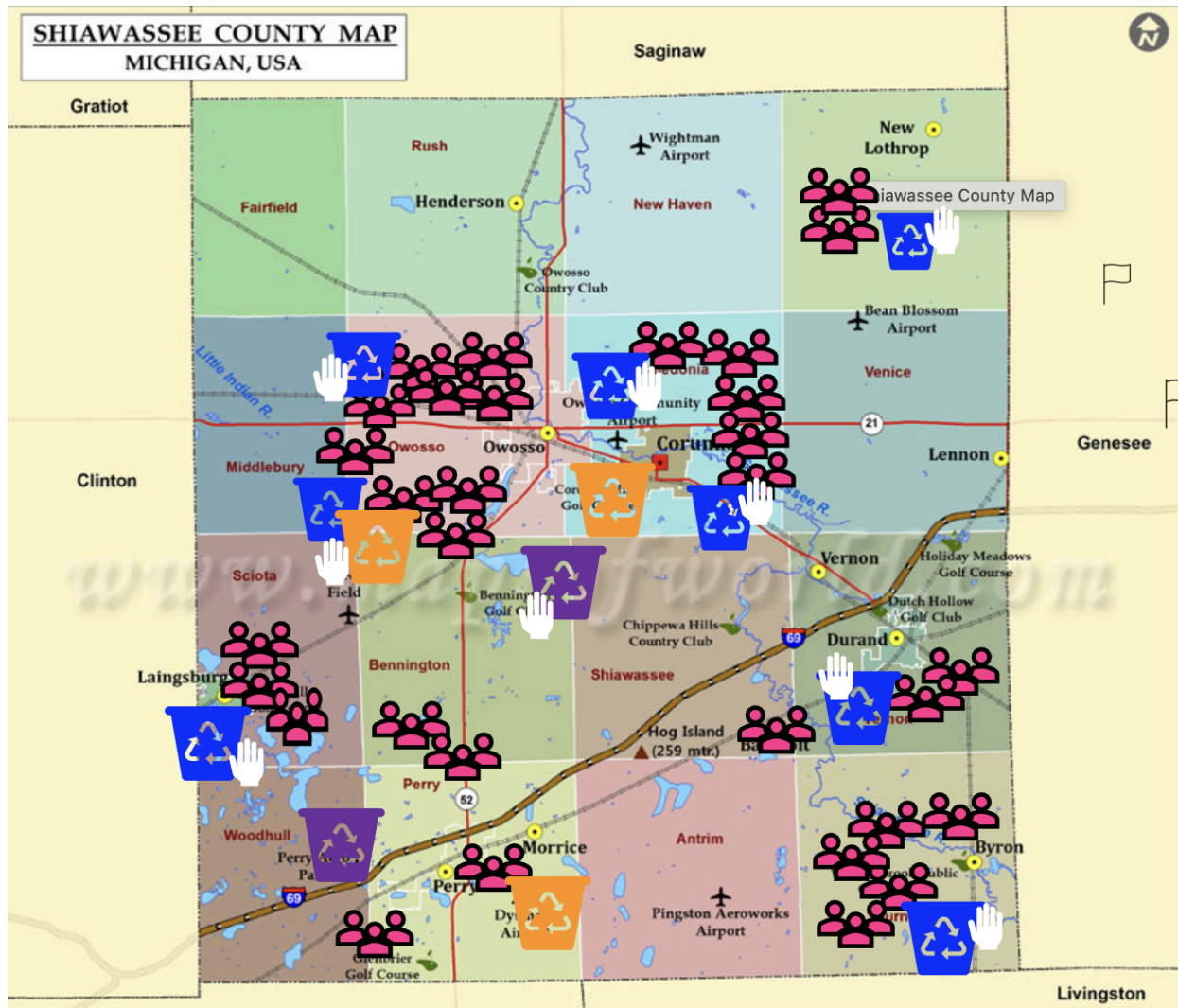
This summary report presents the findings from the Shiawassee County *Recycling Listening Sessions* held between January 2025 and June 2025. The sessions were facilitated by Kari Krantz, PhD, and aimed to gather community input on recycling practices, challenges, and potential solutions. The sessions took place at various locations, including the Owosso Armory, Caledonia Township Hall, Corunna Community Center, Byron Community Center, Durand High School, Laingsburg United Methodist Church, New Lothrop Community Center, as well as virtual sessions. Participants representing various demographics shared their thoughts, priorities, and concerns regarding recycling in their communities. This report synthesizes the key themes and insights from these sessions to inform future recycling initiatives and policies in Shiawassee County.

## **Listening Session Locations Identified on Shiawassee County Map**

Blue Bins -In Person Sessions      Orange Bins -H.S. Student Sessions

Purple Bins -Virtual Sessions      Ine Pink Person – One Participant

White Gloves -Community Champions



## Listening Session Elements

It is important to note the unique nature of *Listening Sessions* and to emphasize the power of this format in engaging people in positive and respectful settings to elicit inclusive and impactful information. Each *Recycling Listening Session* lasted a minimum of 90 minutes, with many *Sessions* continuing beyond the established timeframe. Unlike typical townhalls and the often emotion-laden public comment portions of public meetings, *Listening Sessions* allow every participant to speak in a norm-based environment with no limits on speaking time (provided speakers remain on topic).

Participants are encouraged to speak openly and honestly, without concern about comments or interruptions from others. Participants are asked to focus on listening carefully to one another. This respectful format proves time after time that nearly all participants are compelled to speak freely, recognizing that variances of opinions are expected and appreciated. The expectations shared at the onset of each *Session* provide boundaries and guidance that few, if any, participants ever choose to abandon. As a result, the notes that are taken at each session reflect insights that

are thoughtful and authentic. This information offers community leaders a rich database from which future decisions and plans can develop.

During the *Recycling Listening Sessions*, participants were asked a series of questions. Each question was posed to the group, one at a time, with every participant asked to respond. Participants were able to address each question for a second time after each round. After three rounds of questions, participants were asked to reflect on their experience during the *Listening Session*, comparing their feelings as they entered the *Session* and as they concluded the *Session*.

Countywide, **120 people collectively engaged in over 30 hours of listening and speaking about recycling** during these initial gatherings. This format helped spark the potential for this core group of Shiawassee County residents to become key community leaders in the materials waste reduction planning and implementation.

**The following are the questions asked during the *Recycling Listening Sessions*, with the transcribed notes (raw data) listed after each one. Following each section is a summary of the themes that emerged and additional analyses.**

## Question 1- What Are Your General Thoughts About Recycling?

### **Owosso Armory, February 24, 2025 (9 participants)**

I've been recycling all my adult life. I've driven to VGs in Durand. I try to recycle.

E- waste, now I put things by the curb, I'm all about recycling.

We also recycle. We go to MSU – they take everything. Laingsburg, DJ Root, what do they offer? Recycling is the right thing to do. Recycling is needed. I wish we had curbside recycling right now. If it takes taxes to have it, then I'm OK with that.

We compost everything.

I'm relatively new to Owosso. I was not aware of anything related to recycling here. I lived in a bigger city before moving here. They provided recycling bins along with garbage pickup. As with everything, the more convenient, there will be more involved.

We've all heard that recycling ends up going to landfills anyway. I would like to see trust being built that recycling does what it is intended to do (not into landfills).

I'm going to sound off topic. I've been a lifetime scout. I have a technology business where we work on desktops, tablets, cell phones, etc. The plastic and cardboard coming from Amazon is outrageous! We could do more than we currently do.

My wife and I recycle. We drive things to Laingsburg. We would like more guidance. A lot of people are not able to pay for any recycling. Specialty Salvage— we pay one dollar per week here. I think we need to incentivize our community to recycle.

I go to MSU weekly to drop off my recyclables. Communities all over our nation do great things. Before, local trash companies were fearful that they would be put out of business. We need expanded resources.

When I first started getting into recycling, there were many companies. Many of them ended up closing because it was a mess. The recycling process should be the end-all, be-all. At Michigan State, recycling is open all the time. Greater Laingsburg Recycling is a great resource! I don't always know, and I'm not sure if recycled materials go to landfills, "anyway". Every time I throw something away, I wonder. I see so much cardboard on the curbside on garbage days. Cardboard should never go to landfills. The best way to educate our community is to go through our kids in our schools.

I came to this today because recycling is not good here. I have been to many places over the years in my attempt to drop off recyclable materials. I'm curious as to why some enterprises fail and others do well. I would contact every adjacent county and get all the experiences together to see how it can cost less and be better. When the group decides to initiate a collaboration, I will be there.

Recycling should be done because it is the right thing to do. It is imperative to do! My current trash company doesn't do it. I am worried about our environment.

I am passionate about recycling. Recycling is a public service - it is a utility. I don't like the patchwork recycling that happens now. I want to see recycling driven by a large group. It is so frustrating that our area doesn't have a stronger recycling system. Recycling is an essential need for our community.

### **Owosso Armory, April 12, 2025 (5 participants)**

Recycling is a great idea. It scares me, though - the implementation cost and the cost to small businesses. It's going to cost money.

I just bought a home in Owosso. I also have a house in the Upper Peninsula. I was stunned that there isn't recycling here. In Florida, it was offered twice a week. Now here, I bought a home with a recycling bin, only the size of four shoeboxes. Up north – they share a large processing facility with an increase in my tax assessment. I think quality of life is important. And I'm curious as to why municipalities here don't have recycling.

Recycling - my first thought is why not, and it's about time! My second thought is, it takes perseverance and space. I'm concerned that while doing it, we need space.

I grew up here. And I'm not shocked we don't have it. I've been driving my recycling to East Lansing for 20 years. I just have to feel like there are many models for doing this, and let's just get it done. We need to work backward from 2028 to now.

We learned about cans, and we can learn about how to do this. It used to be that our community was about 60% homeowners and 40% renters. Landlords will need to incorporate this cost into their rent. The money is going to be an issue. When we put that up for discussion to the people, it will be a problem. Old clothes are a problem - people just think of clothes being disposable these days. I support this effort very much. A lot of the EPA money is drying up. Trucks take a lot of gas. I'm glad this is being mandated.

### **Caledonia Township Hall, April 1, 2025, (5) Participants**

I have experienced barriers to recycling. I reached out to Kelly's letting them know that I'm interested, and they said that it is not available. As a board member, I am worried about unfunded mandates. Who is going to pay for this? This is a valid point that concerns a lot of people, especially with the water rate increase conversation happening in Owosso.

I am an environmental person. I care about waste. I hate the fact that I feel our area doesn't care about this. I feel that I am relatively uneducated about what composting can do. I tried recycling with a relatively new person/new business. It was a disaster. I'm jealous of other areas in the country that have recycling. My electric car is right out there, so I try to do my part.

When I saw this, I thought, it's about time! I come from Haslett. I think a small thing can be done here... Like the Fitness Center [at Memorial Healthcare] - Plastic bottles. We should put a bin there to catch the plastic bottles! It would be great to have a coordinated effort for our e-waste, our plastics, our glass, etc. Imagine if Kroger got rid of single-use plastics!

My 10,000 feet high view –implementation is my concern. Will it likely roll out in the city? What will the cost be? My daughter did a recycling project once, and I thought it was great. Who, what, and how, for our people? A lot of our population is at or below the poverty line. I don't know a lot about recycling. Will this raise taxes? I'm worried about putting this on the list of more things to worry about for our population. This is too much.

I'm a tree hugger. I look at the longevity of our planet. I live in a rural area, and my husband is a farmer. I think about the issue in Cadillac, where the water and wells in the city were contaminated. It was not the fault of large corporations like many had predicted. It was the residential use of shaving cream! We do have to do something. It has to be done well. Windmills, gee. [referencing community uproar to potential windmill plans]. Let's make sure whatever we do works.

### **Corunna Community Center, April 1, 2025, (4) Participants**

The local challenge is waste flow control. I don't want to have to seek out several different resources to manage my waste.

When I heard about these *Listening Sessions* starting, I thought, boy, I want to be involved. We recycle and collect our waste. We take everything to Laingsburg. It is something we really need. We should have in our heads that we must save our planet. But many don't.

My opinion is to start with plastics, then add something else, and then start small and get it going. When I had my recycling business, I had a handicapped person run things and sort my materials. Everyone loved him. There's a lot to this. There are a lot of moving parts. We might need to think about the bottle collections. They started out at two cents, and then they went to ten cents, and then everybody collected their bottles.

I've always recycled too. Earth Day in the 70s alerted me to it as a kid. I feel like it's almost a moral thing to care for Creation. A catholic thing for me. We've gotten more knowledgeable over the last 10 years. I've seen it in other locations. Sault Sainte Marie - Public/private. I'm suspicious of public/private.

When I was involved in city government, I had requested that smaller trucks haul in the city.

I recycle every single thing. I take recycling from my own workplace. I separate #1 and #2 plastics and take everything. I don't want to see the small businesses for hauling go under. #5 plastic is very common,

but only Laingsburg takes it. We need more than Great Lakes Fusion here. It's muddy there, and hard hats are required. A lot of people I know my age would recycle if it were convenient.

There's so much Styrofoam at so many events. If it was made easier, more people would participate. It is just so complicated now.

I support recycling and a broader foundation for it, but we have the Styrofoam factory here (Sonoco) – they decided to originate in Owosso over Chesaning because the water supply here was better. Styrofoam is ubiquitous - it's everywhere - and it ends up in the river.

### **Byron Community Center, April 8, 2025, (15) Participants**

Before, I lived in Oakland County, and when I moved here, I was surprised by the lack of recycling. And those who do recycle, commute to take their things. I see that we need to educate folks. I do see lots of composting here among the farmers. The people I know would support and participate in recycling if it was local.

We used to have a trashorator, but people didn't follow the rules. We need solid education for people. People need to understand the why.

Honestly, I don't think about it. I burn my stuff and throw everything else away. I don't know where the stuff goes. However, I think we need to start with our youth in educating them.

I won't remember to take the sticker off the banana. Simplicity [a large company in Durand] used to be involved and care about recycling. The new corporation that took over doesn't care now.

At the county level, I would like to see more recycling stations. Make it convenient. I'm not driving to Laingsburg or over 15 miles to recycle. Perhaps one station for every 15 miles. It's a time thing. It must be convenient.

Convenience is what I'm looking for.

Recycling is important. When I lived in Flushing and Swartz Creek, we had recycling. Now I take my recycling to Great Lakes Fusion. Convenience would really be great. We also go to MSU and make a day of it.

As a transporter, I've been involved in the Michigan recycling coalition since the 1980s. We've learned that if there is a sight or a location that is more than 15 miles away, people won't use it.

My biggest complaint is that the recycling truck picks it up, and it spews all over. Then I pick it up, and it goes back in the trash bin.

I would recycle. I would prefer curbside, but know that within the last 10 years, the village board sent a survey out, and they found that the village doesn't want the township to get a single hauler. Could the village do a new, updated survey? Could the village have its own survey? A survey could be sent out with the quarterly water bills, and we could include a flyer.

### **Durand High School, March 15, 2025 (6) Participants**

Recycling to reuse stuff should be our focus.

We don't have a great solution. We focus on reducing, but this is not convenient to our culture.

Recycling, now I'm thinking more about the circular economy. What are our commercial waste streams? The recycling of plastic is in question. Is there more here? How do we capture the waste stream? Can we have both/and solutions? I'm curious, is there something already happening that's working very well?

We need to recycle everything we can. Plastics, do these end up in landfills? We can make an effort. We have a hard time taking Styrofoam. We need to properly dispose of hazardous waste, but nothing is convenient. We need publicity. We need to know where the locations are and make it more convenient. We are very willing, and yet it's still hard for us.

There's a general confusion or lack of systemwide understanding. What are the multiple uses of plastics?

I'm shocked that we don't have a systemwide program already. Older folks are pretty set in their ways. The youth angle is beautiful because it starts here. Make recycling accessible and timely. Educate people on how to recycle and what to recycle. For example, Meijer used to collect engine oil but spillage and people not doing it properly caused them to stop. The push to get the bottles deposit was not necessarily initiated as a pollution solver but as a sin tax.

There are three pillars of sustainability. Social, economic, and environmental. There are a whole lot of considerations for this topic. Is this residential or everyone? Will this include organics? Will there be different options for various streams? Microplastics? Bio accumulation? We need to educate our young to reduce!

I would love a store to bring your own stuff and buy in bulk. There were many ways in Italy they solved these problems. Our plan must be easier than what we have now.

If we treat people like criminals, they will behave like criminals. We run the Durand Community Garden, and many people questioned some of our trust-based policies. People rise to the occasion. In a recent report of social determinants of health, the microplastics in our bodies were a big concern.

### **Laingsburg Methodist Church, April 3, 2025, (6 ) Participants**

I think it's going to be a tough sell. Everything seems so political right now. If cost is involved, people will say no. Personally, I would pay a fee to have access. To live in this area – it's beautiful! When I drive around our county roads, I see trash and ditches, plastic bags flying around. I see so much trash on garbage day!

I think it has to be convenient and viable for people. If there isn't a market for the products... I don't think curbside recycling makes sense for rural areas. We're going to have to work hard...

Convenience – ensuring that the things that are recycled actually go where they're supposed to go. People need assurances and trust. These are the best ways to get people to do something. Schools are the best places. Kids bug their parents and action happens.

Education is important for people to raise awareness. Getting our youth involved capitalizes on an opportunity versus a chore. I learned that secondhand smoke was harmful when I was in school and young. I came home and bugged my parents, and they stopped smoking in the house. Everyone's part is important - not to politicize.

It seems overwhelming. We read about microplastics in our bodies. How can we keep fighting for this? I fought in a war that we didn't win - there were lives lost in Vietnam. Will we lose this war [sustaining and



protecting our natural resources]? When I go grocery shopping, I see Meijer's carts and all the plastic bags being used.

I know how conservative our community is. I suspect it will always be. However, being part of the small recycling group [Greater Laingsburg Recyclers], we have met so many people, and it has been so positive. I tend to look at things with an even bigger perspective. 1) We have a problem: Meijer's plastic. 2) How do we convince people that there is a problem? I feel I must do my part. Plastic bags are a problem. I remember when gas station attendants pumped everyone's gas for us. Then people had to start pumping their own. There was a big outcry. Now, everyone pumps their own gas. Plastic is a petroleum product. Every time you complain about gas prices, remember this. Education is the key to addressing climate change and sustainability.

### **New Lothrop Community Center, March 3, 2025, (4) Participants**

I think it's great that they're doing this. Our community is limited. If we had more options and things were more accessible, it would be great.

I live in Saginaw County, and I own Resourceful Recycling. We cater to residential recycling. My goal is to make recycling more accessible. We need more recycling stations with greater convenience. What do we do with our tires, our paint cans, etc? There is bad information out there.

I have a question as to what I can put into recycling. My son says I can't put dirty peanut butter plastic jars into the recycling bin. We need education! I heard the twisty on a bread wrapper takes eight years to decompose. We need community education and education starting with our youth. A newsletter in our tax statements might be a good method for some education.

What happens to a water bottle? People need to learn what actually happens and that products do end up going where they are intended to go. This entire topic is a job creation opportunity. In my business alone, I've created 14 jobs because of recycling.

### **Virtual Session, March 15, 2025, (3) Participants**

I don't see enough reducing and reusing going on. We're not doing well at avoiding single-use products. For the basic people, cans and bottles have worked. We don't seem to have enough education on end-use products.

To what extent is there a market for recycled goods? What products are marketable? What changes are in the market and/or no market? How much of the recycled materials are contaminated (e.g., a greasy pizza box being put in with clean cardboard)?

There is a lack of consistency in knowledge. As an individual, how do I know what I can recycle?

Contamination is a problem. I have a friend who had a program that would collect cardboard and glass together, and the glass breakages ended up damaging the machinery. We need education from the ground up on how to recycle.

### **Virtual Session April 3, 2025 (4) Participants**

Recycling is really important. I have a concern that there are reports we hear saying that plastics are going to landfills anyway. I lived in the city in the southwest where we had one hauler, the same company, but two trucks came on two different days. One for regular pick up and one for recycling.

Plastics are an issue. We recently traveled to Canada. The Walmart there doesn't even offer plastic bags! We need to change our culture. It's horrible seeing all the plastic bags we use around here. And we know that microplastics are in our bodies.

I want to recycle. I'm struggling right now because I don't have time or personal bandwidth to do what's right, but I know what I should do. I do know that I need to rinse out my peanut butter jar. But, I need a more convenient means because I personally am so busy as a mom of a 4-year-old and as a working woman. This topic is very important to me. I did my research on whether to use disposable diapers (increasing trash) or cloth diapers (water and sewage used from rinsing). I believe little changes by everyone can add up to a major good.

I'm on the Township Board, and reducing materials waste is a mandate. What will be required? I bring my cardboard from home to my work because we recycle there. But we have no recycling for plastic or glass.

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## Question 2 - What is Your Biggest Concern/Priority?

### **Owosso Armory**

My biggest priority is to recycle as much as possible. I think it is awesome that people are coming together to discuss this important topic.

Curbside recycling is my priority.

The environment is my priority.

Recycling is a win-win. First, we need to get plastics sorted out. Second, we need to keep toxins out of our garbage. People should automatically know that batteries should never go into the garbage!

My top priority is to get a process. This step and the next, this step, the process needs to be clear.

My priority is to have comprehensive, reliable, curbside recycling in Owosso.

My biggest concern is plastics and how we get to recycling as much as possible.

I would like to see a list of recycling entities and a list of what products are recyclable. Where can I go?

My biggest concern or top priority is education. People need to know information about curbside recycling. In big communities, people watch videos to know what to do with their waste.

My biggest priority is education and accessibility. Curbside recycling is a priority.

### **Owosso Armory**

I think our biggest priority is that we need a facility. When Premier was in business, he had three pole barns. We need a place to put stuff.

My biggest priority is to see that it is done. To educate the taxpayers as to the value of recycling. We need to involve our young children, who will influence their families. More education is very important!

My top priority is that it needs to happen. Are people going to do it? Can it be affordable for the county and for me? The financial stability of the program must be considered upfront.

I'm of the mind that we need to figure it out and get it done. We need to cut down on all the trucks hauling.

My biggest concern is selling it to the community. My son lived in New York City, and there was mandatory recycling. They provided cans, but they got fined if they put something in the cans that didn't belong. The question that needs to be addressed is, where do they take the material and where does it go from there?

### **Caledonia Township Hall**

My biggest concern is two-fold. First, apathy from the general public. Next, funding is a concern. With all the uncertainty going on from Washington... I think a lot of people support the idea, but the devil is in the details.

By-in and apathy are my biggest concerns.

I have the same concerns.

I'm retired. I'm willing to volunteer. I think too many people will not say to themselves, I'm going to drive myself to Laingsburg. Recycling needs to be convenient and easy to do.

I can't save the world. It needs to start small and be convenient.

My biggest concern is, will recycling be a burden to people, a burden to municipalities, schools, and small businesses? What will be the impact on all of them?

My biggest concern is the trust factor. Some key people on the committee [County Recycling Workgroup] are on the SEDP board. They get access to large grants and jobs. I hope that many bids will occur. The county will be concerned if some members of the SEDP board are driving this process. The bid process will be watched closely. It's a good way to protect the integrity of the process. Get lots of bids.

We need volunteer boots on the ground.

### **Corunna Community Center**

A lot of people don't know that every plastic has a number. The effort in our county has to start with only a few items, for example, #1 and #4 plastics. We need to educate! We need to teach our people what needs to be done and how to sort materials. DJ Root is such a positive - they greet us with smiles every time.

My biggest concern is education. I'm not fully convinced people in this county want to recycle. "You can't make me!" There is always a way for someone to make money, so this should be an opportunity for small businesses - for example, can a sorter get funds? Keep the plan simple and accessible.

The education of the community is my biggest concern. I like the idea of curbside, but you can't make people do it.

My biggest concern is, "it's all going to the dump anyway!" [mentality of most people].

"No clam shells". People put the wrong stuff in and ruin it.

Resolving the participation level issue. This is an ongoing problem (historically seen). We need to control the waste flow and keep it simple.

### **Byron Community Center**

My top priority is - it's the right thing to do for future generations. We all need to help our environment, and we all need to do our part.

My biggest priority is convenience.

Convenience is my biggest concern

Convenience and accessibility are my biggest priorities.

Convenience.

Education is my top priority. Get information into the schools, and our kids will get things rolling.

Convenience.

My priority is making the world better.

Convenience is my biggest concern.

My priority is to have a place to recycle and to get the plastics out of the ditches.

Access and convenience for a better future are my priorities.

### **Durand High School**

My biggest concern is accessibility for all of our county. Sustainability has to be a culture - we need a culture change. There needs to be a central location, common hours, and consistency (e.g. Everyone closes at 3:00).

A concern I have is, do we know what waste we have presently? If it's too difficult, people won't do it. Collection sites need to have cameras 24/7. We need to educate kids.

Ease and accessibility are my priorities. People must know about it. Communication must be clear.

When these programs are being developed, are experts at the table? Or are they the typical local businessman? Down-cycled or up-cycled? Culture needs to change and that comes with education at the same time. Is this a planned program failure? Are we using chemists, sustainability experts, biological experts, or relying on our typical local businessmen?

We need a strong community education piece. When I was a residential hall leader, they brought in a video that demonstrated the various waste streams on campus and this educated the residents. What percentage of trucks can haul recycling?

### **Laingsburg Methodist Church**

The price of plastics. If we could equate how much it really costs, I believe that would help and could be included in public awareness efforts. We need education. We need everyone to understand what a circular economy means.

I hope this does not become politicized. I hope that we can find common ground toward a viable solution.

My biggest concern is that people will not embrace it or will do a half-hearted job at it. For example, putting half-filled milk jugs into the bin causes contamination. I wish our society weren't so consumed with plastic. Ice cream cups and plastic spoons. What happens to these? Interestingly, people give me a "funny look" when I have my own spoon or I bring my own shopping bags. In Germany, they bring their own boxes.

My biggest concern is that it [materials waste] actually gets recycled and that there is a market for recyclables. To become mainstream, it has to pay for itself.

Make sure there is a stream that gets recycled. Seeing more items truly get recycled. Until people see that paying for multiple garbage haulers costs more money, I don't think we will see support for a change to a single-hauler system. Education is paramount.

Recycling needs to be simplified. It is too complex. Think about the number of plastics. I've been doing this for 20 years. Seldom do I go to recycling and not have a question myself.

### **New Lothrop Community Center**

My biggest priority is farmland. A lot of people don't know what to do about their spare tires and other rubbish.

Education is my priority. My son lives in Ohio and can't believe we don't recycle glass. Is Laingsburg Recycling set up to take glass? Great Lakes Fusion uses ground-up glass for sandblasting.

My priority is that we need better centers that are more convenient.

My priority is more information.

### **Virtual Session**

My biggest concern is that we are about to throw a lot of money into a program that might not work.

My biggest concern is that the changes and inconsistencies in what waste is collected poses unworkable conditions.

I follow this issue perhaps more closely than others and still wonder, do I remove all the caps on my bottles or leave them on? My highest priority is to have curbside recycling where you throw everything into the recycling bin.

My priority is to include curbside recycling into the plan. But we need to make a clear and concise communication effort.

## **Virtual Session**

My biggest priority is ease of access.

My biggest priority is how to change our current disposable culture. Think of our restaurants and all the to-go boxes and all the paper bags used in just this industry.

My biggest priority is convenience. Philosophically, I want to do my part and do something that is tangible.

My biggest concern is so many boxes with online shopping, and how we can use these in new ways. I'm very concerned about Styrofoam.

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## **Question 3-What Solutions Can You Offer?**

### **Owosso Armory**

Recycling and trash pick-up should be included as a city service. I see different bins all over everywhere. I think we have five different trash companies, which means we have five different huge trucks coming down the street, driving all over. These trucks create a great deal of noise and harm to our roads (my tax dollars are used to fix the roads).

Big companies should be responsible, especially with their e-waste (tax credit).

Manufacturing plastics and big corporations need to be responsible.

The bottle bill works quite well. Perhaps there needs to be another bill related to different kinds of waste materials.

My solution is that the whole system needs to work seamlessly. Burning barrels need to go!

Awareness must begin at the point of the consumer. We need to stop and diminish material use at the source.

Curbside recycling should be done side-by-side with trash pickup.

Trash and recycling should be hand-in-hand and should be consistent and accessible.

Make sure the system is transparent. Build trust in the recycling process that materials actually go to the appropriate places.

### **Owosso Armory**

I really don't have a solution. Talking to people who are in the business – clean jugs in a bin but one dirty jug and everything is contaminated. We could be in a no-win situation. What are we going to ask of our constituents?

It's a given for me. I never imagined I'd be living in a place that doesn't recycle. In Ann Arbor, there is a largely shared value. You don't get anything for nothing. We need more education that involves learning and sharing the value of recycling.

This has to be a culture shift and being OK with paying a little more. We need ongoing education, starting with our young, to learn how to do this and to see the value. The ease of use has to be a priority. When I'm at my brother's house, everything has its place. There is a bin for everything. We as a community must value our environment, and we need to learn how to do this.

A priority has to be that recycling is damn convenient. I'm way overpaying my garbage hauler right now! I'm so glad to hear that our young people are interested in recycling.

We have lost a sense of collective responsibility. Education is a must. Educating our youth is a must. Community education is also a must in an ongoing manner.

Incentives might work. Maybe two neighbors share a recycling bin. We need to get people involved. An idea— Waste Management does a % and Kelly's does a %. Get stickers for car windows that say "I recycle". Remember, VGs collected milk cartons to make docks up north. Our community needs to see the effects of recycling.

Education. People need to see that many products come out of recycling efforts. It needs to be a campaign. In rural communities, it might mean knocking on doors- we know that makes a difference. Community leaders need to advocate for this. We need commercials, advertising, and people to take pictures of usable recycling things. I remember in my youth, I came home to tell my parents not to smoke. Maybe we need a recycling article every week in the Argus Press.

### **Caledonia Township Hall**

Having some kind of curbside pickup in each jurisdiction.

Ditto!

Offer curbside recycling and help build a mindset of a sense of pride and willingness to contribute to the greater good.

A solution would be to gather food waste in restaurants in schools like something that Vernon does. Compost piles.

Offer curbside with consideration that the devil is in the details.

Build on the popular wave of small businesses taking advantage of opportunities that are needed (slaughterhouses, repair shops, small farm niche markets, etc.). All going back to nature.

Utilize our schools to build momentum and strengthen the education of our youth.

### **Corunna Community Center**

Recycling is complex. It's a slow-moving train. Is it going to be free? Will people running it make money? It will take time. The input sessions like this are a plus.

A solution is to have a coordinated education effort. Keep doing what we're doing. The mandate might give the edge to finally have something happen.

Education – Continually get more people involved. Can we get groups of people to talk together?

Get flow control from various contracted services through a city contract. Residents won't see a larger cost. Flow control will need to occur if mandated.

Considerable employment for all refuse companies.

Build positive attitudes and stronger desires to do community service.

### **Byron Community Center**

My solution is to have the convenience and the location to be well-established.

My solution is to offer curbside.

My solution is to have individual containers for everyone, and it is all thrown into one.

My solution is to make it easy enough for people to access it.

Keep it simple.

My solution is to, minimally, have a monthly drop-off opportunity.

Offer curbside.

Make it convenient.

My solution is for everyone to have an open mind and do it.

My solution is to have a drop-off site within 15 miles.

My solution is for local access!

My solution is for things to be convenient. We did this in the 80s. Without the convenience, it's not going to happen. The county has a push this time. And we must set goals. If your business picks up trash, they must provide recycling pickup. My concern is that some haulers really don't like the mandate. Food waste is the biggest waste in landfills. The second biggest material waste is cardboard. We need to build stronger education and knowledge, starting with our youth. We all have to come together to do it right this time.

### **Durand High School**

Educate our youth and get people used to a culture of repairing. Cobblers, lamp repair, and other small businesses that promote repair and reuse versus disposal.

It would be a powerful video to show a single piece of trash from various waste streams and where that trash ends up going. QR codes can be used at all recycling stations. Dynamic information can be given using these codes.

Elementary schools could pick up corporate waste rather than selling cookies and candy.

Cardboard from businesses – problems exist for trash recycling for businesses.

There could be a county recycling Summit held to show various foundational concepts and new things.



### **Laingsburg Methodist Church**

I think a solution is to implement a phased approach. Maybe we focus on plastics at first. Next, we focus on glass. When I try to make habit changes, I do them in steps.

Take baby steps toward recycling aspects. Cardboard and paper are so much of the garbage that is picked up. Watching people at Greater Laingsburg Recycling, we see a lot of cardboard.

We need encouragement. Offer training to those who are most interested, and they commit to helping others.

People don't trust politicians. People like Taylor Swift and rappers need to help in advertising for cutting plastic use down. Those who command attention should be asked to help lead.

I think the solution centers on education. Our schools need to be involved. Our sixth graders in Laingsburg spend a whole day at the Greater Laingsburg Recycling Center. Parents listen to their kids.

A solution is a countywide system. I heard rumblings that they might do \$.10 on plastic jugs. If you get your money back, you might clean them and support recycling. We need more receptacles in public areas for recycling. For example, at a gas station, there needs to be a recycling receptacle.

I see an advertising campaign that is fun and interesting and promotes the social cause. Example is the *Recycling Raccoons* used previously by the DNR. Make buttons with catchy messages, make it fun. Make the message noticeable and memorable.

Ask vendors like McDonald's and gas stations if you can use your own glass container versus the Styrofoam options.

What is the incentive to bring our own cups, carry our own chopsticks, bring our own to-go-box?

The state should offer grants to encourage use of recycled products. There needs to be a coordinated effort to build an entire system. There should be a *Shark Tank* for recycling ideas.

In Saskatchewan, Canada, they've had curbside recycling for 10 years. They have everything returnable. If they can do it, we can do it.

### **New Lothrop Community Center**

Education, beginning with our youth, and also community education for our adults.

Help shape the message of recycling 1) helps with beautification, 2) lessens noise (multiple trucks), and 3) wear and tear on our roads (weight restrictions not being followed).

#### **Virtual Session**

Have at least one sizable facility nearby to allow the majority to use it versus driving to Michigan State University or other far-away locations.

Have mandatory curbside recycling in Owosso. Help people know how you separate waste. I believe we need K-12 education.

I would like to see a facility in reasonable proximity that would accept a broad range of materials.

Education is the answer, and clear education and communication are needed. We need to help everyone understand that this is a worthwhile endeavor for many reasons. We need to know clearly what is accepted and what we do with it is impactful, versus not knowing what really happens at the end of the process. We need to help build trust to ensure that we are getting the outcome we want.

### **Virtual Session**

My solution is through education. I see this is the only way to help change our present culture. How can we get buy-in from our businesses? In the southwest, everyone had two containers, and everyone did it. There was always a constant reminder to recycle and to buy reusable things. When we lived in St. John's you bought specific bags for things.

Curbside would be convenient. Currently, we go to MSU or Granger in Lansing. It could still be voluntary. We should think about a solution that is both/and.

\*\*\*

### **Closing Question (Fill in the Blank)**

I came into the session feeling \_\_\_\_\_, and I am leaving the session feeling \_\_\_\_\_.

### ***I Came into the Session Feeling...***

#### **Owosso Armory**

that I wanted to see if like-minds would be present.

that I wanted to learn more.

wanting to learn more.

wondering what opinions are out there.

curious about the range of viewpoints.

nervous because of the politically charged environment.

hoping to learn more about the topic.

a bit nervous.

concerned about the environment.

curious and interested in what the impetus was for the meeting.

#### **Owosso Armory**

unexpected. Wanting to see where people are at.

this is necessary.

uncertain.

as an open book.

wanting to push to keep D.J. Root here.

**Caledonia Township Hall**

No time allowed for closing activity.

**Corunna Community Center**

No time allowed for closing activity.

**Byron Community Center**

hopeful.

wondering if she would make me sign something.

curious.

wondering what you were going to try to do.

curious.

curious.

curious.

curious.

wondering what this was all about.

curious about opinions.

wondering what the meeting would be about.

came to learn and see.

hopeful.

curious.

**Durand High School**

optimistic.

questioning.

curious.

curious.

curious.

hoping for info.

curious.

### **Laingsburg Methodist Church**

inquisitive.

cautiously optimistic.

questioning how and why.

I wanted results.

late.

curious.

### **New Lothrop Community Center**

No time allowed for closing activity.

### **Virtual Session**

No time allowed for closing activity.

### **Virtual Session**

interested and encouraged.

that I might feel bored.

skeptical that any progress can happen.

curious.

\*\*\*

### ***I'm Leaving the Session feeling...***

### **Owosso Armory**

optimistic.

like some good ideas were shared.

good energy.

seeing how I might alter my business.

encouraged by the variety of participants and the unanimity voiced.

optimistic.

pessimistic.

encouraged and heard.

optimistic.

### **Owosso Armory**

still pessimistic.

encouraged because collectively, we can make a change. We can become small volunteer groups.

more hopeful.

more hopeful now. I know we can do this.

this is a daunting task (the people issue).

### **Caledonia Township Hall**

No time allowed for closing activity.

### **Corunna Community Center**

No time allowed for closing activity.

### **Byron Community Center**

still hopeful.

more optimistic.

more educated.

wishing the county good luck.

a little more hopeful.

little more energetic to get some of this done.

proud of Byron.

more hope.

inspired to see so many people come.

wondering how I can help.

optimistic.

hopeful.

super excited.

### **Durand High School**

optimistic.

some answers.

hopeful.

optimistic.

gradually optimistic.

concerned (huge bite to chew).

### **Laingsburg Methodist Church**

like I want to smile.

genuinely excited.

nice to hear similar ideas.

heard.

disappointed that more people were not here as I had expected.

### **New Lothrop Community Center**

No time allowed for closing activity.

### **Virtual Session**

No time allowed for closing activity.

### **Virtual Session**

interested and encouraged

good and feel hopeful

less skeptical but still need to understand more about what and how to recycle effectively.

hopeful

\*\*\*

## Analyses

The following includes a comprehensive record of various **Shiawassee County Recycling Listening Sessions** held at different locations and dates between February 2025 and June 2025. Participants shared their thoughts, priorities, concerns, and solutions regarding recycling in their communities. The *Listening Sessions* elicited responses on topics such as the importance of recycling, barriers to recycling, the need for education and convenience, and potential solutions to improve recycling efforts.

The following summarizes the number of Listening Sessions held across the five months of this initial engagement period.

**Number of Sessions:** 10 community sessions, 3 high school youth sessions, 2 business sessions, 1 Owosso Rotary presentation

**Locations:** Owosso Armory, Caledonia Township Hall, Corunna Community Center, Byron Community Center, Durand High School, Laingsburg United Methodist Church, New Lothrop Community Center, and Virtual Sessions. Owosso High School, Corunna High School, Morrice High School, Owosso SEDP luncheon at the Armory, Owosso Chamber Session at the Armory, and one Owosso Rotary presentation at the Armory\*

**Participants:** The number of participants varied across sessions, ranging from 3 to 20 participants per session.

**Total Participation:** Community participants (61), student participants (22), business leaders (37), Owosso Rotary presentation (18)\*

**Hours:** Collectively, **120** (not including Rotary) community members across Shiawassee County **participated** in over **32 total hours** of focused engagement centering on recycling. Corunna, Morrice, and Owosso High School **students** continued to engage in concentrated work for approximately **20-25 additional hours**.

\*Presentation with question-and-answer session - not a true *Listening Session*

### Key Topics Discussed:

Background information about future county plans to reduce the present levels of materials waste that is currently channeled directly to landfills.

Present understanding about recycling

Biggest priorities and concerns

Solutions offered by participants

Feelings before and after the sessions

Here are the common recycling themes that emerged from all sessions and locations from the **Shiawassee County Recycling Listening Sessions**. These themes reflect the collective priorities and concerns of the participants across all sessions and locations.

**Common Themes:**

**1. Education and Awareness**

Participants consistently emphasized the need for better education and awareness about recycling. They suggested incorporating recycling education in schools and organizing community workshops to raise awareness.

**2. Convenience and Accessibility**

Many participants highlighted the importance of making recycling convenient and accessible. Suggestions included implementing curbside recycling programs and increasing the number of recycling bins and centers.

**3. Trust and Transparency**

There was a recurring concern about the trustworthiness of the recycling process. Participants wanted assurance that recycled materials are actually being processed correctly and not ending up in landfills.

**4. Community Involvement**

Participants believed that community-driven initiatives and partnerships with local organizations could significantly improve recycling efforts. They suggested involving community leaders and advocates to promote recycling.

**5. Environmental Impact**

The environmental benefits of recycling were a common theme. Participants discussed the importance of reducing waste and promoting sustainable practices to protect the environment.

**6. Policy and Regulation**

Stronger recycling policies and enforcement were seen as essential to drive better recycling practices. Participants suggested incentives for households and businesses to recycle more effectively.

**The following analysis provides a deeper understanding of the major themes that emerged from the Listening Sessions. Note the specific comments made at each session relating to each specific theme.**

**THEME 1: EDUCATION (Raised 30 Times)**



### **Owosso Armory Sessions**

- "The best way to educate our community is to go through our kids in our schools." "We need to involve our young children, who will influence their families."
- "More education is very important!"
- "We have lost a sense of collective responsibility. Education is a must. Educating our youth is a must. Community education is also a must in an ongoing manner."
- "Education. People need to see that many products come out of recycling efforts. It needs to be a campaign. In rural communities, it might mean knocking on doors- we know that makes a difference. Community leaders need to advocate for this."

### **Caledonia Township Hall**

- "Utilize our schools to build momentum and strengthen the education of our youth."

### **Corunna Community Center**

- "We need to educate! We need to teach our people what needs to be done and how to sort materials."
- "My biggest concern is education. I'm not fully convinced people in this county want to recycle."
- "The education of the community is my biggest concern."
- "A solution is to have a coordinated education effort. Keep doing what we're doing."
- "Education – Continually get more people involved."

### **Byron Community Center**

- "We need solid education for people. People need to understand the why."
- "Honestly, I don't think about it. I burn my stuff and throw everything else away. I don't know where the stuff goes. However, I think we need to start with our youth in educating them."
- "Education is my top priority. Give us information into the schools and our kids will get things rolling."
- "We need to build stronger education and knowledge, starting with our youth."

### **Durand High School**

- "We need to educate kids. If it's too difficult, people won't do it."
- "Culture needs to change and that comes with education at the same time."
- "We need a strong community education piece."
- "Educate our youth and get people used to a culture of repairing."

### **Laingsburg Methodist Church**

- "Education is important for people to raise awareness. Getting our youth involved capitalizes on an opportunity versus a chore."
- "Education is the key to addressing climate change and sustainability."
- "We need education. We need everyone to understand what a circular economy means."
- "My biggest concern is that it [materials waste] actually gets recycled and that there is a market for recyclables. To become mainstream, it has to pay for itself. Education is paramount."
- "I think the solution center is on education. Our schools need to be involved."

### **New Lothrop Community Center**

- "We need community education and education starting with our youth." 24
- "Education is my priority."
- "Education, beginning with our youth, and also community education for our adults." 26

### **Virtual Sessions**

- "We don't seem to have enough education on and use products."
- "We need education from the ground up on how to recycle."
- "Education is the answer and clear education and communication is needed."
- "My solution is through education. I see this is the only way to help change our present culture."

\*\*\*

## **THEME 2: CONVENIENCE & ACCESSIBILITY (Raised 23 Times)**

### **Owosso Armory**

- "As with everything, the more convenient, there will be more involved."

### **Caledonia Township Hall**

- "Recycling needs to be convenient and easy to do."
- "I can't save the world. It needs to start small and be convenient."

### **Corunna Community Center**

- "A lot of people I know my age would recycle if it were convenient."
- "If it were made easier, more people would participate. It is just so complicated now."

### **Byron Community Center**

- "At the county level, I would like to see more recycling stations. Make it convenient. I'm not driving to Laingsburg or over 15 miles to recycle."

- "Convenience is what I'm looking for."
- "Convenience would really be great."
- "Convenience is my biggest concern."
- "Convenience and accessibility are my biggest priorities."
- "Convenience."
- "Convenience is my biggest concern."
- "Access and convenience for a better future are my priorities."

### **Durand High School**

- "We need publicity. We need to know where locations are and make it more convenient."
- "Make recycling accessible and timely."
- "Ease and accessibility are my priorities."

### **Laingsburg Methodist Church**

- "I think it has to be convenient and viable for people."
- "Convenience... and ensuring that the things that are recycled actually go where they're supposed to go."

### **New Lothrop Community Center**

- "My priority is that we need better centers that are more convenient."

### **Virtual Sessions**

- "My highest priority is to have curbside recycling where you throw everything into the recycling bin."
- "My priority is to include curbside recycling into the plan. But we need to make a clear and concise communication effort."
- "My biggest priority is ease of access."
- "My biggest priority is convenience."

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## **THEME 3: COST OF RECYCLING (Raised 10 Times)**

**Here are the sections where *cost* was discussed:**

### **Owosso Armory Sessions**

- "I would contact every adjacent county and get all the experiences together and find ways to cost less and be better."

- "Recycling is a great idea. It scares me, though. The implementation cost and the cost to small businesses. It's going to cost money.
- "Landlords will need to incorporate this cost into their rent. The money is going to be an issue. When we put that up for discussion with the people, it will be a problem."

### **Caledonia Township Hall**

- "Who is going to pay for this? This is a valid point that concerns a lot of people, especially with the water discussions [increase in costs] happening in Owosso.
- "My 10,000-foot-high view – implementation is my concern. Will it likely roll out in the city? What will the cost be?"

### **Laingsburg Methodist Church**

- "If cost is involved, people will say no. Personally, I would pay a fee to have access."
- "Until people see that paying for multiple garbage haulers costs more money, I don't think we will see support for a change to a single hauler system."

### **Both Virtual Sessions**

- "My biggest concern is that we are about to throw a lot of money into a program that might not work."
- "My biggest priority is how to change our current disposable culture. Think of our restaurants and all the to-go boxes and all the paper bags used in just this industry."

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## **THEME 4: TRUST IN THE RELIABILITY OF RECYCLING? (Raised 5 Times)**

### **Owosso Armory**

- "We've all heard that recycling ends up going to landfills anyway. I would like to see trust being built that recycling does what it is intended to do (not into landfills)."
- "I don't always know, and I'm not sure if recycled materials go to landfills anyway. Every time I throw something away, I wonder."

### **Laingsburg Methodist Church**

- "... ensuring that the things that are recycled actually go where they're supposed to go. People need assurances and trust. These are the best ways to get people to do something."

## Virtual Sessions

- "We need to help build trust to ensure that we are getting the outcome we want."
- "I know someone who hauls trash. He said things collected to be recycled are going to landfills."

\*\*\*

## Here are the main themes that emerged from each specific location:

### Themes from Both Owosso Armory Sessions

Participants emphasized the **importance of recycling** and expressed concerns about the **lack of awareness** and **education** in the community. They suggested implementing more **educational programs** and **public awareness campaigns** to encourage recycling.

### Themes from the Caledonia Township Hall Session

The main themes were the **barriers to recycling**, such as **inconvenient recycling locations** and **limited access** to recycling facilities. Participants proposed solutions like **increasing the number of recycling bins** and **improving the accessibility** of recycling centers.

### Themes from the Corunna Community Center Session

Participants discussed the **need for convenience** in recycling. They highlighted the importance of **curbside recycling programs** and suggested **simplifying the recycling process** to make it more user-friendly.

### Themes from the Byron Community Center Session

The focus was on **community involvement** and **collaboration**. Participants believed that **community-driven initiatives** and **partnerships with local organizations** could significantly improve recycling efforts. **Convenience** was a major theme.

### Themes from the Durand High School Session

**Education** was a key theme, with participants stressing the need for **recycling education in schools**. They suggested incorporating recycling topics into the **school curriculum** and organizing **recycling workshops** for students.

### Theme from the Laingsburg First Methodist Church Session

Participants highlighted the **environmental impact** of recycling and the need for **sustainable practices**. They discussed ways to **reduce waste** and **promote eco-friendly habits** within the community. **Education** needs were also emphasized.

### Theme from the New Lothrop Community Center Session

The main theme was **policy and regulation**. Participants believed that **stronger recycling policies** and **enforcement** could drive better recycling practices. They suggested **incentives** for households and businesses to recycle more effectively. Participants also desired **community education**.

## Virtual Sessions

The virtual sessions covered a range of topics, with participants sharing their **personal experiences** and **challenges** with recycling. They emphasized the need for **flexibility** in recycling programs to accommodate different lifestyles and **remote areas**. **Education** was also a topic that emerged.

## Summary of Closing Activity – I Came to the Session Feeling... and I am Leaving the Session Feeling....

Participants shared their initial feelings upon entering the sessions and their feelings upon leaving. The initial feelings ranged from curiosity, nervousness, and skepticism to hopefulness and optimism. Upon leaving the sessions, many participants felt more optimistic, encouraged, and hopeful. The initial curiosity and nervousness expressed by many suggest that the topics discussed were of significant interest and potentially contentious. The shift towards more positive feelings upon leaving indicates that **the sessions were generally effective in creating conditions necessary to gather thoughtful ideas and concerns while also fostering a sense of community and shared purpose.**

## High School Student Engagement

The Shiawassee Community Foundation Youth Advisory Council (YAC) members agreed to help lead the efforts to engage high school youth in the *Recycling Listening Sessions* and to be potentially involved in individual district recycling projects funded by the Cook Family Foundation. The YAC leadership group, led by Owosso High School senior Charlie Agnew, helped develop a promotional video describing the county-wide recycling initiative and inviting high school students to attend a *Youth Recycling Listening Session* hosted in their district. A promotional flyer was created and also distributed to each district. 39 students registered from Corunna, Morrice, New Lothrop, Owosso, and Perry High Schools, with New Lothrop's Listening Session cancelled twice due to inclement weather and Perry students unable to attend due to conflicts. Corunna, Morrice, and Owosso hosted a *Youth Listening Session* after school. Several students who had registered did not attend. The following is a breakdown of actual participants. Note that all 39 student registrants had the opportunity to answer the survey questions, providing additional data for county planners. These data are included later in this report.

Corunna High School	Morrice High School	Owosso High School
6 participants	4 participants	12 participants

Students were unified in their interest in recycling and also in protecting natural resources and the environment. Students identified caring for the environment as a way to improve community health and wellness (**fewer plastics, cleaner air, less environmental toxins**), **preserving the natural habitats for fish and animals** (cleaning the Shiawassee River), and **reducing the**

**amount of food and materials waste** (bettering everything). Students felt that **tax dollars should be spent on recycling as a utility**.

Students emphasized **the amount of food waste they saw in their own schools** and shared any current recycling efforts happening there. Most schools had receptacles to collect paper waste, and others to collect plastic bottles and cans. Students proposed solutions by returning to reusable food trays in the cafeteria rather than the current disposable Styrofoam trays. Students were also eager to consider ways to reuse and upcycle existing materials waste.

Students from all three districts continued to meet for four Sunday afternoon group work sessions at the Owosso Armory. These **sessions fostered mixed-group conversations about various topics relating to sustainability**. Individual school groups also had time to work on their individual project proposals. Students **learned about the project planning process**, made external contacts needed to gather information or gain permissions from school and community leaders, and participated in group presentations. One Sunday work session included Lincoln High School students presenting their progress to become a *Green-Certified School*. The school garden they had planted and their plans for composting food waste gave the group tangible ideas. Further, this was a great **opportunity to provide an even playing field for all students to be recognized for their common goals toward sustainability**.

The Owosso High School Youth Recyclers, under the leadership of YAC President Charlie Agnew, emerged as the team that fulfilled all aspects of the project development process. On June 21, **the OHS Youth Recyclers hosted an e-waste collection drive in cooperation with Wes Petermen of Resourceful Recycling**. 20% of the proceeds from the thousands of pounds of e-waste collected will be presented to the OHS team, and these funds will be deposited into a special Recycling Legacy Project Account to be used by next year's OHS Youth Recyclers.

Several students will return next year from this originating group and have expressed their desire to continue to be engaged in this initiative. For those schools unable to participate this year, key people have been identified as champions for helping engage their students in similar activities for 2025-26. New Lothrop High School has expressed its desire to have its Robotics Club join in helping lead the Youth Recycling effort. Further, the Youth Advisory Council has agreed to continue to drive this process for next year, with President-elect Owen Skarich (an OHS member of this year's group) agreeing to continue the Recycling focus for the YAC team. **It is anticipated that greater involvement will occur next year because of the hard work that was completed by this year's originating student leaders.**

## Business Leadership Engagement

April 23, 2025	Owosso Rotary	16 participants
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	Lunch Presentation and Discussion about County Recycling Initiatives	
May 8, 2025	<b>Chamber of Commerce</b> Pre-Mixer Recycling Focus Session	18 participants
June 10, 2025	<b>Shiawassee Economic Development Partnership</b> Lunch and Listen Event	21 participants
	<b>Total Participation</b>	<b>55 participants</b>

In addition to the aforementioned *Listening Sessions*, three sessions were held for small and large-scale Shiawassee County businesses. First, the Owosso Rotary participated in a presentation about the Shiawassee County Recycling Workgroup and the *Community Listening Sessions*’ early feedback. Rotary members expressed support for the efforts of the Workgroup and also asked questions about the *Listening Session* participation and findings.

Two sessions were also held for local business leaders who are members of the Shiawassee Chamber of Commerce and the Shiawassee Economic Development Partnership. During both sessions, specific questions were posed to participants. The questions asked included:

1. What are the primary waste streams your business generates?
2. What waste reduction and recycling processes do you already implement in your business?
3. What existing waste challenges do you have in your business?
4. What opportunities might be created in the future through entrepreneurship, job creation, and workforce development?

Each business engagement session gathered approximately 20 business leaders together for a concentrated discussion about recycling. During the Chamber Mixer gathering, small business leaders talked about their **paper and cardboard waste challenges**. Some participants indicated they utilize D.J. Root as their go-to recycling destination for cardboard. A local insurance business talked about the **confidential nature of the paper waste** they produce, requiring shredding. Several participants presently utilize national **paper shredding services**, explaining that these companies pick up their paper waste, guaranteeing strict process controls for assuring confidentiality. This opportunity to **share existing practices led to a collaborative exchange** of ideas about **utilizing local avenues** to pick up and shred business paper waste, rather than contracting with a national chain. Participants expressed willingness to host intellectually challenged adults through D.J. Root to regularly shred paper on-site. Another participant talked



about potential paper pick-up and hauling that a local vendor could do as an additional opportunity to build partnerships to help businesses with their recycling needs.

During the Shiawassee Economic Development Partnership Lunch and Listening event, 21 people attended and provided insights into larger **corporate waste challenges**. American Recycling discussed their process for taking clean industrial rubber waste directly from auto manufacturers and processing it into small, rubberized pellets that are used nationwide for safe ground cover for playgrounds. He explained that his company generates **flashing waste** that is paper-thin rubber. This led to others around the table talking about gasification, which burns waste at extreme temperatures, leaving no atmospheric waste. Another company leader talked about the **waste they accumulate in the form of pallets, electric motors, scrap metal, and steel**. This leader was eager to find channels to help address her company's growing waste piles.

A common theme that came from the business engagement events was that **leaders are concerned about the waste they produce and want to find solutions using collaborative means**. Both sessions concluded with a discussion about the desire to develop and spark the use of a **business waste walk-through inventory process** to identify the waste streams that exist county-wide. Leaders saw this as an important means to generate a **baseline** for potential business partnerships within the county to solve waste challenges. They also saw this information as **vital to the potential for future business entrepreneurship and local workforce development**.

## Survey Data from Registration Process

### Data Collection Challenges

In addition to the information collected during the *Listening Sessions*, additional information was also gathered from the pre-registration process. As participants registered for the *Listening Session* they planned to attend, they were also asked to respond to a few open-ended questions. Those data are included as follows. Note that total registrants, total participants, and total survey respondents do not equate. This is because some people who preregistered for a *Listening Session* did not show up. Therefore, they are not represented in the raw data captured during the *Sessions*. Likewise, some *Session* participants did not preregister. Sign-in sheets were utilized at every *Session* as a means to verify registrations; however, some participants who failed to pre-register also failed to sign in upon arrival. These participants are not represented in the survey data, but their thoughts are represented in the *Listening Session* data. Finally, not all pre-registrants answered all the survey questions. Therefore, some questions were ignored while others were more readily answered. This created a big challenge for data collection and analysis. Throughout the entire data collection process, every attempt was made to capture and analyze unduplicated information. Our goal was for all individuals to preregister, answer all the survey questions, attend a *Listening Session*, and sign in upon arrival. Approximately 30 people did just that. However, many more participants did either or.

For the reasons just stated, this final section of the report treats the survey data as additional information. Supplemental insights can be gained from examining these data. *In most cases,*

*Session* participants extended their survey thoughts and also raised ideas not mentioned in their surveys. **In short, there is a great deal to be learned from both the *Listening Session* data and the *Survey* data.**

## Community Survey Data

### *Community Registrant Demographics*

<i>Residence of Registrants</i>	<i># of Registrants (87)</i>
Bancroft	2
Bennington Township	3
Byron	16
Corunna	4
Durand	5
Gaines	2
Laingsburg	1
New Haven Township	3
New Lothrop	3
Owosso	43
Owosso Township	1
Perry	4

<i>Age of Registrants</i>	<i># of Respondents (63)</i>	<i>Recycling Knowledge</i>	<i># of Respondents (72)</i>
Silent Generation (Born 1925-1945)	1	Minimal	21
Baby Boomer (Born 1946-1964)	7	Fair	26
Generation X (Born 1965-1979)	41	Strong	18
Millennial (Born 1980-1994)	12	Deep	7
Generation Z (Born 1995-2012)	2		

It was interesting to examine the age of the registrants. Those between the ages of 46-59 (Generation X) had the strongest representation, with participants between the ages of 31-45 (Millennials) the next strongest. A noticeable drop occurred in the participation of those aged 18-30 (Generation Z). This age group took advantage of the virtual *Listening Session* options. The Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation participants expressed their lifetime commitment to energy reduction, reuse, and recycling, serving as an inspiration for other participants.

Somewhat surprisingly, the self-reported knowledge levels of respondents did not align with their high levels of support for recycling. In other words, respondents and participants, overall,

were very committed to recycling and expressed practicing regular recycling habits. Yet, these same people indicated that they had minimal/fair knowledge about recycling (47) as compared to those saying they had strong (23) and deep knowledge levels (2). This provides additional data supporting the major theme evident from this entire process: the need to provide community education opportunities.

**A total of 58 community registrants responded to the survey question, *“Is there a topic related to recycling about which you would like to learn more?”* This information will be helpful to community leaders responsible for designing future community education opportunities.**

Please share the guidelines and rules for recycling. Please share the names, addresses, and locations of the existing recycling drop-off sites.

Proposed incentives for residents to recycle

How is recycling funded?

How to help move this forward!

How will the market for materials collected for recycling be determined?

Will recycling be provided as part of trash pickup, will there be an increased fee, and will we be allowed to keep our present trash service? I'm concerned that recycling will be contracted to only larger, more expensive services.

Volunteer at GLR-just want to be part of the conversation

Hazardous Waste Disposal & Styrofoam Disposal

Recycling Styrofoam and hazardous waste

Curbside recycling

Aluminum recycling

Value of recycling

I would like weekly local recycling to be picked up at the curb.

There needs to be a place with dumpsters closer to country people, or a scheduled pickup for recyclable items. I load up my truck 3 or 4 times a year and drive to Durand. A monthly pickup would be great.

Would love to see curbside pickup in Perry, as well as drop-off locations that take special materials (Styrofoam, small electronics, batteries, ink cartridges, etc.)

Will there be a local drop-off location? If it's not convenient, then people will not participate.

What will be mandated, how it will be paid for, and if we can coordinate with neighboring townships

Where can we do it? How much does it cost us?

Curbside recycling pickup in Owosso

Why can't we have it every week just like the trash?

Development of the Shiawassee Plan for solid waste management

Are there efforts (locally, statewide, or nationally) underway to educate people to reduce their use of plastics?

I've heard concerns that plastics, in particular, end up in landfills, etc., and are not recycled as we think.

Will this be curbside or a central location for rural areas?

With the implementation of the new law and the significant increase in recycling materials being collected, do we have the sorting and processing facilities infrastructure to handle it? How can we trace the materials to make sure our collection efforts are worthwhile?

I am a transporter and missed Durand's meeting because I was out of town, so I am attending this one to see what is being considered in this area.

Why is it not available in every neighborhood?

More about the laws of recycling

I would like to know if recycling will be able to be facilitated by local trash companies, alongside the waste pickup already being paid for?

Greatest opportunity areas for increasing local recycling. Collection sites that accept colored glass? Local participation rates (residential and commercial)? Ways to support circular economies?

Making sure products get recycled once at a recycling facility.

How can I do better with recycling?

Recycling of yard & garden waste & being able to purchase finished compost

Recycling practices, separation. More general info.

Location

Recycling practices, separation. More general info.

What are the opportunities our city could take advantage of to use recycling to cut costs or even produce an income while having a true sustainability focus. For an example, a city-wide composting project would reduce the need to buy dirt for city projects and would use our own soil. On top of that, once we have a surplus, it could be donated to residents as a tax refund or sold to outside organizations. (Simplified for the survey).

The benefits of single-hauler contracts

Learn how to help advocate for recycling at a local level

Curbside recycling

Hazardous/electronic waste options

What will recycling be used for?

Is there a market for recycled goods? What percentage of recycled materials end up in landfills?

Yes- Why is it that some of the local recycling providers have not been reached out to at all on this topic?

Recycling Styrofoam and tires

How can we get curbside recycling as part of our taxes?

Curbside recycling

Will curbside or central location recycling be available?

Sorting the various materials, and if there will be a cost to utilize the service

How can we make recycling relevant and easy in large venues?

Is house road pickup available?

Who in our area takes paper, etc., and recycles it?

Processing recycled waste, cost, and local processing. Recycling impacts on packaging businesses and single-use products.

Will there be recycling bins at individual homes?

Curbside recycling plans

What the county is doing to encourage sustainably

Will there be curbside pickup? I did try E-waste and was excited about it, but it was not well-organized.

Implementing a recycling program for Owosso or all of Shiawassee County

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**The key topics of interest identified by Shiawassee County community respondents can assist those responsible for developing future education and engagement opportunities for interested residents. The themes identified from the above survey data are as follows:**

- **Recycling Guidelines and Rules:** Respondents are interested in more information on existing recycling drop-off sites, proposed incentives for residents to recycle, and funding for recycling programs.
- **Curbside Recycling:** Questions were raised about the availability and benefits of curbside recycling, including concerns about fees and the convenience of local drop-off locations.
- **Hazardous Waste Disposal:** There were several questions dedicated to the disposal of hazardous waste, e-waste, and Styrofoam.
- **Community Involvement:** More information was requested about opportunities and/or expectations for volunteers to participate in recycling programs?
- **Market and Economic Impact:** Exploration of the market for recycled materials and the economic benefits of recycling
- **Recycling Practices:** General information on recycling practices, separation of materials, the impact on packaging businesses, and the potential for recycling to initiate new employment opportunities.
- **Sustainability:** There are questions about what the county is doing to encourage sustainability. This includes inquiries about the availability of curbside pickup and the organization of e-waste recycling.
- **Infrastructure for Recycling:** Questions have been asked about the infrastructure for sorting and processing the increased volume of recycling materials due to new laws. There is also interest in tracing materials to ensure that collection efforts are worthwhile
- **Efforts to Reduce Plastic Use:** There are inquiries about local, state-wide, or national efforts to educate people on reducing their use of plastics. Questions and concerns are raised about plastics ending up in landfills instead of being recycled as intended.

## High School Student Data (39 Registrants)

### *Student Registrant Demographics*

#### *High School of Registrants*

Byron	Corunna	Durand	Laingsburg	Morrice	New Lothrop	Owosso	Perry
0	11	0	0	3	2	21	2

#### *Age of Registrants*

Generation Z (Born 1995-2012)							
# of Registrants	39						

#### *H.S. Level of Registrants*

High School Grade Level	12th	11th	10th	9th			
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# of Registrants	13	11	6	9			
Total 39							

**A total of 33 high school registrants responded to the question, “Please list any concerns you have about the environment, climate change, and recycling, and identify how you would like to see tax dollars allocated toward your concerns.” The following are the raw data compiled from respondents.**

My concern is a lack of urgency for a very urgent issue. Tax dollars could be utilized in a way that creates jobs to help local economies and also increase sustainability, which is currently almost nonexistent.

Research into healthy and cost-effective energy production with long-term benefits.

Carbon emissions need to be lower.

My main concern is pollution, and I would want to see more people put effort towards recycling or even cutting out plastic in their daily lives. I want to see programs introducing positive changes, and our school cutting down on plastic use.

There is currently no local place to recycle that I am aware of. Everyone using plastic bottles, especially for water is a primary concern. Tax dollars to support a recycling program would make it more sustainable.

I am concerned about the total amount of greenhouse gas emissions and would like to see subsidies provided to companies that either use a certain threshold of renewable energy or begin to make the transition towards cleaner energy.

I’m most interested in seeing change within schools because the more kids seeing the change, the more will want to get involved.

I see trash daily in Shiawassee River all the time. I see how gasoline impacts the air around the entire world. I see how the trash in the oceans kills the environment. And you know, pollutes the air which the trees try to breathe in to make oxygen that leaves their leaves, they can't do all the work as living beings.

I want tax dollars put into recycling garbage and shopping carts from Shiawassee River. I can't change gasoline because that will run out sooner than I would know (it’s not an unlimited ore or material). I'd definitely put the tax dollars into more refined machinery to help clean up the garbage islands that procreate because of people not being responsible enough to do it themselves.

And because I care for the ocean life, I do have a certificate for helping Mother Nature when I was in fifth grade, so I know a lot about recycling and cleaning. But having a refresher at the discussion is better than going off from memory.

Climate change is affecting everybody and it's our world to protect and keep for it takes care of us.

I am very concerned about the environment, climate change, and recycling. Yet I feel like I need to be better educated to fully identify if I am ever more concerned. I try my hardest to be self-aware, yet I feel like I need and want to do more. I want to be more involved in helping my community and my planet.

I would like to see tax dollars go into recycling to see a bigger change in my community. I absolutely hate to see the food in my cafeteria go to waste.

Energy, pollution.

The food that is getting wasted.

I see trash daily in the Shiawassee River all the time. The pollution from cars can affect people, especially people with asthma. Animals can eat the trash, and they could get harmed. Even if it gets in our food, we could get harmed.

I worry about animals losing their habitat to climate change. If tax dollars went into building climates for the animals.

It's not looking good bro.

I believe that, as a whole, our society does not think about the environment and the direction it is moving in enough. I am a victim of this as well, but we should all be working together more to save the only planet we have. Recycling would be a great place to start, and the process should be instituted everywhere. Tax dollars could be allocated towards more centralized recycling programs that run throughout the community, including at homes, schools, and businesses.

The trash we have.

I think that climate change is a big issue that needs as much help as possible. I think a good starting point is to add recycling bins around downtown to reduce our waste as a community.

I think tax dollars should go toward things like recycling plants and better resources for energy.

Overall, recycling is not very consistent and reliable, which is not helpful. Also, anything that may impact animals, especially those that can be considered endangered. I hope to see more research done to stop these things from continuing, and also create more recycling organizations in order to stop waste.

I'm concerned that all parks, rivers, and public areas are cleaned from garbage and recycling. Eliminating the trash and litter in these areas will create a cleaner environment. I would like to see money allocated on cleaning up these areas more often to promote a clean environment.

Pollution

I think having a widespread recycling program for the average household would greatly improve the carbon footprint of Shiawassee County.

So many resources are being wasted in landfills, and we can change that.

How much they spent on the reinforcements in our state for the roads, but no work has been done.

Since we have normalized throwing everything away instead of recycling it or composting it we are filling landfills at an alarming rate, and then the trash is going everywhere and hurting animals, habitats, and nature.



Our environment is becoming more and more unhealthy and dangerous for people. People leave trash all around, causing pollution. Recycling needs to be offered more through taxes. If recycling is included in taxes, then everyone would be able to recycle more easily within their own home.

Save the animals in the ocean and sea by recycling.

I would like to see money for cleaning the river because it's sad how bad it is.

I'm really worried about our oceans and beaches because people are always throwing their trash everywhere, and it's creating a huge problem not just for people, but for the animals.

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**A total of 16 Shiawassee County high school registrants responded to the question, “*Is there a recycling/sustainability topic or issue that you want to learn more about?* Like the previous questions and topics about which community members identified, the following questions raised by students can inform leaders of education and youth engagement responsible for developing future interest-based learning opportunities. Here are the raw data from this question.**

I'd like to know more about the process of getting a recycling center in Owosso.

The political aspect and what happens behind the scenes to make changes occur.

How will the ideas that we bring forward to local lawmakers, in terms of grant money, or the availability of property, help us to perform our projects?

What type of hurdles are there to implement bins within the lunchroom (i.e., training, engraving, location)?

All of it.

I want to know what they can make out of the Styrofoam trays.

Yes, how they reuse the plastic bottles and the process of that.

I would like to learn more about composting and the benefits that it could provide for our community.

The recycling bins in schools.

Recycling distribution and where it can be used.

Pollution.

I would like to learn more about the effects that trees could have on the community.

Costs of a new recycling center.

Styrofoam usage.

I want to learn more ways we can help our school improve its recycling practices, in a way everyone can participate.

A really big one for me is the oceans. I'm really concerned about the sea life and other people having clean drinking water.

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**The high school student respondents raised questions and provided feedback about the environment, climate change, and recycling, along with suggestions for the allocation of funds to address these issues. Here are the themes that emerged from the responses of the Shiawassee County participating high school students to both survey questions.**

- **Urgency of Action:** Shiawassee County high school respondents express a lack of urgency regarding environmental issues and suggest that tax dollars could create jobs while promoting sustainability.
- **Energy Research:** There is a call for research into healthy, cost-effective energy production with long-term benefits.
- **Pollution and Recycling:** High school students expressed concerns about pollution, with a desire for increased recycling efforts and reduction of plastic use in daily life.
- **Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** High school students want to lower greenhouse gas emissions and propose subsidies for companies transitioning to renewable energy.
- **Community Involvement:** Many students emphasize the importance of educating children about environmental issues to foster future community involvement.
- **Waste Management:** There is a significant concern about waste, particularly in local rivers and public areas, with suggestions for tax dollars to fund cleanup efforts.
- **Recycling Programs:** High school respondents advocate for improved recycling programs and resources to reduce waste in both homes and communities.
- **Education on Recycling:** There is a strong interest among respondents in learning more about recycling processes, composting, and the impact of waste on the environment.

## **Conclusion**

The Shiawassee County Recycling *Listening Sessions* provide valuable insights into the community's perspectives on recycling. Participants emphasized the need for better education, convenience, urgency of action, skepticism of the present recycling intended outcomes, and reducing waste. The sessions highlight the importance of community involvement to drive effective recycling practices. These findings shall inform future initiatives to enhance recycling efforts, reduce materials waste, and promote sustainability in Shiawassee County.

## **A Personal Note of Recommendations and Insights**

The registration and sign-in process generated a comprehensive contact list of recycling enthusiasts across Shiawassee County. **These contacts can serve as the backbone for the County recycling efforts ahead.** Participants expressed genuine interest in reading the final

report and remaining up to date on progress. These contacts voiced interest in participating in future engagement and education opportunities. Several **key contacts residing in each location** identified on the Shiawassee County map were also identified as **Recycling Champions**. These special community members expressed their willingness to take a **leadership role in helping their local communities** make progress in recycling and sustainability programs. All of these community gems should be utilized in the work that is before us.

This first round of engaging the community through *Listening Sessions* opened the door to generating interest and hearing what people were thinking about recycling. As the future work toward reducing materials waste across our county continues, I recommend a **second and third round of Sessions be facilitated so that specific probing questions that directly align with program innovations can continue to be asked of participants**. I predict that those involved in the first round would enthusiastically attend future *Sessions* and would likely bring friends and neighbors.

The *Listening Sessions* provided a new method for gathering input from interested community members who wanted to express their thoughts about relevant topics. I envision *Listening Sessions* becoming part of a progressive county's systems and structures so that **public forums and townhalls can be replaced by thoughtful, respectful gatherings** where every single person has an equally comfortable opportunity to share their views.

The norms and expectations that were outlined for participants at the onset of every session served their purpose well. **At no time during the over 30 hours of participant talking and listening did anyone stray from the guidelines**. As a result, people spoke more openly with each round of questioning. It was remarkable to see people with diverse backgrounds, interests, and experiences **come together and contribute positively without any friction or divisiveness**. It was commonplace to see participants remain after the *Sessions* were concluded to continue to dialogue with others and to thank me, the facilitator, for helping to create a refreshing experience.

It continues to amaze me how eager people are to be heard. And, once they are heard by others, a slight burden seems to be lifted from their shoulders. A sense of appreciation is immediately evident. **The synergy among the participants increases the power of the process and multiplies the goodwill toward all involved**. Just look at the closing words participants used to represent how they felt at the end of each session! Hopefulness, optimism, gratefulness, and enthusiasm are words that are repeated over and over as I facilitate hundreds of *Listening Sessions* across Michigan. And it is so simple to achieve.

Thank you to the **Cook Family Foundation**, for providing the vision and financial **support to utilize Listening Sessions** throughout this initial process, and for fostering the commitment of **involving our youth** from the onset toward *building a robust recycling program to reduce*

*environmental impacts, provide resources for new business ventures, create employment opportunities, and build a sustainable community that benefits all residents (Vision of the Shiawassee County Recycling Workgroup, adopted October 24, 2024).*