

Sustainable Materials Management Summit 2015

Diane Cohen, Executive Director
Finger Lakes ReUse, Inc.
2255 N. Triphammer Road, Ithaca, NY, 14850
(607) 257-9699 (office) / (607) 351-9491 (mobile)
diane@fingerlakesreuse.org / www.fingerlakesreuse.org

Background Information Finger Lakes ReUse (ReUse) is an independent nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization founded in 2007 in Ithaca, NY, that specializes in reusable building materials, housewares, furniture, and computers & electronics. ReUse has a triple-bottom line mission to enhance community, economy, and environment through reuse, reducing waste, relieving poverty, and teaching job skills through reuse-related activities. The organization was founded and is supported by Tompkins County Solid Waste and numerous other community partners.

Since the launch of its ReUse Center in 2008, ReUse has diverted more than 1,400 tons of materials from the waste stream, transforming these local liabilities (which would have cost more than \$118,000 to discard) into assets generating revenue exceeding \$2.1 million. ReUse uses waste prevention and diversion to create local wealth and strengthen community, offering opportunities for wide-spectrum workforce development through its operations, and providing a powerful outreach point for broader messaging and education through its retail activities.

Finger Lakes ReUse is developing a Community ReUse Center (CRC) model that preserves, extracts, and leverages the embodied value of reusable materials. The organization offers a wide array of diversion programs, including deconstruction and salvage services, computer refurbishment, job skills training, and community-based repair, providing access to convenient and affordable sustainable materials management options.

National SMM Plan Recommendations Developing a network of reuse outlets, best-practice recommendations and operational templates for communities to access will significantly reduce the material volumes sent to landfills and will incentivize, support, and prioritize the role of reuse in high-grading material waste.

The key to harvesting quality reusable materials is creating a network of reuse portals to provide convenient and affordable alternatives to disposal. The labor-intensive nature of reuse can appear to be cost-prohibitive, but with minimal seed money and appropriate incentives and resources made accessible, the environmental, economic, and educational opportunities associated with reuse can create additional benefits not afforded on the same scale through recycling and other means of waste reduction.

There is insufficient infrastructure for reuse to occur anywhere near its potential capacity in most communities. It is critically important to *emphasize and support* the powerful and positive impacts that reuse inherently offers, including its reduction of CO₂ emissions, ability to generate revenue and new jobs, and the rich training grounds it offers for effective workforce development.

Additionally, mechanisms must be developed for both recyclers *and* reusers to provide feedback to manufacturers and designers to produce goods that will enable reuse, repair, or recycling to occur. SMM strategies must include guidelines and incentives throughout the entire life cycle of products in order to transform current wasteful practices.