Plan On It

A Dutchess County Planning Federation eNewsletter

DUTCHESS COUNTY PLANNING FEDERATION

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Don't Throw it Away

Alternatives to Landfills or Incineration

By Lindsay Carille, Deputy Commissioner of Solid Waste Management

Reusing and repurposing are high on my list of how to keep waste out of landfills. Growing up the youngest of six children, I know what it's like to wear hand-me-downs and play with used toys. This might have made me only want new things as an adult, but it's quite the opposite. A friend recently gave me a bag full of clothes she no longer wore, and it was like getting a present. Television shows about salvaging parts of old houses, and turning old materials into new items, are my favorite shows to watch. There is truth to the old saying: One man's trash is another man's treasure.

In addition to clothing and household items, we can think about reuse on a larger scale. Renovation projects, be they individual homes or larger-scale projects in commercial or industrial buildings, can generate countless items for reuse.

Local Opportunities for Reuse

Here in Dutchess County there are numerous ways to reuse things:

Donate

You can bring items to a thrift shop, where they will be sold at a fair price or given away to those in need. A thrift shop is run by a not-for-profit organization to raise money to fund their charitable causes. While they do not pay you for your items, donations of goods are tax-deductible if you itemize your deductions. Or, drop off unwanted items in one of the many drop-box locations around the county for donating clothing and shoes that others can use.

So what can you donate? Just about everything that could be used by someone else. Clothes, furniture, décor, kitchen utensils, and at some places, the kitchen sink. Call one of the many thrift shop locations in the area to find out what can be donated, and they might even pick up your items. If you think your ripped jeans or t-shirts are not worth donating, think again. Many thrift shops and donation drop-boxes take damaged textiles and sell them to salvage textile recyclers, using the profits for their charity. Some of the recycled textiles are then turned into polishing cloths or fiber for use in making other products.

Sell

If you are looking to sell your treasures, having a yard sale is one way to earn cash while passing on usable items to someone else. You will be amazed when someone wants to buy that gold-tasseled, neon-green table lamp that Aunt Matilda bought you as a wedding present twenty years ago.

If you don't want to have a sale in your driveway, you can go online to sell the items or take them to a consignment, resale, or vintage shop to earn a percentage of the profit if the item sells. The shops in our area range from selling only high-end merchandise to selling everything as long as it is not broken. To find shops in our area, a quick online search or a look in the phone book under Consignment and Resale Shops will provide some options.

Feeling Creative? Upcycle!

Repurposing is another great way to keep materials out of landfills or being incinerated. Sometimes called "upcycling" or reuse, it means taking something that is no longer needed or used, and turning it into something else. If you have a little bit of "Martha Stewart" in you, an old wooden ladder can be turned into bookshelves and soda can pop tabs can become a purse. If you are not crafty, there are stores in the area that sell items made from repurposed materials, and websites like Pinterest to help with ideas.

Two examples of upcycling: the planter box (left) was constructed entirely from building materials leftover from other projects (scrap lumber, beadboard, rubber roll roofing, house paint), and the wine and spirits rack (right) was made from an old wood pallet. [Photo credits: H. LaVarnway, L. Querrazzi]

Larger-Scale Options

It's not just homeowners that can help keep treasures out of landfills and incinerators – businesses and contractors can, too. There are dedicated websites for office furniture and equipment exchanges, and consignment and thrift stores may also be interested in the items.

Deconstruction is another method of reuse. It is the selective dismantlement of building components, specifically for reuse and recycling. Deconstruction involves carefully taking apart portions of buildings or removing their contents with reuse or upcycling as the primary goal. With our area having a decent stock of older/historic buildings, owners or contractors involved in renovations can take care to remove materials such as flooring, hardware, cabinetry, fixtures, windows, etc, that others may be interested in purchasing.

A Touch of Sentimentality

At my house, the old milk bottle my father-in-law kept for years is now a pretty vase, and the ripped and stained collection of tablecloths my grandmother had cross-stitched designs on have been cut-up and renewed into a beautiful, upcycled tablecloth. Every time I look at these items, I think of my family members. New is not always better, and new doesn't come with pleasant memories. So if you are at all interested in either getting creative or giving to others, consider these alternatives to just throwing things into the trash.

Like-new, upcycled tablecloth made from scraps of my grandmother's old cross-stitched cloths.

More Information

Visit our website for more ideas on Reuse

For more information on donating textiles, visit NYSAR "Clothes" the Loop NY

New York State Association for Reduction, Reuse and Recycling

Click here to view past issues of *Plan On It*.

This newsletter was developed by the Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development, in conjunction with the Dutchess County Planning Federation.

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