



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS EVENT LAUNCHES NEW PROGRAM FOR LOCAL NON-PROFIT**

[Kalispell] Citizens for a Better Flathead organized a well-attended Thursday evening community conversation about reducing our waste footprint in the valley and easing pressure on the county landfill.

“We were honored to be joined by a thoughtful, passionate, and dedicated panel of speakers to begin to address these important issues in our community,” said Allison Batch, Sustainability Programs Coordinator for Citizens for a Better Flathead.

The event, which took place at Flathead Valley Community College on Thursday, June 21<sup>st</sup>, featured six panelists representing local businesses and government agencies:

- Dave Prunty, Public Works Director for Flathead County
- Chase Jones, Energy Conservation and Climate Action Coordinator for the City of Missoula
- Matthew Folz, the Director of Risk and Sustainability for Xanterra Glacier National Park Lodges
- Jay Frisard, Regional Manager for Glacier Restaurant Group
- Ryder Delaloye, Director of Curriculum for Whitefish School District
- Alissa LaChance, Owner and Operator of Dirt Rich Compost, LLC.

The discussion was a Question and Answer format, with Richard Turbiak, Executive Director for Citizens for a Better Flathead, serving as the moderator. Topics ranged from individual commitments, to local business purchasing choices, to government policies to reduce waste.

“We wanted the conversation to very positive and solutions based,” explained Batch. “We didn’t want to dwell on the challenges that Montana faces in terms of recycling, but instead look forward towards tangible things that can be done now to make a difference. And our panel did an incredible job with that task.”

The final question of the evening asked the panelists to identify one thing that the public could do tomorrow to move towards Zero Waste – a waste management philosophy that eliminates waste sent to landfills, and instead conserves or recovers all materials. Takeaways included:

- Reduce first, Recycle last: Recycling is a challenge for Montana because of our seclusion, and the three R’s are in order of most effective. Reduce, reuse, *then* recycle.
- Get involved: Serve on a committee or run for local office. Go to public meetings and speak up to elected officials about changes you’d like to see.
- Reframe the issue of food waste by switching the terminology to “wasted food,” and take steps to minimize this waste and compost what’s left.

- Spread the word: Talk to the people in your life about simple changes they can make to reduce waste, like bringing a reusable bag to the grocery store.
- Genuinely look at what brings you happiness; generally, consumption isn't the answer. Act on these values to make impactful lifestyle changes.
- Know your local recycling businesses: The Flathead Valley has two businesses (Dirt Rich Compost for food waste and New World Recycling for glass) who reuse and recycle materials right here, making them the most sustainable local outlets for wastes.

The event marked the start of a new program for Citizens for a Better Flathead called *Towards Zero Waste* – but this isn't a new concept for the organization. Citizens has managed the WasteNot Project for 26 years in collaboration with the Flathead County Solid Waste District and Flathead Valley Community College. Through WasteNot, Citizens educates more than 3,500 students per year on recycling and composting best practices, produces educational brochures and materials for the broader community, and runs a recycle bin loan program for events.

The new *Towards Zero Waste* program will expand upon this foundational work to find widespread solutions for local waste issues.

*"Towards Zero Waste* will help us have a larger impact through local policy and business decisions. This type of change must come from a higher level than post-consumer waste management – we need to shift what types of materials we purchase and the type of industry that we support," described Turbiak. "We'll work to facilitate deeper commitments and coordination between the county and three cities, other important stakeholders, and individual citizens, to move towards a more efficient and sustainable Zero Waste economy."

To learn more about Citizens for a Better Flathead and the *Towards Zero Waste* program, visit [www.flatheadcitizens.org](http://www.flatheadcitizens.org).