

City of Saint Paul
Garbage Advisory Committee
Draft Report version 4
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SAINT PAUL
MINNESOTA



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Still to be done:

By Committee:

- Billing/customer service Comments & Recommendations
- Costs – pricing – services - service holds Comments & Recommendations

By City staff:

- Complete the History section in the Introduction (staff with Committee review)
- Existing program details

I. Introduction

The November 2019 consideration of the 2020 garbage rates included comments by the public which proposed creation of a garbage advisory group to provide input to the Council for future changes to the Coordinated Collection (CC) Program. The current contract for garbage, bulky item, and yard waste collection ends September 30, 2023. The City must consider what the next iteration of the program will be, and what changes could be considered.

A Garbage Advisory Committee, comprised of residents who applied for a position, was convened. Eighteen members were appointed by the Mayor with the advice and consent of Council Members. The members represented the wide diversity of St. Paul residents:

- Various geographic, income, language, and cultural areas of the City
- Homeowners, renters and rental property owners with 1-4-unit or townhouse properties
- Persons who wished to adjust and improve the CC program and those opposed to it
- Persons with some garbage knowledge and those without
- Persons highly engaged in the Sustainability movement, and those who were not

The charge of the Committee was to advise the City on issues associated with the City's solid waste management programs and as individually interested, to be an ambassador for the Committee and the City with neighbors and neighborhood organizations. Changes to recycling and organics collections were not included in the Committee's work, except as they informed the Committee on the role of those programs in an integrated solid waste management system.

All meetings of the Committee were open to the public. A public web page specific to the Committee's work was established which held all meeting and recordings, materials and a web form for submission of public comments ([Garbage Advisory Committee | Saint Paul Minnesota \(stpaul.gov\)](https://www.stpaul.gov/garbage-advisory-committee)) were posted. There was also time on the Committee's meeting agendas for non-Committee individuals to provide comments and advice.

This Report of the Committee provides program areas for the City to evaluate as it moves forward with the CC program.

History

Between 2009 and 2015 the City of Saint Paul enhanced the City's efforts toward sustainability, environmental and public health protection, and conservation of energy and natural resources. Studies by the State of Minnesota and the Wilder Foundation found that many City residents paid a higher cost for solid waste management than surrounding

cities. In 2015 the Macalester-Groveland Community Council researched trash collection in Saint Paul through surveys, community meetings and interviews and urged the City to adopt organized trash collection. The City began a process to implement a coordinated collection program in 2016. A series of community meetings, surveys, and Open Saint Paul activities sought additional input and advice from residents (RES 16-337 <https://www.stpaul.gov/sites/default/files/Media%20Root/Public%20Works/OTC%20Resolution.pdf>).

On July 19, 2017, the Council directed City staff to work with the existing licensed residential collectors in accordance with Minnesota Statutes to negotiate with the existing licensed residential collectors. On November 18, 2017, the Council authorized the execution of the contract between the City of Saint Paul and St. Paul Haulers, LLC for the provision of trash collection services. All 1-4-unit residential properties located in Saint Paul became part of this system.

The City Council defined the following goals and anticipated benefits of the Coordinated Collection Program:

- Stable, uniform rates and reasonable, low cost.
 - A survey of residents found wide disparities in prices charged by haulers. A small cart with weekly service was reported to cost between \$10.33 and \$53.65 per month. The City wished to ensure that residents would get consistent service at a reasonable price throughout the City.
- Reduction in illegal dumping.
 - When people choose not to sign up for garbage service, they may find other ways to dispose of their garbage, including illegal dumping. Illegal dumping affects the entire community by decreasing property values, harming the environment, and costing the City over \$300,000 a year to clean up. It was hoped that standard service throughout the City would reduce illegal dumping.
- Reduced truck traffic.
 - Before coordinated collection, there were 15 haulers serving overlapping areas. Multiple trucks in alleys and streets creates unnecessary noise, alley and street wear and tear, additional exhaust, and safety issues. Coordinated collection resulted in one truck per week serves most alleys or streets for garbage collection.
- Equitable service and pricing.
 - Saint Paul is home to new residents from throughout the world. A standard service allowed all residents to receive uniform prices which were not based on their ability to negotiate lower prices

Additional information can be found on the City's Residential Garbage website page:
[Coordinated Collection | Saint Paul Minnesota \(stpaul.gov\)](https://www.stpaul.gov/Coordinated-Collection)

Staff to complete for Committee review a comparison of original program goals promoted to current outcomes.

The Next Generation of the City's Solid Waste Management Program

The following report section detail the program areas the Committee considered to improve the Coordinated Collection Program. Each section contains an outline of the topic, the ideas and comments the Committee had during discussion of the topic, the majority option and differing or minority option(s). Comments by Committee members are included in the options, and a complete list of all comments and ideas, from the Committee and from the public, are included in Appendix A.

II. Next RFP and Contract Mechanics

The Committee members considered the process of implementing the next garbage program and ways it could be improved. The Committee members focused on elements that could be included in the RFP and contract processes to improve transparency.

Existing Program

City has a contract with the Saint Paul Haulers' Consortium. An amendment to the contract was made in 2019 to clarify billing issues. The contract ends September 30, 2023.

The terms of the contract require the haulers to be the primary customer service entity, to bill customers, to manage cart inventory, to collect garbage and deliver it to the County-designated location, to receive requests from customers for bulky item disposal and to provide that service and bill appropriately. The haulers pay the tipping fee at the disposal facility. The haulers must also provide data and reports to the City.

The City provides "next-level" or dispute resolution customer services. The City reimburses the haulers for any late fees, non-payments or other "bad debt" they incur in for the Saint Paul customers through assessment of the fees on property taxes. The City provides the garbage carts and cart parts to each hauler. The City provides education to residents on setouts and proper placement of garbage carts and the rules for garbage collection. The City provides the tags haulers use to communicate with residents when there are problems. The City enforces contract provisions for collection services, customer service, and billing disputes.

Committee Comments, Concerns, Pluses, Minuses

- The focus of the garbage program should be to keep Saint Paul clean. All committee members want this.
- Small garbage haulers, included in the first contract process, were able to sell their routes for good price. They had time to adjust to the new program or sell.
- There needs to be transparency in the reasons for the increase in the Ramsey County tipping fees, taxes on garbage, and their impact on prices that residents pay for garbage service.
- A focus of the next contract should be to invest in and promote reduce/reuse/recycle and NOT just throw away more. The trash and recycling companies' line is "When in doubt, throw it out," which just adds fuel to the throw away mentality.
- There is a desire to contract with a local hauler who cares if customers are happy (or not) with their garbage service.
- There is a desire to move garbage collection to a City department versus a private garbage hauler.
- There is a desire for a single hauler and/or a municipal service citywide.



- The committee would like more teeth to guarantee excellent customer service.
- The length of the current contract is too long.
- There should be open meetings or hybrid meetings for contract negotiations so that the public can watch the meetings live or recorded, but not necessarily contribute during the meeting.
- Transparency in the negotiations and the contract details should be improved.
- There is frustration that details of contract negotiations and details weren't clear and large promises to the community weren't kept.
- The City should be clear about what is possible (legally and practically) in the next contract.
- Before the Citywide garbage program, some committee members had a <national hauler,> who is now in the Consortium, and fired them for poor service.
- We wish the trucks didn't have to make 2 passes down the alley
- We wish the garbage company was more local.
- The contract should allow the expansion of the City's garbage program to properties with 5+ units. They would be able to use the bulky program; to help prevent illegal dumping.
- Larger and adjacent properties should be able to have dumpsters instead of carts.

Recommendations

Majority

- The Committee supports an RFP to select the next garbage contractor(s). There is consensus that haulers should compete for the City's garbage collection service.
- More teeth should be included in the contract to hold haulers accountable for service.
- The next contract should promote reduce/reuse/recycle, and not promote the idea to just throw away more stuff.
- Notification should be sent to customers if a hauler is being purchased by another hauler.

Minority

There is varying support to include the items below in the RFP process or RFP:

- Include a municipal collection option and/or make the City the hauler
 - Fewer complaints, City workers get benefits
 - Could be very expensive
 - Over time the City should look at being the hauler (generate revenue for the City?)
- Hire expert Counsel. We (the taxpayers) must have good negotiators this time around versus the last time.
- Shorter contract than current one. The next contract should be for 3 years.



- Require haulers to have Customer Service/Operations office within the City.
- Track and reduce vehicle miles travelled, including from hauler’s garage to the service area.
- Explore including 5+ unit properties as an opt-in in the next contract to reduce the number of trucks in neighborhoods
- Track total waste across City so we can accurately gauge waste reduction to meet goals.
- Provide incentives to encourage waste reduction.
- Develop and/or promote City programs to encourage reuse (e.g., FreeCycle).
- Give monetary incentives to recycle.

III. Opt-Out/Cart Sharing

This topic contains the situations Committee members discussed to allow Very Low waste generators to opt out of the City’s CC program or share services, and situations in which persons in multi-unit properties or who are neighbors could be allowed to share cart(s) and services.

Existing Program

The contract with the Haulers’ Consortium requires each dwelling unit to have at least one garbage cart. The contract does not allow opt-out from garbage services or cart sharing between units of a residential property or between consenting neighbors.

Committee Comments, Concerns, Pluses, Minuses

Comments from committee members who are in favor of an opt-out option and/or cart sharing:

- Opt-outs should be allowed.
- Cart sharing decreases the number of carts at a property, which enhances the neighborhood.
- Allows garbage service to be more affordable for low waste generators.

Comments from committee members who are not in favor of an opt-out option and/pr cart sharing:

- Everyone has waste and needs to dispose of it.
- It costs money to check to make sure properties are correctly disposing of garbage.
- Opt-out and cart share allows some residents to get a discount and creates inequality. Current citywide garbage system, which requires all to have carts, is more equitable.
- Opt-out and cart sharing risks only some residents will have the knowledge and resources to use the system and will be subsidized.

Recommendations

The Committee discussed the topics of opt-out and cart sharing extensively.

Majority

The Committee agreed on the common goals of fair and equitable garbage service for everyone and flexibility to meet different needs with a range of options.

Minority **Note: organize this by different situations and options to opt-out or not? – single family, multi-unit,**

The Committee discussed a range of recommendations from no opt-outs allowed to fees for opting-out or cart sharing to not having some buildings currently in the program not included in a future program. Some committee members are concerned that having too many options and/or too many exceptions may result in a loss of efficiency.

- No opt-outs allowed at all.
- Allow opt-outs with an application fee for all properties.
- Allow Homeowner Associations to opt-in or opt-out. Several options for HOAs were discussed: **# of HOAs, information letters that were sent**
 - HOAs could manage their own trash as a commercial entity.
 - No opt-out application fee required but would have to prove that the HOA is providing garbage service.
 - Require an opt-out application fee, but only one fee per HOA, not per unit.
 - Exempt HOAs from the City ordinance so they are not in City garbage program.
 - HOAs over # units are exempt from ordinance/City garbage program. For example, HOA comprised of mixed size buildings (some 4 unit and some 6-unit buildings) has some buildings in and some building out of the current City garbage program.
 - HOAs under # units have to pay an opt-out fee.
 - **How to determine what properties qualify as HOAs – is there a legal description?**
 - **Specific designation for an HOA – need to find out about this**
 - **Having a shared driveway – would this be a way to distinguish in or out?**
- Allow 5+ units to opt-in to the City garbage program and be able to opt-out at a future time (i.e. change of ownership)
 - Have flexibility to change but not every month.
- Allow multi-unit properties to share carts (right sizing).
 - At least one cart per address, but no mandated number of carts based on number of units.
 - Allow multi-units to have dumpsters.



- Cart-sharing could be applied for, with a fee to pay for enforcement .
 - Allow neighbors (different address) in single family homes to share carts.
 - Be clear about who to share with – just a different address; doesn’t need to be next to your house
- Allow dumpsters (not carts) at multi-unit properties or on a block if the block organizes.
 - MN state law – many houses on a block can’t pay for a dumpster; double checking this; okay for a multi-unit - Susan double checking with attorneys on this
- If there is an overflow of garbage at a cart-sharing property, the City could require more carts.
 - Alternate: If there is an overflowing garbage issue and it is brought in front of the City Council, the owner would lose the ability to choose cart number/size.

IV. Billing/Customer Service – separate billing & customer service into 2 sections

This program area provides recommendations on the billing of residents for solid waste services, and for improvements to resident customer service experiences.

Existing Program

Haulers mail out invoices on the 5th day of the first month of quarterly service (January, April, July, and October). The invoice covers the next three months. Payment is due the 25th of the billing month. In order for your hauler to receive payment, it must clear your bank or financial institution by the due date. Payments not received by the due date, will incur a late fee of 5% and the end of each month of the billing cycle. Up to three late fees are possible per billing cycle. At the end of the quarter, all unpaid bills are turned over to the City for assessment. Your hauler can no longer take payment for that quarter.

If residents have problems with the collection services and/or the bills, they are to first call the Haulers to resolve these issues. If satisfaction is not achieved, the City will attempt to mediate/resolve the dispute. The City offers an opportunity for residents to contest any assessments via the legislative hearing process.

Committee Comments, Concerns, Pluses, Minuses

- Multi-language support should be easily available
- Physical presence less important; understand our contract and operations here +



Recommendations

Billing

- City should handle Customer billing (unified) ++++++ Majority Rec
- Have a single bill with yard waste and bulkies all in one +++ Comment
- Multi-language support should be easily available – can request a bill in a different language; send message in multiple languages that this service is available – promote the service Majority Rec
- Winning <contractor> should have office/presence in Saint Paul for local help with pickups and questions If the City handles billing than this isn't needed; but Rec if council doesn't adopt billing by City Majority Rec
- Due date for billing – 30 days from when get it to when due Majority Rec
- Single bill for multi-families if customer wants it Majority Rec
- Option to have monthly billing vs quarterly billing – customer request to have monthly, default stays as quarterly Majority Rec

Customer Service

- City should handle Customer Service (unified) ++++++ Majority Rec
- Consistent customer service if all goes through City Comment
- Keep system as it is now – hauler does customer service; ability to contact City if issues not addressed Minority Rec
- Would like to do whatever is most cost effective – fine with hauler or City doing customer service, just most cost effective Majority Rec
- Require hauler to report issues/customer service, including call volumes and trends, to the City, if the hauler provides the customer service – quality control Majority Rec
- Online portal for customer service Comment
- Multi-language support should be easily available for customer service Majority Rec
- Walk-up service should be available to seniors/disability/anyone who asks Majority Rec

Majority (to be completed)

Minority (to be completed)

V. Costs – Pricing – Service Holds

Discussion of the cost and prices of solid waste services and the process for temporary suspension of services are discussed in this section.

Existing Program

Service Costs

Residential properties with 1-4 units, are required to have service and a garbage cart per unit. Depending on cart size either 2 or 3 bulky items can be collected each calendar year at no additional cost. Cart size/collection frequency can be changed once per year at no additional charge. An annual fee of \$28.08 is added to the Ramsey County property tax statement to cover costs for carts, program administration and assessments, outreach, and education efforts.

The contract with the Haulers provides specific annual cost adjustments based on the Consumer Price Index, the tons of garbage hauled the previous year, and the tipping fee charged by the County. County and State Solid Waste Management taxes are added to the bill for garbage and bulky item services. Recycling and yard wastes/organics composting are not taxed by the County or the State.

Service Holds

The City's program has two options for temporarily stopping garbage service: Temporary Service Hold and an Unoccupied Dwelling Unit Registration. Service holds may not be used to avoid paying for service if a residence is occupied.

Temporary absences for service holds can include, but are not limited to: extended vacations, temporary employment or education relocation, extended absence due to health reasons, or other similar situations.

Property owners that have a vacant unit can request an Unoccupied Dwelling Registration Form to suspend service until the unit becomes occupied. Unoccupied Dwelling Registrations go into effect the 1st of the month after the month they are received by the City of Saint Paul and are evaluated annually.

Committee Comments, Concerns, Pluses, Minuses

Cost

- Decrease overall costs for all
- Encourage waste reduction
- Abolish charge when cart lid is open six inches unless grossly overstuffed
 - Asked this of other cities – if we have to move a bag to tip the cart then it's an "excess" charge; others 3 inches or more; there is no standard
 - Do we know how many extra bag charges have happened in last year?
 - We will check on the info; do we have this data?
- Provide more information for new residents about cart sizes
- Single family home extra cart should cost same as multiunit additional carts (e.g., each property has service fee plus fee for number of carts at property similar to Minneapolis pricing model)
- Give people options of a smaller cart and a smaller bill
- All services for one price (single, inclusive, price for Yard waste, bulky, etc.) +++



Service Hold – Separate section for service hold

- Remove need to give haulers reason for a temporary service hold Majority Rec
- Allow service holds even if dwelling is occupied (alternate for very small generators)+ Minority Rec
- Service holds and opt-outs should remain separate. Service hold should not be used in place of opt-out – concern that if don’t allow opt-out than service hold gets used and there is no fee associated with it Minority
- Same form for opt-out & service hold – if you don’t want garbage service, then it’s the same form Comment
- There should be a written plan to hold or stop garbage temporarily that outlines:
 - What qualifies
 - How much is saved
 - When service is stopped and started
 - Be transparent about the costs & savings related to the service hold – widget to figure this out

Admin – Didn’t discuss comments/solutions. Committee to decide

- The Administrative fees that the City charges on the property taxes are too high
- Break out the City Garbage Annual Service Fee into categories (Cart bond replacement costs \$__; City Administration costs \$__; Cash flow stabilization costs \$__)
- Change city administration fee to be per property address, not per trash cart

Recommendations

Cost

- Charge by weight (If little trash is in the cart give discount, since bill extra when lid is six inches open)
- Charge by volume so small carts do not subsidize large carts

Example:	96 gallon	\$50
	45 gallon	\$25
	32 gallon	\$18
	32 gallon EOW	\$ 9
- Allow small cart every-other-week to call for temporary weekly or extra service for a fee
- Give discount for one/year bill/payment ++
- Get rid of charge when cart lid is open 6 inches
- If carts are empty, monthly fee should be reduced (Converse of overstuffed Carts or carts with lid open)



- There is a minimum cost to garbage <service> that should be paid regardless of how much is thrown out
- Single family home extra cart should cost same as multiunit additional carts (e.g., each property has service fee plus fee for number of carts at property)

Majority (to be completed)

Minority (to be completed)

VI. Bulky Items

Bulky items include furniture, large plastic toys, appliances, electronics and TVs, and other waste items that do not fit into a garbage cart. Bulky items do not include construction and demolition wastes, car parts, stumps and large branches, or large landscape materials.

Existing Program

Bulky Items include furniture, appliances, electronics, and mattresses. The citywide garbage collection program includes collection and disposal of 2 or 3 bulky items, depending on cart size, per residential property unit per calendar year at no additional charge. Arrangement for collection and disposal of additional bulky items can be arranged with the Haulers for specified additional charges (\$10-35 per bulky item (plus tax)).

Committee Comments, Concerns, Pluses, Minuses

- There is a concern that bulky item pickups will not stop illegal dumping.
- Bulky item pickup should occur regularly as part of the garbage service.
- Bulky item pickup should be available as an additional charge on the bill.
- Bulky item pickup should happen once a year at the curb, like the City of Bloomington has historically done.
- Concern was expressed that folks can't store bulky items for a whole year as needed if bulky pickup is annually as historically done in the City of Bloomington.
- There should be consistent rules on how many hours/days (48 hours, 1 week, etc.) to call ahead for bulky item pickup.
- A committee member tried to use bulky item pickup. The hauler kept asking what size the bulky was and then said it was too big to qualify as one of their bulky items allowed per the current contract.
- A committee member tried to use the included bulky item pickup and it was too difficult to contact the hauler to schedule the pickup.

Recommendations

Majority

Committee members agree that bulky item disposal should be addressed.

Minority

The committee feels that bulky item pickup is a complicated topic and divided the recommendations into several areas.

Options for the Type of Bulky Pickup Program

- Bulky item pickups should be included as part of the garbage service pricing.
- Increase the number (more than 2 or 3) of bulky item pickups.
- Have same contract as Maplewood in which the hauler collects bulky items for a fee all year, and there is a 20% discount on bulky items during the Fall Cleanup Campaign.
- Have a program similar to Minneapolis in which up to two large items are taken each week at no additional charge. Bulky items with recyclable parts are to be set out only on recycling day (every other week), other items can be set out any week.
- If bulky item pickup is part of garbage service pricing, then an end-of-year rebate should be given if the bulky service is not used.
- Offer 1 bulky item pickup per address and let owners buy in for additional pick-ups (similar to yard waste service charged per bag).
- Allow one day per year curbside pickup across Saint Paul as an opt-in option with a participation charge.
- If cart sharing is allowed, then the number of bulky items allowed as part of the garbage service pricing should be dependent on the cart number/size.
- Bulky item pickup should be a separate opt-in service (no pick-ups as part of cart service).
- Bulky item pickup should be charged by the item and accessible as needed.
- There should be no limit on the number of bulky item pickups allowed to reduce illegal dumping, like the City of Minneapolis.
- Bulky item pickup should be year-round and not seasonal.
- Special program for garbage and bulky pickups around colleges/universities occur during move in/move out times to address additional bulky items and overflowing garbage. Notice is given prior to move in/move out times that bill payers will be charged if they have bulky items/extra garbage bags on the curb or alley during this time.

Ways to Improve a Bulky Item Pickup Program

- Re-use/recycle mattresses like Second Chance Recycling does.
- The person (owner, renter/tenant), who is authorized to schedule a bulky item pickup, needs to be defined.
- A better and easier way to schedule a bulky item pickup is needed.
- Better communication is needed about the bulky item pickup program:
 - Existence of program and program details, including how to use it

- One number to call for bulky item pickups and questions
- Interpretation and translation (language line) to assist limited English speakers

VII. Yard Waste/Organics

Yard wastes include grass clippings, garden weeds, bundles of small branches, and fall leaves. Yard wastes do not include organics, pet wastes, stones, hardscape materials, large branches or stumps.

Organics include food wastes, non-recyclable paper (paper towels, tissues), and compostable to-go containers. Ramsey County is developing an organics collection program that will allow residents to put organics in a special compostable bag which will be collected with their garbage and processed at the R&E Center.

Existing Program

Residents can contract with haulers for April – November weekly service, including a yard waste cart and up to 8 bags per week. Residents can also purchase “a la carte” service by calling the hauler. Yard waste services do not have a State or County Solid Waste Management Tax added.

Organics can be taken to a Ramsey County drop-off site, or vegetative organics can be composted in a back-yard bin. There is no charge or tax for the County drop-off program.

Committee Comments, Concerns, Pluses, Minuses

- Not everyone uses yard waste collection; many back-yard compost or use the Ramsey County drop-off sites.
- Include yard waste in cost of full-service (not separate) so that everyone has yard waste service.
- Encourage more composting in yard or leaving the grass clippings on the lawn.
- Yard waste collection, either annual or a la carte, should be easier to arrange. Its now difficult to contact hauler and/or arrange for pickup of yard waste.
- When durable compostable bag program begins in 2023 compost will be taxed as a part of garbage collection and disposal.
 - Be transparent to community about this.
- Increasing the garbage cart size to allow room to throw in compost bags, instead of taking them to a drop-off site means a higher cost to the resident.
- Yard waste by the bag instead of whole year commitment.
- Stickers from City for yard waste by the bag or extra bags of trash.



Recommendations

Majority

- Keep yard waste collection as a separate paid service.
- Have the option to pay for yard waste collection per bag or full season (have both annual and a la carte options).

Minority

- Incorporate cost of yard waste into the full garbage program so everyone has yard waste service.

VIII. Appendix

Will contain all Committee and Public comments received; will continue to add to this