

City of Saint Paul Garbage Advisory Committee

Draft Report

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 was convened, with members appointed by the Mayor with the advice and consent of Council Members. The members were selected to represent 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 are 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.

The Committee was comprised of eighteen persons. All meetings of the Committee were open to the public. A public web site specific to the Committee's work was established which held all meeting and information materials and a web form for submission of public comments ([Garbage Advisory Committee | Saint Paul Minnesota \(stpaul.gov\)](#)). 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 topics for the City to evaluate as it moves forward with the CC program. Within the topic areas there are not unanimous recommendations; the Committee has provided a range of options. Each of the major areas have sections which contain options recommended by a majority of the Committee members, with differing or opposing recommendations also presented.

The Report topics include:

- Opt Out/Cart Sharing
- Billing/Customer Service
- Costs – Pricing – Services –Service Holds
- Bulky Items
- Yard Wastes/Organics

- Green Options
- Programs Other Cities Have which the Committee Favors
- Next Contract Mechanics
- Hauler Bucket List

Each topic section contains a sentence outlining the topic, the majority option and 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.

Speak more to the green options/impact of the garbage hauler – include more in here

SECTIONS

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, and situations in which persons in multi-unit properties or who are neighbors could be allowed to share cart(s) and services.

Committee Member Options for Opt-Out or Cart Share provisions

- Garbage Reduction should be the over-riding Goal
- Allow zero wasters to opt out via an application
 - Use Maplewood example of application with fee, and requirement for “regular” service if illegal or neighbor-dump
 - If zero-wasters opt out they pay an additional annual Recycling Service Fee
- Allow Townhouse/Homeowner Associations to opt in or opt out
- Allow multiunit properties to share carts +
 - No minimum mandated number of carts, or at least one cart per address
 - This decreases the number of carts at a property which enhances the neighborhood
- Cart-sharing could be applied for, with a fee to pay for enforcement
- Allow neighbors in single family homes to share carts +++
- Allow dumpsters (not carts) at multiunit properties or on a block if the block organizes +
- If there is overflow at cart-sharing property, City could require more carts as instructed by DSI
 - Alternate: If there is an overflowing trash issue and it is brought in front of Council they owner would lose the ability to choose cart number/size

Committee Member Comments Not in favor of Opt-Out options

- Everyone has some waste
- It costs money to check to make sure properties are still cleaned up
- Opt-out and cart share allows some residents to get a discount and creates inequality. New system which requires all to have carts is more equitable. Opt-out and cart share risks only some will have knowledge and resources to use the system and will be subsidized

Billing/Customer Service

Cost

- Decrease overall costs for all - comment
- Encourage waste reduction - comment
- Charge by weight (If little trash is in the cart give discount, since bill extra when lid is six inches open) - solution
- Charge by volume so small carts do not subsidize large carts - solution
 - 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 - solution
- Give discount for one/year bill/payment - solution
 - ++
- Abolish charge when cart lid is open six inches unless grossly overstuffed – comment = frustration, solution get rid of charge
 - Asked this of other cities – if we have to move a bag to tip the cart then its over; others 3 inches or more; 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?
- If carts are empty, monthly fee should be reduced (Converse of overstuffed Carts or carts with lid open) - solution
- There is a minimum cost to garbage <service> that should be paid regardless of how much is thrown out - solution
- Provide more information for new residents about cart sizes - comment
- Allow apartment buildings to use bulky program, if have City service with dumpsters (instead of carts) – move this contract mechanics – expand to larger units; help prevent illegal dumping
- 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) – comment, solution
- Explore 5+ unit service – move to contract mechanics

Customer service

- City should handle Customer Service/billing (unified) - solution
 - +++++
- Have a single bill with yard waste and bulkies all in one - solution
 - +++
- Require haulers to have Customer Service/Operations office within the City – move to elsewhere
- Multi-language support should be easily available – comment, solution

- Walk-up service should be available to seniors/anyone who asks – solution; Dr note may be required to request this; but haulers generally accept the reason

Service Hold

- Remove need to give haulers reason for service hold and/or put service hold in place of opt-out when household creates small trash amounts
- Allow service holds even if dwelling is occupied (alternate for very small generators) +
- Service holds and opt-outs should remain separate. Service hold should not be used in place of opt-out
- 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

Admin

- 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

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.

Committee Comments

Options for the Type of Bulky Pick-up Program

- Increase the number of bulky item pickups for all as part of cart service pricing
- If Bulky Service is part of cart service pricing, give end-of-year rebate if not used +
- Offer 1 bulky item pickup per address and let owners buy in for additional pick-ups (similar to yard wastes by-the-bag) +
- Allow one day per year curbside pickup across Saint Paul as opt-in option (Bloomington model) +++
- Opt-in to bulky item service (no pick-ups as part of cart service) +

Concerns about the Types

- If it is an incentive, there should not be a limitation on the number of bulky items
- There is a concern that bulky item pickups will not stop illegal dumping

- Concern was expressed for folks that can't store bulky items for a whole year (Bloomington model)
- Don't make it a seasonal pick up

Ways to Improve a Bulky Item Program

- Re-use/recycle mattresses like Second Chance Recycling does
- Need to define who is authorized to schedule pickup (owner, renter/tenant)
- Need a better/easier way to schedule a bulky item pickup +++

Better communication that program exists

One number to call

Language Line

Consistent rules on how many hours/days to call ahead (48 hrs., 1 week?)

Tried to use it. The hauler kept asking what size the bulky was and then said it was too big

Tried to use it and was too difficult to contact the hauler to schedule the pickup

Yard Waste/Organics

Yard wastes include grass clippings, garden weeds, bundles of small branches, and fall leaves. Yard wastes do not include 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.

Committee Comments

Options for the Type of Yard Waste/Organics Collections

- Keep Yard Waste Collection as separate option, a la carte +
 - Not everyone uses it, many back-yard compost or use the Ramsey Co. drop-off
- Have the option to pay for Yard Waste Collection per bag instead of full season (have both annual and a la carte options)

Ways to Improve

- Include yard waste in cost of full-service (not separate)
- Encourage more composting in yard or leaving clippings on the lawn
- Yard waste collection, either annual or a la carte, should be easier to arrange. Now difficult to contact hauler and/or arrange for pickup
- When durable compostable bag program begins in 2023 compost will be taxed
 - Be transparent to community about this
 - Increasing the trash cart size to allow room to throw in compost bags, instead of taking them to a drop-off means more \$ to haulers

Green Options

Green Options are suggestions the Committee members identified to move Saint Paul toward a more sustainable solid waste management program.

Incorporate into the sections
But also separate to drive awareness

Focus on what the hauler can do to improve green – vehicles, the way they do it, etc.
Don't focus on individual behavior

Eliminate this section

- Intro – address green
- Put into other sections, except vehicle miles traveled and electric vehicles
- Focus on hauler specifics
 - o Put into the hauler bucket list

Give people options to have a smaller cart and smaller bill

Existing Program

Pluses, Minuses, Concerns

- Contract doesn't need to provide incentives for reduced waste
 - o Have lots of carts for multi-families so paying for garbage service so should use the space/volume
 - Already in cart sharing opt out/opt in
- Contract does need to provide garbage service

Proposed Solutions

- Encourage less garbage by giving small container users a way better deal, Not have small container users subsidize the big container users
- Way the haulers operate – Electric Garbage Trucks
-

Majority

Minority

- City promote Reduce/Reuse/Recycle, NOT “Throw away more.” - Intro
- Track total waste across City so we can accurately gauge waste reduction plans/goals – can do for 1-4 units; intro – goals
- Give incentives to reduce total waste - Intro
- City programs to encourage reuse (e.g., FreeCycle) - Intro
- Give \$\$ incentives to recycle - Intro

++

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+++

- Track and reduce vehicle miles travelled, including from hauler's garage to the service area – hauler bucket list
- Include 5+ unit properties in next contract to reduce the number of trucks in neighborhoods – into contract mechanics
+++
- Anything to do with landfill – all Ramsey County waste goes to Newport waste to energy facility
 - Leave off; no impact

Programs other cities have which the Committee favors

The Committee reviewed programs in place in surrounding cities and identified portions of those programs Saint Paul could replicate

- Adopt a program similar to Maplewood, with one-time form with fee to opt-out
- Even Minneapolis gives you choices with significant <cost> differences between size and frequency of collection
- All services for one price (single, inclusive, price for Yard waste, bulky, etc.) +++
- Have same contract as Maplewood (lower prices and opt-outs) and other cities and include bulky items
- Citywide bulky pickup days/weeks especially around colleges ++
- One day per year “curbside” pickup service across Saint Paul (similar to Bloomington) ++
- I’d like to see free pickup of all large items (like Minneapolis) instead of just two or three a year
- Move garbage collection to City department vs. a trash business
- Single hauler/Municipal service citywide
- Yard waste by the bag instead of whole year commitment
- Stickers from City for yard waste by the bag or extra bags of trash

Next Contract Mechanics

The Committee members considered ways the process of implementing the next garbage program could be improved.

- Keep St. Paul clean, we all want that. - comment
- Invest and really promote reduce/reuse/recycle NOT throw away more. The trash and recycling companies' line is "When in doubt, throw it out" which just adds fuel into the throw away mentality.
 - Use Request For Proposals (RFP) - solution
+++++
 - Let haulers compete - solution
 - Include municipal collection option - solution
++
 - Small haulers were able to sell their routes for good price – they had time to adjust or get out - comment
- Include a municipal collection option - solution
+++++
- ~~Negotiate with existing Consortium~~ - City attorney has says that can't negotiate current contract if significant changes -
- Hire expert council. We (the taxpayers) must have good negotiators this time around vs last time. - solution
- Need transparency of increasing County tipping fees and of taxes on garbage and impact on prices - comment
- Winning <contractor> should have office/presence in Saint Paul for local help with pickups and questions – move to customer service; physical presence less important; understand our contract and operations here
+
- Contract with a local hauler who cares customers are happy (or not) with service - comment
- What can haulers offer as a discount? – move to cost
 - More teeth to Customer Service - comment
- Contract End date – comment that current contract is too long
 - Less than 5 years - solution
+++
 - Less than 3 years - solution
- Open Meetings or hybrid meetings so the public can watch the negotiation meetings, not necessarily contribute during the meeting, but can watch live - comment
+++++
- Transparency to negotiations and/or contract details
- Comment – frustration that details of contract negotiations and details weren't clear
 - Put into the intro?
 - Big promises that weren't kept
 - Be clear about what is possible
- ~~Record all negotiation meetings~~

- ~~Post recorded meetings on the City website, like this advisory committee is doing~~

Hauler Bucket List – move into the Next contract mechanics

The Committee had specific hauler-related recommendations.

- Make the City the hauler - solution
 - Fewer complaints, City workers get benefits
 - Could be very expensive
 - Over time the City should look at being the hauler (generate revenue?)
- Local Customer Service - solution
- More teeth in contract to hold haulers accountable for service - solution
 - +
- We previously had <national hauler> and fired them for poor service - comment
- We wish the truck didn't have to make 2 passes down the alley - comment
- We wish the company was more local - comment
 - +