

The Sanitation Commission meeting met on 11/28/2023 and discussed the new Save As You Throw program to control escalating costs and encourage waste reduction, better recycling.

Recording is available [here](#):

Powerpoint Presentation is available here:

**Reduce Waste.
Recycle Better.
Remove Food Scraps.
Save Money!**

Waste Reduction Program Update

Sanitation Commission
November 28, 2023
Kim O'Rourke, Recycling Coordinator

Funding provided by CT DEEP administered through the SMM Grant

The graphic features a central illustration of a recycling bin with a recycling symbol, surrounded by people. The background is split into light blue and green sections. The text is in a bold, sans-serif font. The entire graphic is framed by a yellow border.

COMMUNITY MEETING

WASTE & FOOD SCRAP CO-COLLECTION PILOT

The logo of the City of Middletown, Connecticut, is circular and features a central figure holding a scale, surrounded by various symbols of industry and agriculture. The text 'CITY OF MIDDLETOWN' and 'CONNECTICUT' is written around the perimeter of the logo.

MEETING GOAL

We Want Your Feedback!

As the waste disposal capacity in Connecticut shrinks, and costs increase, this is an opportunity for us to create a new, equitable system— one that reduces Middletown’s waste and controls costs. **As this program moves through phase 2, we continue to need your input.**

TRASH IS CONFUSING



Solid Waste Hierarchy



BACKGROUND: CONNECTICUT'S TRASH CRISIS

- Disposal capacity is diminishing
- Costs are increasing
- Recycling is not enough
- We need a new approach.



Connecticut Coalition for Sustainable Materials Management

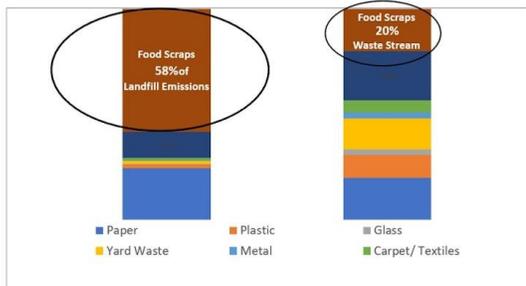
<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP-CCSMM>



WHY FOOD WASTE?

Why target food scraps?

Food Waste is 20% of the waste stream but responsible nearly 60% of all emissions



*Project Drawdown <https://drawdown.org/solutions/reduced-food-waste> Washington DC Carbon Neutrality Modeling Report September 2019

Food waste is very heavy and contributes to the increased cost of trash disposal.

Renewable energy and compost are much more beneficial solutions than food scraps sitting in a landfill!

Middletown Food Scrap Options



WHAT IS CO-COLLECTION?



orange and green bags
are manually sorted

www.reducethetrashct.com/Middletown

<https://youtu.be/1SOWarH0iz4>

MIDDLETOWN RATE STRUCTURE

1. Base Rate (Cart Price) Declines

- Flat service fee per gallon of capacity purchased (works with carts or containers)
 - Includes administration, recycling, salaries, overhead maintenance, etc.
- Ex: annual cart fee of \$398 reduced to \$280

2. Variable Rate Introduced (Bag Fee) for Disposal

- Pay per bag (varying capacities)
 - Includes disposal tip fees, transport fees, sorting fee

Food Waste Bag Sizes



Trash Bag Sizes

Food Scrap Buckets Available



How do I get rid of???

No Charge for:
Electronics
Brush
Twigs, garden debris,
Leaves
Batteries
CFLs & Tubes
Large Boxes
Textiles
Books
Mattresses



Recycling Nook at City Hall :



While most items can be recycled at the curb, some are only accepted in more specialized programs. The following items are collected for recycling at City Hall on the second floor:

- Alkaline batteries
- All other batteries
- Cellphones and cellphone batteries
- CFL Bulbs
- Corks - not synthetic
- Disposable razors
- Dunkin Donuts coffee bags
- Eyeglasses
- Gerber baby food pouches
- Office Supplies
- Plastic bags and plastic film
- Plastic gift cards
- Techno Trash: CDs, DVDs, cassettes, VHS Tapes, etc
 - Full list available at: <https://www.greendisk.com/jgdsite/accept.aspx>
- Toothbrushes, empty toothpaste tubes, floss containers, and packaging
- Toner cartridges



For more information:
Kim O'Rourke - Recycling Coordinator
(860) 638-4855
kim.orourke@middletownct.gov

City Hall
245 de Koven Drive
Middletown, CT 06457
Hours: M-F 8:30-4:30

Timeline

- April 18, 2022 - Phase 1 SMM Grant Resolution
- May – November 2022 - Start up, Outreach & Education
- November 21, 2022 - Pilot Program Starts
- November – September 2022 - Outreach and Education
- September 5, 2023 - Phase 2 Resolution
- September – Ongoing - Outreach, Education & Technical Assistance

Expected Results:

COLLECTIVELY SAVE MONEY
REDUCTION IN WASTE
INCREASE IN RECYCLING
ADDRESS THE TRASH CRISIS
SEPARATE FOOD SCRAPS
BETTER MANAGEMENT OF WASTE MATERIALS
DECREASE IN COSTS
AN EQUITABLE SYSTEM
GIVE RESIDENTS MORE CONTROL OVER THEIR COSTS



Thank you!

Kim O'Rourke, City Recycling Coordinator

860-638-4855

kim.orourke@middletownct.gov

Below are answers to questions posed at the Sanitation District Commission meeting on 11/28/2023. These were the exact questions asked at the meeting. Answers after each question.

1. *"When do the fines start? Is that December 1st? Okay and then how are they enforcing it? Are you going to address that?"*
 - There is no set date as to when fines, or any other type of penalty, will be issued for non-compliance of this program. Because customers are doing such a great job, with over 70% participation and close to 8,000 lbs of food waste in the first month, the city will be holding off with any type of enforcement action while customers get used to the program. We will continue to monitor and leave notices to let people know they need to comply. Some type of penalty will eventually be enforced because all customers need to pay for their disposal costs.

2. *"Does the city at all draw profits from the bags?"*
 - No. The cost of the bags covers the bag cost and the disposal cost for the respective bag size. The price does not generate profits for the City. The revenue generated is used to pay the disposal fees for the trash.

3. *"Who decided that the pilot program was working? Were there any statistics involved in the pilot program that were used to move it forward?"*

- The initial phase of the pilot commenced in November 2022. Through this program we saw that people were willing to participate and that the mechanics of the program would work. The City saw averages of 20% capture rate of available food waste, an estimated waste reduction rate of approximately 20% and a participation rate, at various levels, of approximately 60%. Although this was positive, it was clear a voluntary program would not incentivize enough customers to reduce their waste and separate out food scraps. The City Public Works, in consultation with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and its consultant, proposed a plan to reduce costs to customers and give them the opportunity to save money. Phase 2 allowed the City to reduce the fee for all cart customers and require the use of the orange bags. This would incentivize customers to reduce their trash by participating in the food scrap diversion and increase recycling. The Public Works department held numerous feedback sessions and outreach events in the spring and summer and then the resolution was reviewed by the following commissions and approved by the Common Council on September 5, 2023.
 - Public Works Commission, August 9, 2023, Approved
 - Sanitation Commission, August 22, 2023 Approved
 - Resource Recycling Advisory Commission, August 28, 2023
 - Finance and Government, August 30, 2023

4. *“My concern is that whoever sold this program is getting rich off of these bags.”*

- The material cost of a 33 gallon bag is \$.38. The rest covers how much money it costs to take that bag to the landfill. The remaining \$1.27 goes to the City Sanitation District to pay for the disposal of the trash. Trash is expensive. This is a shift in the way customers pay for trash. The City reduced a typical residential bill by \$118 annually and shifted the disposal cost of the bill into the cost of the bag. That way, the less bags you use, the less you pay. The more you use, the more you pay.

5. *“It seems like there’s a better option out there for these bags. Did anyone research the price of the bags that you’re paying, which is included into our price that we’re paying?”*

- Yes. The pricing is taken from state contract. The cost to make, ship and handle the 33-gallon size bag is \$0.38/bag. This is very competitive to other pricing. They must be strong enough to go through the compaction and sorting process. They are also made with recycled plastic. The \$1.27 disposal cost is also included in the cost of the bag. A 33 gallon bag is estimated to weigh 22 lbs. Therefore, $22 \text{ lbs}/2000 \text{ lbs/ton} = 0.011 \text{ tons} \times \$115/\text{ton} = \$1.27$ disposal cost per bag.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE COST OF THE ORANGE BAGS?



6. *“Is there a fine that's going to be made for people that do not use these bags? And if there is a fine, where—what's—where's that money going and what is it going to be used for?”*
- Currently, the City is pleased with participation at this point. In the short term, we don't anticipate that we will be giving out fines. However, in the long term, for people who repeatedly don't comply with the program, there must be a penalty. If customers aren't using the city-issued bags, then they are not paying their bill. If fines were given, the Department would advocate that the fines go to pay the Sanitation District disposal fees. Because if someone is using a non compliant trash bag, they are not paying their disposal bill and that account will be short.
7. *“How does that funding work and where are the savings involved to the public?”*
- The savings are on an individual level. On average, a typical household generates two 15 gallon bags per week. Two 15 gallon bags per week = \$104. With the addition of 1 food scrap bag a week -\$13 annually - the cost of the bags is \$117. Each homeowner with a 90 gallon cart received a reduction of \$118 annually. If they can use only one 33 gallon trash bag, or one 15 gallon bag, with the food scrap bag, they will see more savings. The bag fees provide the funding to pay for the out-of-state landfilling of trash. It costs less to bring the food scraps to the anaerobic digester in Southington. By increasing the recycling of remaining trash, additional savings are realized.
8. *“I read that there was also a purchase of a new trash vehicle in excess of \$300,000. Was that part of the grant?”*
- The Department purchased a truck using Capital Non Recurring (CNR) funding. The SMM Waste Reduction grant was not used to purchase the new vehicle. Please note, trucks are very expensive, it would be helpful to have grant

funding to purchase new vehicles. The City is advocating for Climate Pollution Reduction Grant funds to purchase an electric refuse truck.

9. *“On page 83 of the grant that you have created here, it says we were supposed to have customer feedback. How was public feedback obtained?”*

- We worked in collaboration with the Resource Recycling Advisory Commission and the Sustainable Middletown Team to promote the program and seek input from residents. Due to the timing of the grant and the billing cycle, the initial start of the program was quick, but then we worked throughout the pilot year to seek input from customers of the District. This included:
 - Information in all billing cycles starting in Oct. 2022;
 - Information included with boxes of bags delivered to doorsteps in Nov. 2022;
 - Outreach at pick up line outside MacDonough School;
 - Press releases and press conferences with CT DEEP;
 - Information disseminated through the City and the Reduce the Trash website;
 - Newsflashes, civic send messages, social media, Wesleyan and MPS Community Connectors;
 - Solicited feedback at information tables at over 50 events, stores, City Hall and the Library;
 - Weekly presence at the farmers market;
 - Issued questionnaire on line and through tabling events;
 - Curbside tagging on carts in Dec, Jan, Feb, & April;
 - Direct outreach with Wesleyan and Housing Authority neighborhoods;
 - Community meetings and presentations
 - November 2022, May & April 2023, and four in August 2023 at various locations throughout the District;
 - Presentations at Commissions and Common Council (July - Sept 2023)
 - Presentations at schools and summer camps and sent home informational letter;

We continued our outreach in September and October and are continuing to solicit input as the program continues. This includes the following:

- Bill information and mailings;
- Tabling, events, displays;
- Website, Newsflashes, civicsend, social media;
- Press Conference with DEEP on Nov 3, 2023;
- Residential canvass - canvassed the entire District. Spoke with 400 people;
- Mailings to renters and landlords;
- Bag Assistance Program for renters and low income;
- Tabling and bag distribution at Housing Authority properties;
- Canvassing and distribution at Wesleyan;
- Chamber of Commerce information session;
- Canvass of businesses and individual visits for technical assistance;
- School programs; and
- Commission and Council Meetings.

10. *“The recycling center is the place to go as an option, but the hours of that are honestly laughable: 7–2:45 and there’s only an opening on Saturdays. But for those of us who work on Saturdays that’s also not something that we could do.”*

- Thank you for the comment. We will take this under consideration.

11. *“Why are the bags not biodegradable / why is this being touted as a more environmentally friendly program when the additional heavy duty plastic bags (esp for food scraps) are extra plastic we needed to use these specific bags because they’re far more heavy duty to sustain the process that they go through. And to me, heavy duty plastic doesn’t really sound like something that’s environmentally friendly when I could get more bags that are biodegradable online for a much cheaper price. It’s also not really environmentally friendly for me to have to go drive somewhere additional out of my way to get bags at a place that I don’t normally stop.”*

- The experience with these types of programs shows that people actually end up using fewer bags because they use them more efficiently and reduce their waste. The bags are made out of recycled material. Again, we don’t love plastic bags either, but right now they are the only way we have to capture the majority of the material from the most people. Maybe down the road, something else will be designed. But right now, biodegradable or compostable bags will break. Separate containers will require an additional route and driver and increase the cost by five times. Plastic bags make it easy for everyone.
- Please note that very few people actually use biodegradable bags. And if you do, they do not degrade in landfills and get burned in incinerators.
- We are working to make the bags easier to get. We’ve made them available in seven common local stores where people shop and at City Hall <https://middletownct.gov/201/Sanitation-Division>
 - Some stores won’t stock them unless customers ask for them. If you have a specific store you shop at, let us know and we will try to get the store to carry them. You may also mail a check to DPW and we will deliver them to you. An on-line option is coming soon.

12. *“What if something that I have doesn’t fit into any of your bags. I’m not going to buy a bag to throw something out only to find it doesn’t fit and then I have to make room in my busy schedule to go to one of these other centers with terrible hours. And that’s not really something that I have the availability to do.”*

- Everything was supposed to be bagged in the trash cart before this program started. If it doesn’t fit in a bag, it is not household trash and shouldn’t go in the cart. These items would be considered bulk waste and should be brought to the recycling center. The Sanitation District does offer curbside bulk waste pick up year round. There is a minimum charge for bulk waste, delivered to the recycling center or picked up, so it is more economical to gather several of these items before disposing of them.

13. *“I did speak to someone at city hall who said it’s not legal to fine unless there’s an ordinance passed. I would like clarification on whether or not an ordinance has passed that will allow you to fine people for not following this policy. And I do want a clarification on the legality of the fines.”*

- No ordinance has been passed, and we currently aren't giving out fines for not using the bags. There is an ordinance to fine for not recycling properly, and should the City decide to go that route, it would follow a similar system. Violators are notified of the problem and given an opportunity to comply. If they consistently and blatantly do not comply, a fine is issued. With recycling, we find with education, most people comply. This first month we have seen over 70% of the customers are participating, so we hope this continues to increase and no fines will be needed. However, considering the bag is the receipt for paying the bill, if some people continue to be chronic and blatant violators, there will be penalties because it is not fair to others who are paying for their trash.

14. *“And at the very beginning you questioned—you said something about down the road going to where you will now be billed for the weight. Is that by the number of bags? I really need clarification on that. How are you going to weigh?”*

- What we were saying is this: Bag pricing is based on averages as to what the various bag sizes will weigh. That is how we determine the pricing, by how much fits in a bag. The City is not weighing bags.

15. *“If the green bags are going to be separated from the orange bags at the plant anyway, why do we need the orange bags? Why not just pull out the green bags and obviously the rest is trash? So, why can't we only use green bags and then use whatever other bags are going to be in there instead of having two different kinds?”*

- The orange bags are the receipt for paying for your trash disposal. By not using the orange bag, people are not paying their trash disposal fee. Over the past year, those involved in this program have experienced firsthand that a significant reduction in trash is not only possible but normal for a program like this. There is a connection between increased recycling + separating food scraps, and the amount saved. It is a daily reminder of the costs of waste removal. Using green bags in this program saves money because food waste is less expensive to dispose of. Using ONLY orange bags is more expensive because of the heavier weight of food waste and the higher cost of landfilling waste out of state. The cost of bags, which includes the disposal, is meant to incentivize more effective separation of food scraps and overall trash reduction. In addition, the orange bags are sturdier than normal bags, this is necessary so that bags don't break open during compaction and transportation, and can be easily sorted manually. Most regular bags will break, making the sorting process dangerous for the men and women who staff the sorting lines.
- This system is called a two tier billing system and is not unusual. Hundreds of communities in the northeast use it. Stonington CT uses it but their first tier - the cost of operation and management is included in their taxes. The second tier - the cost of disposal is in the cost of their bags. Every town's solid waste system is slightly different. In Middletown trash management costs have never been included in the taxes. There's always been a separate fee. The Sanitation District reduced that fee and shifted the disposal cost to the bag to incentivize customers to reducing, reusing and recycling. Just asking people to do it hasn't worked.

16. *“Why are we, in this district, going to be held to a different standard than the rest of the city?”*
- The Sanitation District is an enterprise fund; operating solely on user fees and controlled by the City. The change that has been made with this program is how the bill is paid, now through a bag fee, and how much freedom customers have to reduce their trash, and their costs.
17. *“So how am I saving any money at all?”*
- The less trash you make, the more money you save.
18. *“No, one's going to be saving any money in this and why not just use only the green bags? And pull out the green bags and the rest is trash. Do these other companies do that? The city of Middletown dumps off their garbage truck at the same place as Waste Management. If so, how—it just doesn't seem to go very well, if all the trash is going to the same facility.”*
- The orange bags are the receipt for paying for your trash disposal. By not using the orange bag, people are not paying their trash disposal fee. Over the past year, those involved in this program have experienced firsthand that a significant reduction in trash is not only possible but normal for a program like this. There is a connection between increased recycling + separating food scraps, and the amount saved. It is a daily reminder of the costs of waste removal. Using green bags in this program saves money because food waste is less expensive to dispose of. Using ONLY orange bags is more expensive because of the heavier weight of food waste and the higher cost of landfilling waste out of state. The cost of bags, which includes the disposal, is meant to incentivize more effective separation of food scraps and overall trash reduction. In addition, the orange bags are sturdier than normal bags, this is necessary so that bags don't break open during compaction and transportation, and can be easily sorted manually. Most regular bags will break, making the sorting process dangerous for the men and women who staff the sorting lines.
 - Waste Management does not operate in CT. The Sanitation District is independent from any private hauler or company.
 - Over the past year, those involved in this program have experienced firsthand that a significant reduction in trash is not only possible but normal for a program like this. There is a connection between increased recycling + separating food scraps, and the amount saved. It is a daily reminder of the costs of waste removal. Using green bags in this program saves money because food waste is less expensive to dispose of. Using ONLY orange bags is more expensive because of the heavier weight of food waste and the higher cost of landfilling waste out of state.

19. *"I just saw that an 8 gallon bag is 25 cents or 50 cents? It's half the price for a green one than it is for an orange one. So why wouldn't I just buy all green bags now and put everything in a green bag and nobody's going to know?"*

- The orange bags are for trash and include the trash disposal cost. The green bags are for food scraps which are much less expensive because they are just the cost of the bag. We are hoping people will comply with the rules. Using the green bags for trash will cause problems at the anaerobic digester. If we see this happening we will track the contaminated bags back to the generator.

20. *"My concern is, you know, how, how do you control? Like, if somebody's walking their dog and they have that little poop bag, I'd rather them throw it in my trash can than throw it on the ground or leave it a mess in my yard."*

- Tiny infractions like that will likely happen and are impossible to eliminate. When we roll out penalties we won't be penalizing people for small infractions like that. We will be looking for the chronic, blatant violators who are consistently not complying. Random dog poop bags and litter in the trash is not an issue. If you ever feel you received a notice or penalty that you didn't deserve, contact the Department to discuss it.

21. *"There have been plenty of times I've gone to, like, Price Chopper or Walgreens when I'm picking up my kiddo from work and they're out of bags."*

- We understand that this is frustrating. We have asked the stores to watch the stock and we get them bags as soon as they are ordered. We're aware that early on it was challenging to get the bags. You can order bags online at <https://wastezero.bigcartel.com/> or you can send a check to Public Works, 245 Dekoven Drive, Room 210 and we will deliver them to you.

22. *"So if it's an optional thing to use the green bags Why even use the green bags? Why not just make it so, we are to use city-approved, biodegradable bags?"*

- Green bags divert food waste that would otherwise be driven far away to a landfill where it would sit and add methane gas into the atmosphere. It's better environmentally and economically to use the green bags. When food scraps decompose in a landfill, they emit methane gas that is 30 times more powerful than carbon dioxide. Furthermore, 58% of methane emissions released to the atmosphere from municipal solid waste landfills are from food waste. Turning food scraps into clean energy and compost is cheaper and better for all of us. Plus, it offers the option of using fewer orange bags. We hope the incentive of saving money and helping the environment will be enough to get most people to separate their food scraps. The biodegradable bags do not degrade in a landfill and if they get sent to an incinerator, they just get burned. Maybe at some point they can make a bag that is strong enough to handle the sortation and transportation process and go through the biological process of digestion, but right now that doesn't exist. Or maybe another type of container, besides a plastic bag, will be invented.