

HENNEPIN COUNTY  
MINNESOTA

Solid Waste Management  
Master Plan  
Public Engagement  
Findings Report

2017

*To support the development of the 2018 Solid Waste Management Master Plan, the county held discussions with various stakeholders to identify the best solutions to encourage waste prevention, increase recycling and expand organics recycling to eliminate landfilling of waste.*

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## Purpose

### **Seeking input to develop strategies to meet our recycling goals**

Hennepin County is developing its 2018 Solid Waste Management Master Plan to reach the goal of recycling 75 percent of waste by 2030. State statute requires metro counties to prepare master plans every six years that identify strategies to meet the recycling goals and objectives in the state's Metropolitan Area Solid Waste Management Policy Plan.

During the first phase of engagement from March to June 2017, county leaders and staff sought input from residents, businesses, cities, schools, haulers and other partners to identify the best solutions to encourage waste prevention, increase recycling and expand organics recycling to eliminate landfilling of waste.

This report provides a summary of the public engagement activities and key findings from this effort. The feedback will be used to develop new strategies to be drafted in the Solid Waste Management Master Plan.

This report is being shared with the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners as they provide guidance on the overall direction of the plan. In fall 2017, a draft plan will be made available, and the county will solicit formal feedback on specific strategies. It is anticipated that the plan will be submitted to the county board for approval by the end of 2017.

# Engagement approach

The county gathered input from 1,526 participants through meetings, one-on-one interviews and online surveys. Participants included residents, elected officials and representatives from businesses, business associations, cities, schools, multifamily property owners, haulers and other waste industry experts. Promotions of these activities included arranging in-person meetings, sending emails and letters to stakeholders, and including information in newsletters and on social media.

## Summary of public engagement activities

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Online survey	1,235 residents
Meetings with city elected officials	35 elected officials and city managers
Meetings with hauler representatives	6 haulers
Meetings with city recycling coordinators	26 city staff
Focus group discussions with businesses that generate large amounts of food.	21 business representatives responsible for waste management decisions
Interviews with Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) Greater Minneapolis representatives	7 representatives of BOMA from primarily large corporate real estate companies.
Meetings with school representatives	12 adult school staff and 2 students
Online survey of school representatives	24 school recycling contacts
Online survey of business grant recipients	35 business recycling grantee
Green Partners environmental education network meeting	34 community group representatives
Interviews with multifamily property managers	6 property managers
Phone interviews with multifamily property managers	31 property managers
Interviews with construction and demolition industry professionals	31 industry professionals, including building reuse retailers, contractors, city building officials, construction waste processors and end markets
Waste sort engagement event	23 attendees, including county commissioners, city council aides, environmental organization executives, retail sustainability officers and reuse and organics industry representatives.
	<b>1,526 total participants</b>

## Communities represented

Residents from 39 of the county's 44 cities as well as representatives, including mayors, council members, managers and recycling coordinators, from 29 cities provided input.

### Residents from:

- Bloomington
- Brooklyn Center
- Brooklyn Park
- Champlin
- Chanhassen
- Corcoran
- Crystal
- Dayton
- Deephaven
- Eden Prairie
- Edina
- Excelsior
- Golden Valley
- Greenfield
- Hanover
- Hopkins
- Independence
- Long Lake
- Maple Grove
- Maple Plain
- Medina
- Minneapolis
- Minnetonka
- Minnetrista
- Mound
- New Hope
- Orono
- Osseo
- Plymouth
- Richfield
- Robbinsdale
- Rockford
- Rogers
- St. Anthony
- St. Bonifacius
- St. Louis Park
- Shorewood
- Wayzata
- Woodland

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- Richfield
- Robbinsdale
- Rockford
- Rogers
- St. Louis Park

## Key findings

### **Residential recycling has improved, but more recycling options are needed**

- Residents emphasized increasing convenience by offering pickup services for items that currently need to be dropped off, such as plastic bags and batteries, or improving drop off options by adding more locations and expanding hours.
- Many residents need more capacity in their recycling carts. Many residents want recycling picked up weekly, while other residents asked for a larger recycling cart.

### **Interest in organics recycling is high, but the concept is still new**

- Residents consider organics recycling to be important, and 62 percent said they would be very likely to participate.
- Businesses that generate large amounts of food waste have begun to implement organics recycling. Reasons they cite for starting their programs include having an individual who was passionate about the topic and a financial scenario that made sense. Other businesses have considered it, but haven't made it a priority or found it was too expensive.

### **Barriers to organics recycling need to be addressed, and the benefits need to be better understood**

- Barriers for residents include space for adding another cart, increased truck traffic, and odors.
- Barriers for businesses include finding space for outdoor containers, the need to conduct on-going training for staff, and finding time to focus on an issue that isn't urgent.
- There is a need to better understand the benefits of organics recycling and the value of the compost that the food scraps are turned into. People say they participate in organics to help the environment, to be less wasteful, to send less to landfills, and to create healthy soils.
- Providing rewards for residents and business who participate in organics recycling programs should be explored.

### **There is openness to residential organics recycling requirements but concerns about implementation**

- Cities were accepting of the need for requirements, and their concerns were related more to the implementation rather than the requirement itself.
- Cities are concerned about what changes in the funding policy and an organics recycling requirement together would mean for the cost of recycling to their residents. Residents are not seeing the cost savings of reducing waste.

- County leadership is needed to determine the best collection methods and improvements to waste infrastructure to make organics recycling viable.

### **Organics recycling requirement for business sectors that generate large amounts of food waste is not unexpected, and the suggested approach is sound**

- Although no one readily embraced requirements, the concept was not unexpected.
- Several businesses acknowledged that they likely wouldn't participate in organics recycling until it was required.
- The approach of the requirement made sense. A well designed requirement implemented with county guidance and support, would make requirements more palatable.

### **Each sector is willing to do its part to expand organics recycling if it is broad effort**

- Interest in the status of organics recycling for other sectors came up in nearly all the discussions. There is a desire to see organics expanded as a broad effort and made available more widely, but individuals seemed more willing to do more if other sectors were also being asked to do more.

### **The educational and financial resources the county provides to encourage recycling are helpful**

- The grants, recycling containers, education materials and technical assistance provided by the county were valuable to businesses, schools, multifamily properties and community groups.
- In general, the county is offering the right mix of resources for each sector. The barriers for each sector are unique but well understood.
- Partners that have received grants continue to want help with ongoing training needs and troubleshooting their programs.

### **Advocate for policies that reduce waste and help enforce existing requirements**

- Many residents want the county to be more active in encouraging product stewardship, especially on plastic packaging and disposable products. Residents also want to see more done to enforce recycling requirements that are already in place for apartments, businesses and schools.

### **More education needed**

- Residents want very detailed lists of what can and can't be recycled or composted.
- Cities want the county to do more to promote organics recycling so residents better understand the benefits of organics recycling and the value of the compost.

## Residential recycling and organics

Residents, city representatives, waste haulers and community groups were asked about how to improve recycling and expand organics collection. This section summarizes the feedback of the following input-gathering methods.

The county conducted an online survey that was promoted through social media ads and newsletters to reach a wide audience of county residents. A total of 1,235 residents representing 39 cities took the online survey.

County leaders and staff gathered feedback from mayors and city council members from 20 cities on how to increase participation in organics recycling. The discussions focused on recent changes in the county's residential recycling funding policy that will shift funding over time from supporting recycling to organics recycling for composting. Participants also discussed options for requiring cities to make organics recycling available to residents.

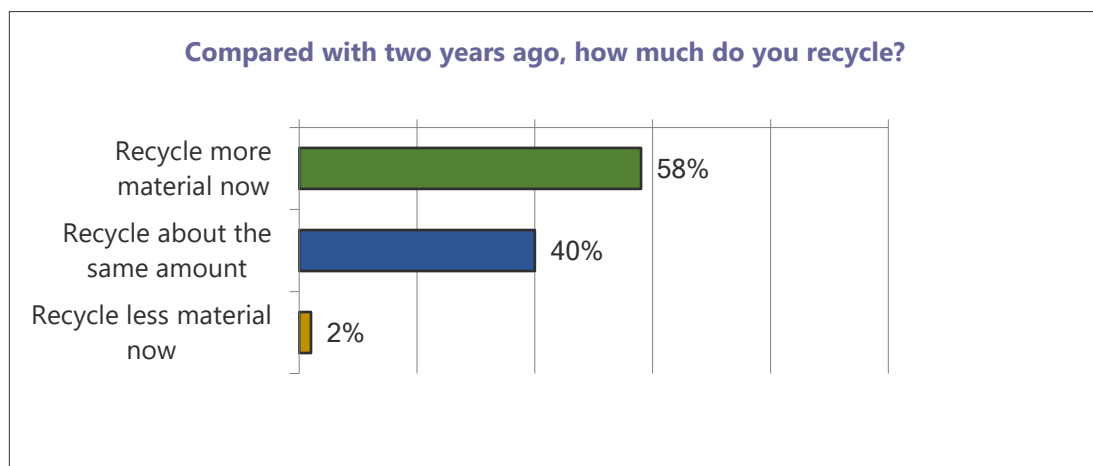
Staff conducted one-on-one interviews with recycling coordinators of 17 cities. The conversations focused on how to move organics recycling programs forward and gathered feedback on the various options.

Staff interviewed staff representing six waste hauling companies. The conversations focused on residential organics recycling services, education, and the solid waste infrastructure.

The county also hosted a Green Partners environmental education networking meeting and facilitated small group conversations with our community and environmental organization partners.

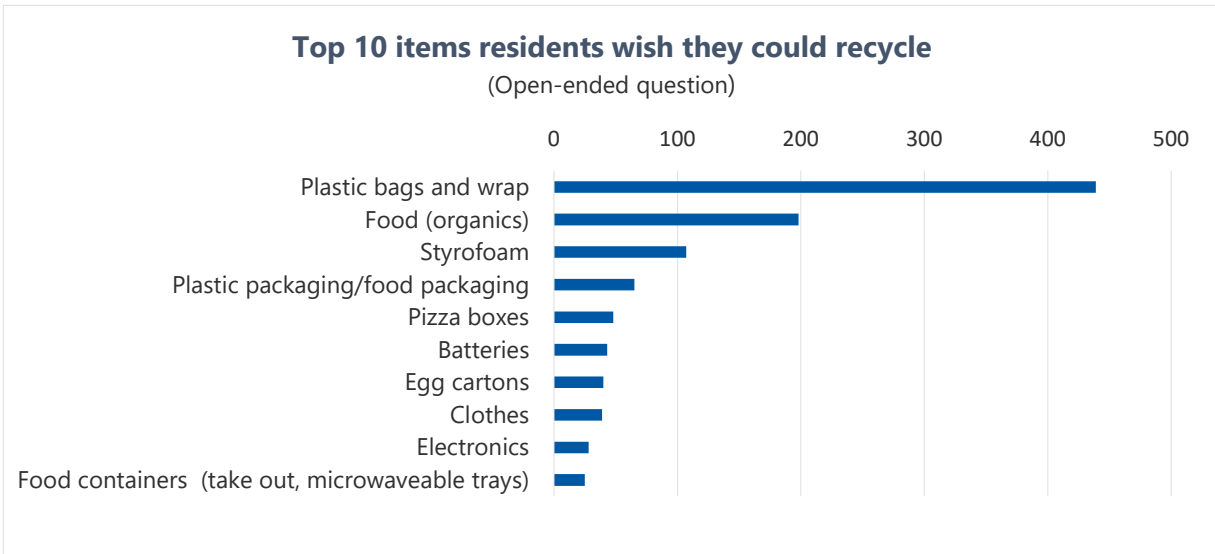
### Recycling has improved, but more recycling options are needed

Most residents said they recycle more now than they did two years ago, but there are still opportunities to improve recycling.



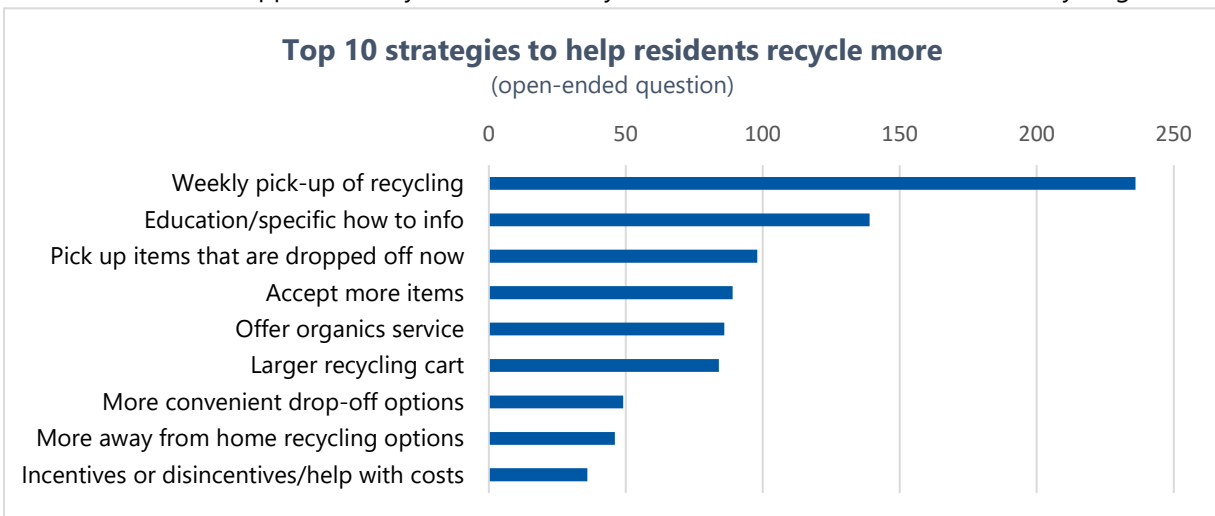


Residents said they want to recycle plastic bags and food and other compostable materials. Both residents and representatives from community groups emphasized increasing convenience by offering pickup services for items that currently need to be dropped off, such as plastic bags, batteries, electronics and bulky items, or improving drop off options by adding more locations and expanding hours.



Many residents need more capacity in their recycling carts. The top strategy suggested was to pick up recycling weekly, while other residents asked for a larger recycling cart. Many confessed that some recyclables ended up in the trash because their containers were overflowing by pickup day.

Residents also asked for more education. Many residents want very detailed lists of what can and can't be recycled or composted. They recognize that packaging and recycling programs have changed in recent years, and what can or can't be recycled is not clear. Some residents also want to see more education on what happens to recyclables after they leave the curb and the benefits of recycling.

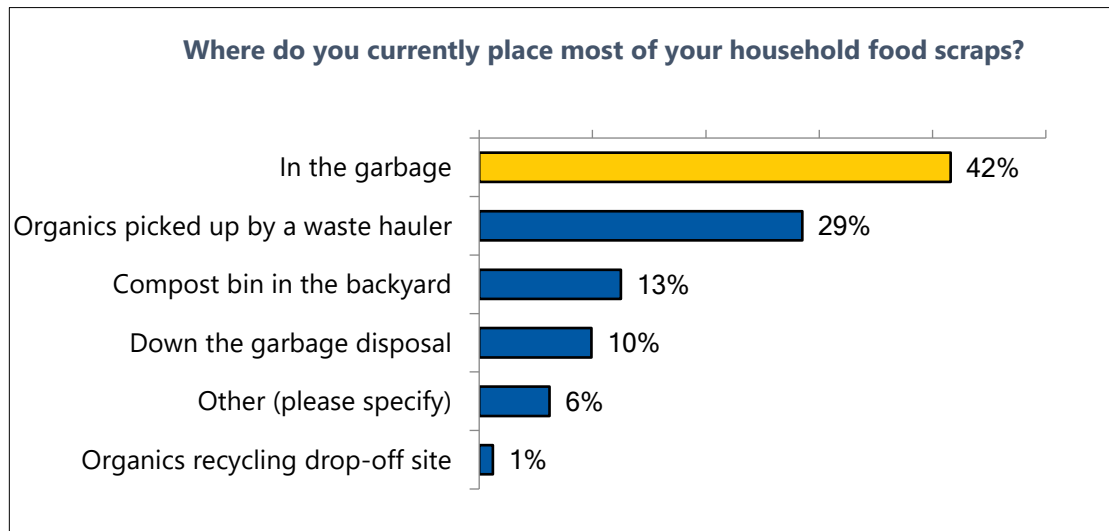


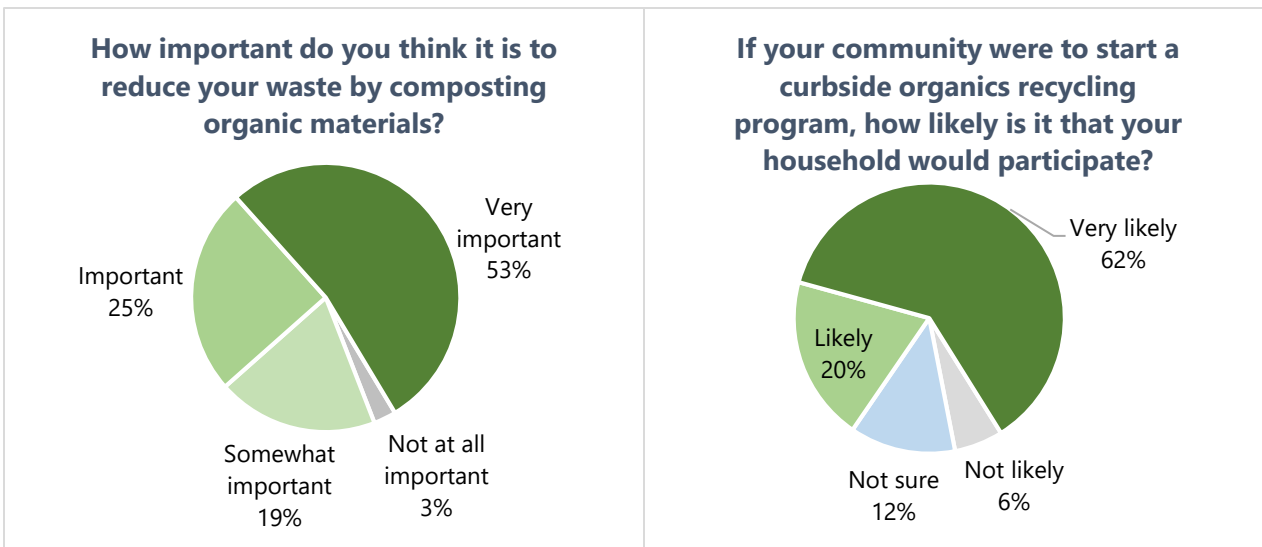
### Interest in organics recycling is high, but the concept is new

Currently, residents most commonly put their food scraps in the garbage, but there is interest in doing something else with this waste. Residents who are not already participating in organics recycling consider it to be important and said they would be very likely to participate. Similarly, elected officials said residents, especially younger residents, would like the option to participate in organics recycling. Community groups agreed that more residents need to have the opportunity to participate in organics recycling.

Haulers said they are ready for organics collection programs, and some are already expanding options by offering the Blue Bag program. Haulers said they need greater route density and are concerned about capacity at compost sites. They would like to see more transfer facilities to sort blue bags, and they support an expansion of the Brooklyn Park Transfer Station to accommodate more organics processing. Many haulers are interested in a regional anaerobic digestion project.

City recycling coordinators had a somewhat contrary view, explaining that there is not significant demand right now from residents for organics recycling because it's a new concept and many do not know what it is or why it's important.





### Barriers need to be addressed and benefits need to be understood

Elected officials and city recycling coordinators anticipated similar barriers for residents to organics recycling, with the highest being adding another cart, increased truck traffic, and odors. Residents who are not currently participating in organics recycling programs were concerned about finding space to collect organics inside their homes, adding another cart, attracting pests and managing smells. Elected officials see a need to further explore barriers and related strategies for overcoming the “yuck” factor for residents.

Elected officials expressed the need to better understand the benefits of organics recycling and the value of the compost that the food scraps are turned into. They see neighbor-to-neighbor outreach as a valuable tool to spread the word about organics recycling.

Elected officials, haulers and community groups all suggested providing rewards for residents who participate in organics recycling programs. Benefits suggested include giving away free compost or exploring a system like Recycle Bank where participants earn points for recycling that can be redeemed for discounts at local retailers.

For residents already participating in organics recycling, the most common reasons they participate include to help the environment, to be less wasteful, to send less to landfills, and for healthy soils. Their greatest ongoing concerns related to organics recycling were the cost and quality of compostable bags.

Elected officials believe that a significant amount of food waste is handled through backyard composting. The survey indicates 13 percent of residents manage food scraps in a backyard bin. Surprisingly, some residents who now participate in curbside organics said they started because they had some items that they wanted to compost but couldn't be handled in a backyard bin, such as meat and dairy products. Some residents were also composting to manage food scraps, but didn't really

have a need for the compost, so they preferred to manage their organic waste through curbside pick up.

### **There is openness to requirements but concerns about implementation**

Most elected officials were accepting of the need for requirements, and their concerns were related more to the implementation rather than the requirement itself. One participant explained, "You might as well tell us what to do. We would rather hear requirements from the county rather than the state." Another participant wondered why organics recycling was optional for residents.

A few elected officials who represent smaller cities were concerned about requirements, citing a lack of interest among residents, a general aversion to requirements, and limited staff resources available to implement the program.

Community groups suggested a multi-faceted approach to increasing organics recycling that included promotions, incentives, grants and requirements.

Elected officials wanted more specific information about what the change in the funding policy and organics recycling requirements together would mean for the cost of recycling to their residents. They said residents are not seeing the cost savings of reducing waste, and they expressed concern about adding more fees for recycling services.

City recycling coordinators similarly discussed how figuring out the best model for who pays for organics recycling can be a challenge. City recycling coordinators said that many councils prefer the subscription model where only residents who use the service pay, while haulers advocate for a model where everyone pays. Elected officials emphasized the importance of minimizing costs while maximizing environmental benefits, and some elected officials wanted to get credit for households that compost in their backyards or use a drop-off option.

Both elected officials and city recycling coordinators said that incentives for cities need to be reconsidered. Elected officials said an incentive for cities needs to encourage them to do the best – not just the minimum – to achieve the recycling goal. City recycling coordinators said the new funding policy incentive is not enough to get cities interested in moving forward because organics recycling is an additional cost that is not offset by the SCORE funds.

Elected officials want the county to help with promotional efforts needed to get buy in and educate residents. They also suggested more education is needed now to promote organics recycling to those who have the service.

### **The county needs to take the lead to determine collection methods**

City recycling coordinators said there needs to be more county leadership to get the information needed to determine the best collection methods for organics recycling and identify improvements to waste infrastructure to make it viable. The possibility of a county requirement has been brought forward before, so they are waiting to see what the county does.

Some elected officials said that if cities are required to offer organics recycling to their residents, they want help determining the best collection method. They suggested the county consider factors such as costs and who pays, environmental impacts, amount of material collected, ease for residents, and truck traffic to determine the best collection method. They emphasized that cities don't want to make the wrong decision and change collection methods later.

City recycling coordinators similarly said they want the county to help address barriers and issues with options to provide organics recycling services to residents. Some barriers they discussed include the availability of service providers and only having one hauler that offers the service in open markets. They explained the following pros and cons with each option:

- Status quo: No city is currently moving forward with organics recycling, and many cities want to pair an open market approach with education.
- Drop-offs: Several cities are interested in setting up drop-off sites if the county provides financial assistance. Concerns include finding a site, staffing, illegal dumping, and the cost of maintaining the site.
- Pilot programs: Golden Valley, Hopkins, Richfield and Robbinsdale expressed interest in developing pilot projects. Cities with open hauling are not sure how to do a pilot because of issues with legal authority and logistics with the haulers.
- Hauler licensing requirements: Several cities were interested in this, but they are reluctant to try it because no one else has. They suggested the county consider a licensing requirement for haulers. Elected officials said they were not quite sure how this would work and questioned hauler commitment to supporting organics collection. One elected official suggested this was the least preferred option, citing that haulers are not likely to offer a good price.
- Include organics recycling with recycling RFP/contract: This option had some interest, but no city has concrete plans to do this. Some cities see this as a risk-free way to see what options are available. Cities preferred that the requirement date for organics recycling align with the expiration of recycling contracts rather than amending their current agreements.
- Contract separately for organics recycling: This was not a preferred option as cities that are interested in contracting for organics recycling would rather include it with recycling, not separately.
- Organized collection: Although this would provide more options and better pricing, it is a contentious political issue with too much opposition from residents. However, some cities may explore this option, and it was suggested that the county consider organized collection for organics.

### **Organics recycling needs to be widely available**

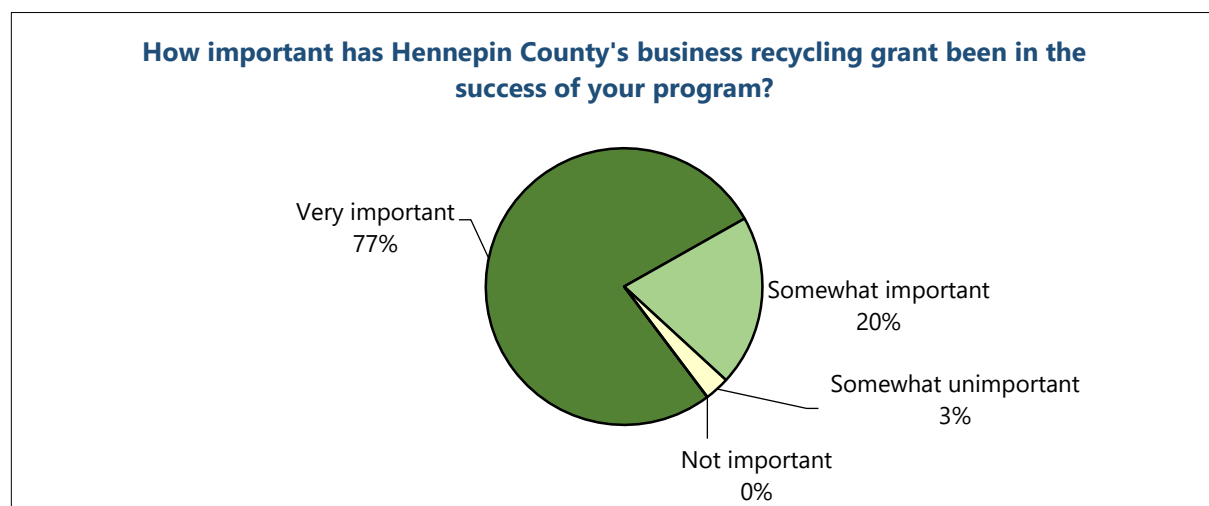
Elected officials were interested in the status of organics recycling for other sectors, including multifamily and businesses, because organics recycling needs to be widely available in order for residents to be consistent and effective at home. Residents and community groups also noted the importance of organics recycling in schools to teach kids about the program, suggesting they would bring it home and continue the practice throughout their lives.

## Business recycling and organics

The county contracted with a consultant to conduct focus groups with 21 managers or owners of businesses that generate large amounts of food waste. The focus groups explored attitudes about organics recycling and gathered feedback about how to best implement a requirement for businesses that generate large amounts of food waste (business managers) to participate in organics recycling. A similar conversation was conducted by county staff with representatives of primarily large corporate real estate companies who serve on the Building Owners and Managers Association Greater Minneapolis' Sustainability Committee (BOMA representatives). The county also received input from 35 people who received a business recycling grant to ask about the resources the county provided, challenges to implementing a waste diversion program, and suggestions for additional program improvements. Feedback from these businesses as well as input from community groups and haulers related to business recycling is summarized below.

### Efforts so far have been successful

Business managers explained several elements that have made business recycling successful so far. Businesses currently involved in organics recycling told stories of their programs starting as a result of an individual with passion for the topic and a financial scenario that made good business sense. Business recycling grantees report funding, container signage and educational materials as the most important resources provided by the county. Site visits and technical assistance were also valuable and continue to be a need. Haulers said they liked the business recycling grants offered by the county and believe the program is working to increase organics recycling. Many of the BOMA representatives were already participating in organics recycling and had taken advantage of the technical assistance the county provides. Representatives from community groups said they appreciate the efforts so far to make recycling programs and labeling consistent across businesses and want to see those efforts continue to expand.



## **Barriers and strategies suggested to overcome them**

Businesses and haulers said that finding space for outdoor containers and conducting ongoing training for staff were common barriers to starting organics recycling programs.

Most businesses found educating customers and training staff to be an ongoing and challenging need. Business recycling grantees also noted challenges with selecting appropriate bins to create a system that makes recycling easy and finding affordable compostable liners and food serviceware that performed well. Suggestions to improve the grants program include simplifying the application and reporting form and being more proactive in communicating reporting requirements. Another common request was for clearer or customizable signs.

Business managers said that compelling information about financial and environmental impacts were needed to encourage more widespread implementation of organics recycling programs. Several of the business managers felt that hauler cooperation would be essential for implementing the requirements successfully. They have an established relationship with their hauler, valuing the knowledge and customer service haulers provides.

Community groups encouraged more targeted outreach, incentives and requirements for restaurants and other large generators of food waste. They said that transparency on waste bills from haulers is needed, and they think that businesses and organizations should be able to change garbage service level with no penalty from haulers.

Haulers emphasized that successful organics recycling programs among businesses that generate large amounts of food waste require buy-in from the chef, proper set-up in the kitchen, training for staff and well-labeled containers. They have found organics collection in the kitchen to be much easier than organics collection in customer areas.

Haulers said they are providing service to some businesses, schools and hospitals, but they indicated that route density is a challenge and suggested the county focus outreach on large generators and in Minneapolis. They find it valuable when county staff meets with haulers sales teams.

## **Organics recycling requirement not unexpected and the suggested approach is sound**

Although no business managers or BOMA representatives readily embraced requirements, the concept was not unexpected. Several acknowledged that they likely wouldn't participate in organics recycling until it was required. The BOMA representatives said that the corporate real estate industry doesn't like requirements because they are already doing so much, especially in the environmental arena. One hauler wants to see legislation to add organics to the list of required materials for businesses to recycle.

For most business managers and BOMA representatives, the approach of the requirement made sense. They agreed with targeting facilities likely to generate large quantities of organics first, managing processing capacity to avoid overwhelming the existing processors and encouraging development of additional capacity, and encouraging development of efficient collection by starting with large generators and phasing in smaller ones after costs hopefully decrease.

The draft requirements would use two screening factors to determine which businesses would be subject to the requirements. The first would be businesses sectors that typically generate large amounts of food waste. The second screening factor would include businesses that generate one ton of trash or more per week.

There was general agreement by the business managers and the BOMA representatives that the draft list of business sectors presented by the county would be large generators of food waste. Additional suggestions included prisons, sports stadiums, event centers and schools.

Only a few business managers knew the volume of their trash and were thus not confident about assessing whether one ton was a reasonable standard for the requirements. The BOMA representatives were more familiar with trash volumes and agreed a threshold of one ton of waste a week was reasonable.

Although they thought the requirements sounded reasonable, business managers and BOMA representatives had some questions related to the details of compliance. The draft requirements include having organics recycling service in place, having containers set up in the back-of-the house, and having a maximum allowance of 10 percent of food waste by volume in the trash. The ability to accurately and fairly implement the 10 percent standard was questioned, with business managers wondering about equity and process regarding measurement, enforcement and consequences. The BOMA representatives also questioned the resources needed to enforce the 10 percent standard. However, neither group could readily identify an alternative approach to ensuring that organics recycling service was being used effectively.

### **A well designed requirement implemented with county guidance and support is palatable**

BOMA representatives appreciated the thoughtful approach to the requirements, noting that other entities have enacted requirements without gathering input that are then difficult to implement. One member said "I appreciate the approach. It's palatable. It's reasonable." They want to work with the county to design the requirements and show leadership.

BOMA representatives emphasized measurement and see the requirements as a way to get better data from haulers. Their corporate clients are focused on sustainability and need recycling

## **Key elements of draft requirements**

### **Which businesses?**

Business in the following sectors that generate one ton of trash or more per week:

- Restaurants
- Grocery stores
- Food wholesalers/distributors
- Food manufacturers
- Hotels
- Caterers
- Nursing/residential care facilities
- Office buildings with cafeteria/dining services

### **What are the standards of compliance?**

- Organics recycling service in place
- Containers set up in the back-of-the house
- Maximum allowance 10 percent food waste by volume in the trash



and waste data to meet LEED or other environmental performance measures. They emphasized that many of their clients are leading the way on organics recycling, so if the requirements encourage the right metrics, they can prove they are meeting the requirements.

Business managers suggested that the right attitude during implementation, such as offering incentives and approaching businesses with an encouraging attitude, would make requirements more palatable. They thought that implementing requirements within one year was manageable, and they felt they could roll out a program fairly quickly with the appropriate training and support.

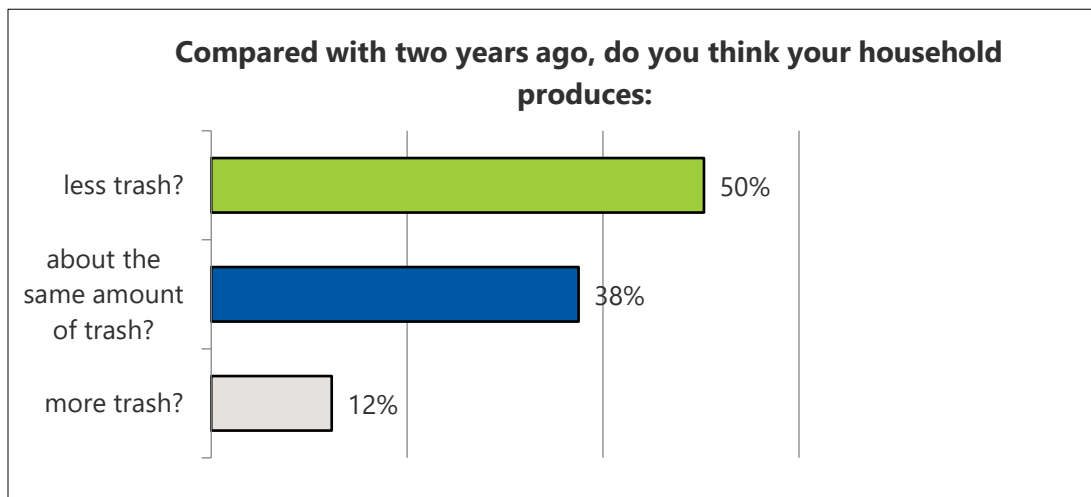
BOMA representatives echoed the need for the right attitude and added that a little flexibility with implementation to recognize businesses that are trying to make it work in difficult situations, such as those with small loading docks, would go a long way. They also said the data gathered should be used to encourage, rather than shame, businesses into compliance.

## Waste prevention

The following includes feedback from the resident survey, business grantee survey, community group discussions and waste sort event regarding waste prevention.

### Residents are seeing a difference in their trash

Residents are seeing a positive trend when it comes to waste prevention, with most residents thinking they produce less trash than they did two years ago.



### Waste prevention is not completely understood and interest is not as strong

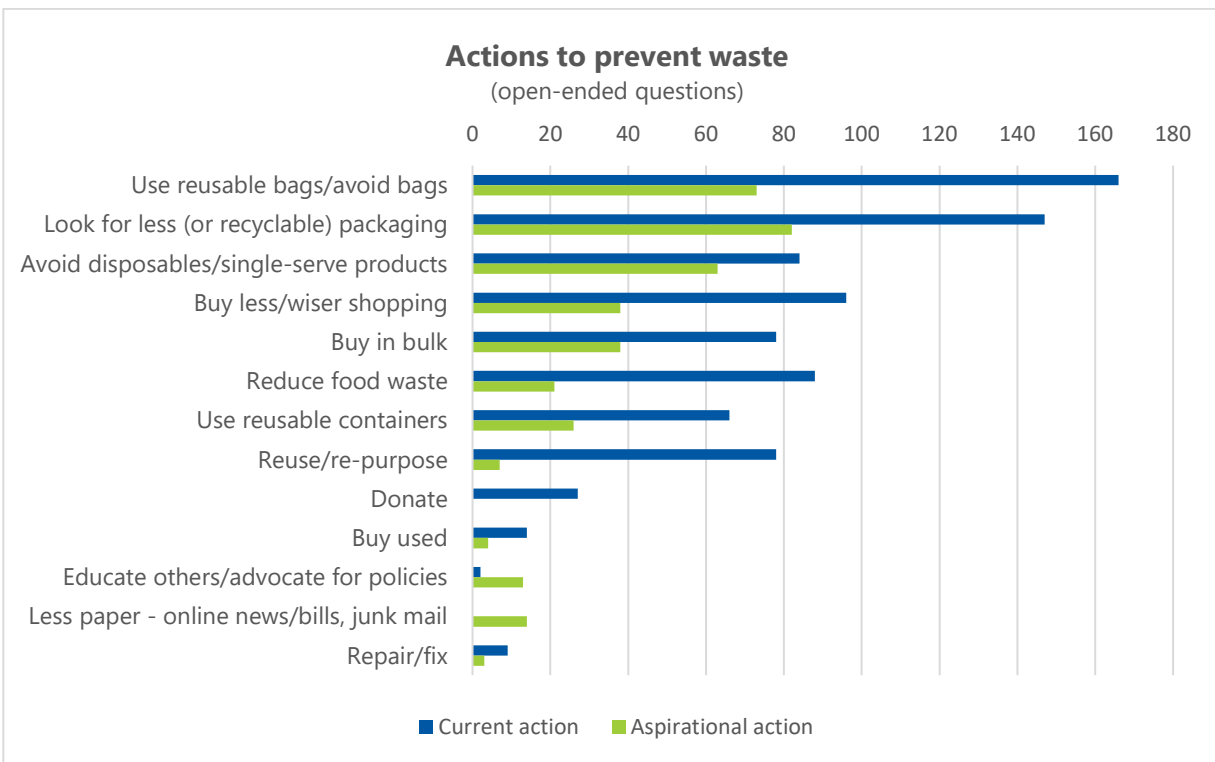
The county considers waste prevention to be any action taken to not produce waste of any kind – including recycling and composting. The survey results show that residents define waste prevention differently than the county, with residents considering composting and recycling to be key waste prevention actions. They also struggle to identify new waste prevention action to take. When asked to name one action they currently take to prevent waste, 21 percent of residents said they compost or participate in organics recycling and another 11 percent cited a recycling action. And when asked to name a waste prevention action that they want to be doing, 12 percent fewer residents even answered the question. Of those who answered, only 45 percent of the actions identified were a true waste prevention action, and many of those responses were people who want to do an action more consistently, such as remembering to bring reusable bags to the store all the time.

Businesses are also still not familiar with “waste reduction” to a large degree, and very few businesses recycling grantees have used their grant funds toward any waste reduction efforts.

**Most common waste prevention actions focus on items that are difficult to recycle**

Residents reported many similarities among their current and aspirational actions. The most popular actions include using reusable bags, looking for the least amount of packaging, and avoiding disposable or single-serve items. Many residents noted that these items were difficult to recycle or not recyclable at all. These items also took up noticeable space in their trash or to store for reuse.

Surprisingly, actions to reduce paper use and donating household items were low despite the increase in opportunities to take these actions. Additionally, actions that the county has promoted widely – including buying used and fixing broken items - were not frequently mentioned.



**Advocate for policies that reduce waste and help enforce existing requirements**

Community group and waste sort participants were supportive of legislative work and requirements, including those related to producer responsibility, making organics mandatory, establishing organized collection, and instituting plastic bag bans.

Some residents also asked for more mandates, including requirements for residential organics and bans on plastic bags, water bottles, and Styrofoam take-out containers. Many residents want the county to be more active in encouraging product stewardship, especially on plastic packaging and disposable products such as straws and food pouches. Residents also want to see more done to enforce requirements that are already in place for apartments, businesses and schools.

# Multifamily recycling

In-person interviews were conducted with six property managers to assess the impact of the county's multifamily recycling program. A phone survey was also conducted with 31 property managers to assess interest in organics recycling. This summary also includes comments related to multifamily recycling that were included in the resident survey.

## **County resources are useful**

Most property managers think that the materials provided by the county are very helpful and useful. All said they appreciate having the recycling tote bags and that residents use them regularly. Most properties have seen an improvement in their recycling programs by either reducing contamination or increasing participation.

One property manager said that we could provide more images on our signs that are culturally relevant for non-native English speakers. Another property manager recommended that we provide a more detailed booklet of recycling information.

Haulers are willing to invest in signage for carts and dumpsters as well as printed recycling information, but they appreciate the county's help with education and communication. They believe that pictures are more valuable than colors in reducing confusion related to what goes in what container.

## **Renters want better recycling services**

Some residents said their apartment buildings didn't offer recycling or only collect cardboard. Many said that there were not enough recycling containers provided and the ones that are available are overflowing. Some residents want organics recycling and plastic bag recycling to be offered. Many suggested more education is needed, especially for new tenants.

Some renters mentioned they wanted to be treated the same as homeowners, noting that they do not receive the same level of recycling service or outreach.

## **Haulers find servicing multi-unit housing challenging**

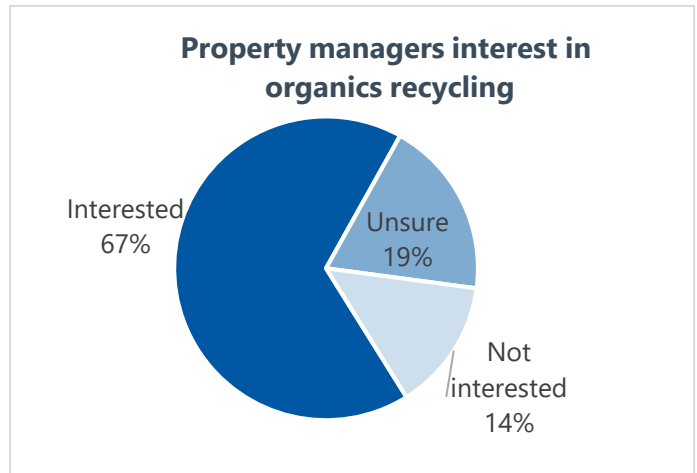
Haulers acknowledge there is tremendous opportunity to increase recycling from multi-unit residential properties. Many haulers noted that the challenges servicing multi-units were greater than those faced when serving other commercial customers. Challenges include inconsistent support and constantly changing property managers, contamination of recyclables with trash and hazardous items, space constraints, managing bulky items, and varying interest and understanding about recycling from different demographics of renters.

### Interest in organics recycling is high

When surveyed, only one-third of the property managers were familiar with organics recycling. However, after an explanation of the service, interest in participating was high.

The most common concerns expressed were tenant participation, “ick” factor, space, costs, and the extra work that the program would add.

Haulers reported that organics recycling service is not typically being asked for; however, haulers will provide it when asked. Haulers are not eager to voluntarily offer organics recycling service because it is very expensive due to inefficiencies in the organics recycling infrastructure, such as route density and proximity to disposal locations. They noted that the majority of customers do not want to pay more. Haulers suggested focusing on senior housing or commercial kitchens, rather than multifamily housing.



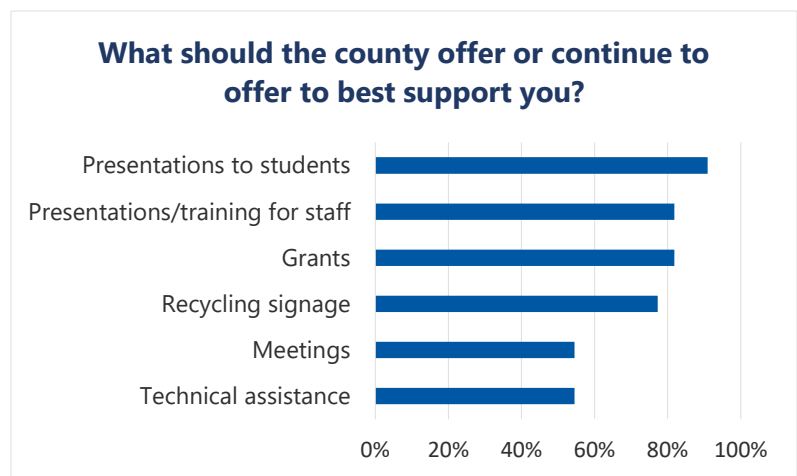
# School recycling

The following is a summary of feedback from 38 people who participated in either an in-person meeting or online survey to gather information on what is working well, barriers, and resources needed to improve school recycling programs.

## County resources are helpful

Program elements that are working well in schools include recycling signage, consistent recycling stations and access to recycling bins. Support from the community and recycling and organics recycling becoming the norm are additional key reasons for the success of their recycling programs.

Top rated support needed from the county included presentations to students, training for staff, grants, and recycling signage.



## Staff and student involvement is a key challenge

School recycling contacts identified their top challenge being the lack of time or support from staff, primarily custodians and school lunch monitors. Another common challenge was keeping up with the education and motivation necessary to get students and staff to sort correctly. This is especially hard with the variety of lunch items brought from home.

## School recycling a priority for many stakeholders

Community group representatives, elected officials and business managers all noted the importance of organics recycling in schools as a way to teach youth who can then bring the behavior home and continue the practice throughout their lives. Business managers added that the workforce in many of their restaurants were young people, so if youth were familiar with organics at school and at home, it would help address the challenge of training.

## Construction and demolition waste

The county contracted with a consultant in 2015 to interview 31 industry professionals, including building reuse retailers, contractors, city building officials, construction waste processors and end markets, to assess the capacity for reuse and recycling of construction and demolition waste. The following summarizes their feedback regarding diversion and recycling of residential construction and demolition waste.

- The price of construction and demolition landfilling needs to be higher to incentivize greater diversion rates.
- There is ample facility capacity in the metro area to collect and process more construction and demolition materials to increase recovery of materials for recycling.
- Diversion of high value and/or readily reusable residential building materials, including cabinets, fixtures and old growth wood, is generally not optimized, and a significant amount of these materials are being landfilled.
- There is a lack of awareness about retail outlets for reused building materials. Physical space to store and sell these materials is one of several barriers to growth of this market.
- Deconstruction, a technique that carefully dismantles a building to salvage materials for reuse, can divert up to 90 percent of the waste material generated during building removal. On large commercial projects, such as the Vikings stadium, materials are often removed for reuse or recycling. However, few contractors currently provide this service in the metro area for residential properties.

## Education and outreach

The following includes feedback from the resident survey and discussions with elected officials, haulers and community group representatives regarding improving education and outreach.

### **Residents want more education**

Residents recognize that packaging and recycling programs have changed in recent years, and what can be recycled is not always clear. Many residents want very detailed lists of what can and can't be recycled or composted. Surprisingly, many residents were asking for detailed examples of items they shouldn't recycle, which could be a result of recent efforts to raise awareness about "wish-cycling."

Residents asked for the information in various formats. Refrigerator magnets, detailed checklists, apps and picture charts were most frequently mentioned. They also asked for more frequent reminders, including mailers and text messages. Some residents also want to see more education on what happens to recyclables after they leave the curb and the benefits of recycling.

Elected officials and recycling coordinators want the county to do more to promote organics recycling so residents better understand the benefits of organics recycling and the value of the compost.

### **Resources the county provides are helpful**

Community group representatives value the educational support the county provides, including literature, activity guides, learning kits, tours, field trip support, and grants. They noted the most successful youth outreach efforts are visual, hands-on, and allow for student leadership.

Community group representatives were familiar with the Choose to Reuse and Recycle Everywhere campaigns. They suggested more videos, use of social media and demonstrations. Messaging should be positive and focus on the "what and why." For example, show how recycling works or the full cycle of organics collection to compost and the associated benefits.

Community group representatives want to see more targeting of messages to the right audiences with special attention being paid to being inclusive of diversity, creating materials in other languages and incorporating social justice.

Haulers said the county does well at promoting recycling and organics recycling, and they especially like the recycling container labels the county provides. They believe that education is key to changing behaviors.

### **More engagement needed about HERC**

Haulers and community group representatives suggested more transparency when talking about the Hennepin Energy Recovery Center (HERC). They suggested the county engage environmental groups in discussions related to HERC and promote everything that is being done by the county related to waste reduction, recycling and organics.



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