

Organic Waste

WASTE DISPOSAL IN Winnipeg accounts for 15 per cent of Winnipeg's total GHG emissions.¹ This is primarily due to decomposing organic waste in landfills, which creates methane, a greenhouse gas 25 times more powerful than carbon dioxide. According to data from Environment and Climate Change Canada, Brady Road Resource Management Facility's landfill is the second highest point source polluter of GHGs in Manitoba.² Organic materials comprise up to 50 per cent of all household waste, but only an estimated 30 per cent of Winnipeg households compost their organic waste,³ either through backyard composting, community compost bins, or private collection service. Winnipeg is one of the last Canadian cities without a residential green bin program for organic waste collection. According to City information, "most major Canadian cities have an organics collection program, including Victoria, Vancouver, Burnaby, Surrey, Edmonton, Calgary, Hamilton, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax."⁴ Without an organics collection program, Winnipeg will never reach its 50 per cent waste diversion goal as set out in its Council approved Comprehensive Integrated Waste Management Strategy (CIWMS)⁵ (Winnipeg was at 31 per cent waste diversion in 2020).⁶

Six years ago Winnipeg councilors shut down a scheduled consultation on organics options. A proposed doubling or tripling of the flat waste

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diversion fee on utility bills was judged too high and unfair to lower income households and backyard composters.⁷ In October of 2020, Winnipeg was finally successful in launching a two-year Residential Food Waste Collection Pilot Project where organic waste is being collected from 4000 homes in seven neighbourhoods of Winnipeg. After completion of the pilot in the fall of 2022, Winnipeg City Council will decide on whether to move forward with a city-wide residential food waste collection program.⁸

The debate about how to fund a residential organics collection program illustrated that fees are not currently aligned in a way that are financially sustainable, allow for growth in waste diversion services, align with a polluter pays model, and reflect the true costs of providing solid waste services (garbage, recycling, and organics). This point was recognized in the City of Winnipeg's 2019 Five Year Review of the CIWMS, in which it states that the solid waste utility is not in a sustainable financial position and it would be difficult for the City to implement waste diversion activities as recommended in the CIWMS update (such as organic waste collection) until a new financial plan is created.⁹ Thus, a Financial Plan and Utility Rate Model Report was completed for the City of Winnipeg's Solid Waste Services in 2020. It specified that current reliance on constrained property tax and grant funding to support Winnipeg's solid waste services is not sustainable, and current fees charged to Winnipeg residents are not sufficient in covering the end-to-end cost of providing the service. Instead of supporting waste collection, property taxes should be used to support community-based programming that provides environmental and social benefits and is open to all residents.¹⁰

Currently, Winnipeg's garbage collection costs are funded by property taxes, and its waste diversion programs (recycling and recycling collection, leaf and yard waste collection and composting, 4R depots) are funded by grants and a flat waste diversion fee charged to utility bills.¹¹ Today, Winnipeg has the lowest property taxes of comparable cities and the lowest annual increases by far.¹² This does not allow for growth in waste diversion services provided to residents. The financial plan and utility rate model report recommended several funding models, including a Residential Utility User Fee to replace the current mix of property taxes and waste diversion fee funding, or a Pay As You Throw (PAYT) model, in which customers pay higher fees per volume of garbage. The residential utility user fee would be

a flat fee set specifically for both single-family dwellings and multi-family dwellings based on a standard service level, and any service required above this would be at an additional cost. As quoted from the report, ‘this provides a purposeful fee which addresses end-to-end activities required to support the services and reflects a user-pay philosophy.’

In response to the debate in 2016, Green Action Centre proposed financing and collection alternatives that incentivize waste reduction and do not place a disproportionate financial burden on lower-income households.¹³ It put forth 11 recommendations that fit with the AMB’s sustainable budgeting principles, including framing organics diversion as responsible waste management (like sewage treatment) to avoid negative environmental effects and resources loss, rather than treating it as an optional personal service. It also recommended that we introduce Pay As You Throw (PAYT) utility fees, with highest fees per volume of garbage and much lower fees for recycling and composting pickup. This will incentivize waste reduction, diversion, and home composting.

Importantly, it also recommended that the city explore additional bill mitigation alternatives for lower-income households. There is a growing literature on multiple ways to shrink utility bills for lower income customers to make them more affordable (e.g. Best Practices in Customer Payment Assistance Programs).¹⁴

What would an organics diversion program cost? A 2019 report from Solid Waste Services to Winnipeg’s Standing Policy Committee on Water and Waste¹⁵ identified all-in additional costs (operating plus financing for capital) as the following. Note, the financial costs in the City report document are in 2018 dollars, so they have been adjusted here to reflect 2021 dollars.

New Capital Expenditure:

- Capital cost of compost facility [\$9 – \$21 million if shared equally with Province and Feds]: \$27 – \$63 million
- Implementation of program (supply and delivery of carts, kitchen catchers, communication materials, etc.): \$18 million

New Operating Expenditure:

- Annual Facility Operating Costs: \$5.4 million

Pay As You Throw (PAYT) utility fees: highest fees per volume of garbage and much lower fees for recycling and composting pickup.

- Annual Operating Costs (collection from single family homes):
\$5 million

Capital contributions from provincial and/or federal governments and a more efficient collection system, e.g. by collecting recyclables and garbage every other week along with weekly collection of organic waste and using two-compartment collection trucks, as Toronto does, would reduce this cost.

Endnotes

- 1 City of Winnipeg (2018). “Winnipeg’s Climate Action Plan”. Available at: <https://winnipeg.ca/sustainability/PublicEngagement/ClimateActionPlan/pdfs/WinnipegsClimateActionPlan.pdf>
- 2 Environment and Climate Change Canada (2021). “Canadian Environmental Sustainability Indicators: Greenhouse gas emissions from large facilities.” Available at: www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/environmental-indicators/greenhouse-gasemissions/large-facilities.html.
- 3 Statistics Canada (2021). Table 38-10-0128-01 -Composting practices of Canadian households. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.25318/3810012801-eng>
- 4 City of Winnipeg (2016). Organics Diversion Strategy. Available at: <https://www.winnipeg.ca/waterandwaste/publicengagement/organics/default.stm>
- 5 Gordichuk, Michael (2021). “2020 Comprehensive Integrated Waste Management Strategy (CIWMS) Annual Report.” City of Winnipeg Water and Waste Department’s Solid Waste Services. Available at: <https://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/DMIS/ViewDoc.asp?DocId=21015&SectionId=607088&InitUrl=>
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- 7 City of Winnipeg (2021). Residential Food Waste Collection Pilot Project. Available at: <https://engage.winnipeg.ca/residential-food-waste-pilot-program>
- 8 9 City of Winnipeg (2019). “Comprehensive Integrated Waste Management Strategy (CIWMS) - 5 Year Review.” Available at: <https://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/dmis/ViewDoc.asp?DocId=17943&SectionId=&InitUrl=>
- 10 Stack’d Consulting OR The City of Winnipeg, Solid Waste Services (not sure who the author is) (2020). “Solid Waste Program Financial Plan and Utility Rate Model Final Report.” Available at: <https://winnipeg.ca/waterandwaste/pdfs/WinnipegSWSFinancialModelReport.pdf>
- 11 City of Winnipeg’s Water and Waste Department’s presentation to the Standing Policy Committee on Water and Waste, Riverbank Management and Environment (2020). 2020 To 2023 Preliminary Operating and Capital Budgets. Available at: <https://winnipeg.ca/interhom/Budget/2020Budget/pdfs/2020-2023-Water-and-Waste-Operating-Capital-Budget-Presentation.pdf>
- 12 City of Winnipeg. “2022 Preliminary Budget Operating and Capital Volume 2”. Available at: <https://winnipeg.ca/finance/files/2022-Preliminary-Operating-and-Capital-Budget-Volume-2.pdf>
- 13 Green Action Centre (2018). “Briefing Note. Composting - Policy (edited for submission to CoW Climate Action Plan).” Available at: <https://greenactioncentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/GA-Briefing-Note-Composting-Policy-for-submission-to-CoW-ClimateActionPlan-Feb2018.pdf>

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15 Gordichuk, M. (2019). Source Separated Organics Pilot Project (Residential Food Waste Collection). City of Winnipeg Water and Waste Department, Solid Waste Services. Available at: https://wfpquantum.s3.amazonaws.com/pdf/2019/73610_CoW%20Curbside%20Compost%20Pickup%20Pilot%20November%2028%202019.pdf