

# **Solid Waste Programs**

## **2024 Progress Report**



### **Environmental Services Department**

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# **Solid Waste Programs 2024 Progress Report**

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## **Background**

The City of Guelph has a strong integrated waste management system offering a range of waste diversion services to the community to reduce the quantity of material hauled to landfills for disposal. In 2021, City Council approved the Solid Waste Management Master Plan (SWMMP) that defined program enhancements, policies and resources necessary to help the City increase the diversion rate and reduce the weight of waste disposed per household.

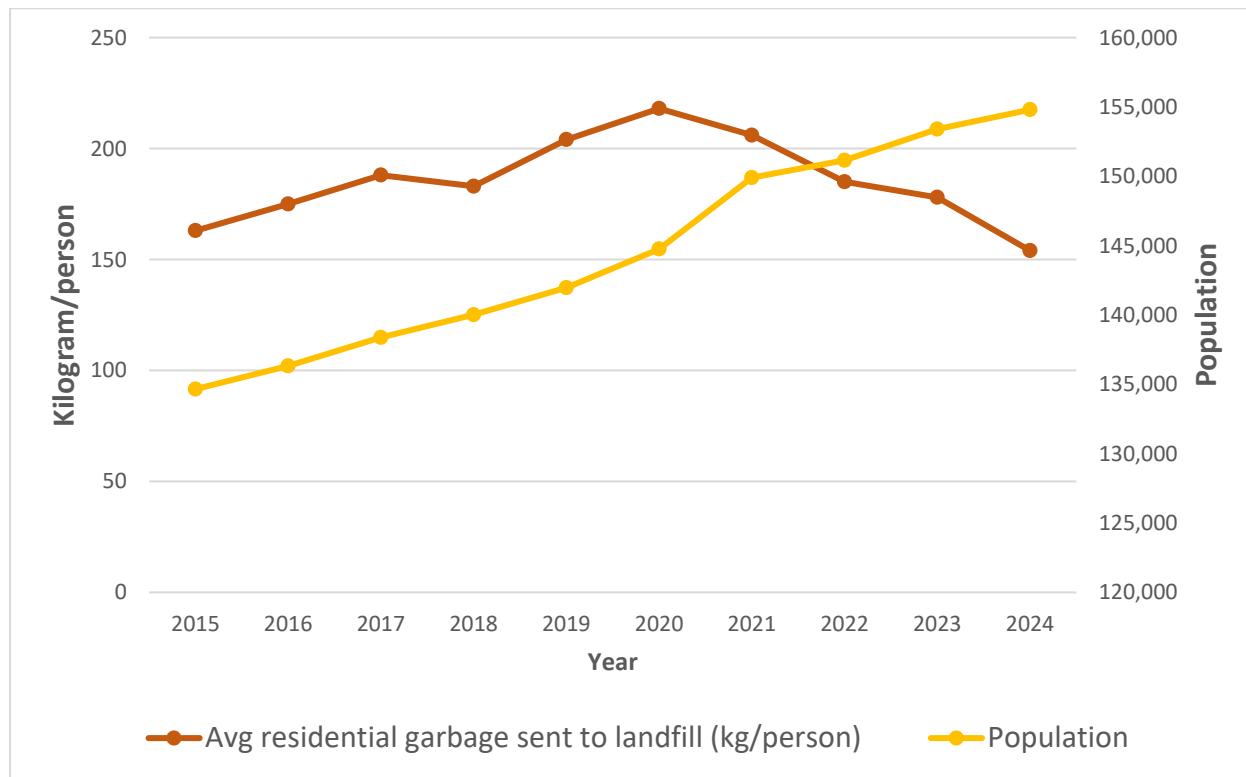
The following sections outline the program goals achieved from the 2021 SWMMP between January 1 and December 31, 2024.

## **Waste Reduction Target Progress**

The 2021 SWMMP identified a target waste diversion rate of 62 percent by 2030, or 250 kilograms per household. The diversion rate is the percentage of the total waste generated that is diverted from disposal in the blue and green cart collection programs.

Figure 1 presents Guelph's average residential waste sent to landfill (kilograms/person) and population from 2015 to 2024.

**Figure 1 Guelph Population and Waste Produced Per Capita, 2015-2024**



In 2024, Guelph's waste generated per person was 154 kg/person. This remains below the Ontario average of 178 kg/person and national average of 286

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kg/person. Guelph's population is expected to grow from 138,700 people in 2019 to 165,000 by 2031. This growth will result in an increase in the amount of waste generated from 48,200 tonnes in 2019 to a projected 58,000 tonnes in 2031.

In 2024, Guelph residents diverted 55% percent of their waste away from landfill through proper sorting. Guelph's diversion rate has varied between 55 and 60% since 2015. As described in the 2021 SWMMP, the City has seen a decrease in its diversion rate over the past decade. Waste diversion is based on the weight of materials collected for diversion and disposal. The weight of products and packaging is decreasing (e.g., less glass products and lighter plastic products) which could be contributing to a decreasing waste diversion rate. Based on waste audit data, an increase in improper sorting of waste by residents also has impacted Guelph's diversion rate. Enhanced communications to households through promotion and education tactics will help improve sorting and the City's curbside diversion rate.

The recommendations coming out of the 2021 SWMMP are anticipated to help the City achieve this target diversion rate, an increase of 12% or 33 kilograms above 2020 levels of waste landfilled.

## **Solid Waste Reduction and Diversion Programs**

The following sections outline the results of the City's ongoing waste reduction and public activation programming as well as progress on recommendations from the 2021 SWMMP.

### **Promotion, Education and Outreach**

The City provides regular information to residents on waste diversion and reduction, promoting the waste hierarchy – avoid, reduce, reuse, repair, recycle, recover and dispose as a last resort – and how to properly sort items that need to be disposed. This includes the use of various tools and tactics to reach residents, from digital promotions to attending in-person events.

### **Annual Communications Plan**

The annual communications plan for solid waste includes monthly campaigns on topics related to waste reduction and proper waste sorting and set out at the curb. Campaigns include "keep our staff safe" to encourage proper disposal of hazardous waste to help protect front-line collections and sorting staff, and circular economy month to encourage the reuse and repair of items. Messaging is shared through a variety of digital and physical media, including screenscapes, radio, social media, transit bus ads, and roadside signs.

### **Guelph Waste App**

The City offers a mobile app and online tool to help residents to properly manage their waste. The tool includes a personalized collection calendar and collection

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notifications and reminders to assist with proper waste set-out, and a “waste wizard” search tool to assist with proper waste sorting.

In 2024 the City continued to promote the mobile app and 2,096 new addresses subscribed to the collection calendar. Since the City started offering the app in 2017, approximately 18,900 households have subscribed to collection reminders, representing approximately 36% of all residential addresses.

The most popular items searched on the waste wizard are broken glass (5%), electronic waste (4%), pet waste (4%), clothing (3%) and shredded paper (3%).

### **Goods Exchange Weekends**

This annual community reuse event takes place twice per year – Victoria Day weekend in May and Labour Day weekend in September. Goods Exchange Weekends are a city-wide coordinated effort to keep usable goods out of the landfill by finding them new homes. By turning the curbside into a free marketplace, residents can put out reusable and gently used items that can be re-homed by neighbours. The May event was advertised on Facebook, X and Spotify and reached 10,555, 4328, and 10,693 people respectively. The September event was advertised on Facebook and Spotify and reached 29,197 people and 13,167 people respectively. A Facebook event page was also created for this event and it received 244 responses, of which 220 responded that they were interested in the event, and 24 people said they were partaking in the event. There is no data on how many people participated in the Goods Exchange Weekends, as these events happen on a city-wide scale. Staff are considering a pledge or sign-up form to track participation in the future.

### **Sustainable Move-Out**

In April the City collaborated with the University of Guelph to promote the proper disposal of bulky items to students. This campaign aligned with the end of the school year and the large-scale move-out of students in households across Guelph.

### **Student Move-In**

In 2024, new targeted ads were designed for post secondary students moving in to off-campus housing at the start of the school year in September. The campaign focused on introducing proper sorting, bag use and set-out requirements and run through campus screenscapes from September to December. Food waste reduction messaging was also built into the annual plan in 2024, acknowledging the United Nation’s International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste on September 29<sup>th</sup>.

In 2024, staff continued to collaborate with other teams in the organization to stack messaging for residents, aimed at reducing message fatigue and the risk of tune-out. This included coordinated communications campaigns on:

## **Fall leaf management**

A collaboration between Environmental Services, Operations and Transportation Planning. This campaign acknowledged the dates and set-out requirements for the yard waste and loose-leaf collection programs that focus on diversion (including keeping bike lanes free of leaves for cyclist safety), while encouraging reduction messaging from the healthy landscapes program focused on keeping leaves on your property.

## **Proper pool-closing**

A collaboration between solid waste and wastewater operational divisions in Environmental Services. This campaign highlighted how to and why it's important to manage pool, spas and hot tub treatment chemicals and containers, alongside proper drainage. Tactics included a targeted letter mailed to owners of pools, hot tubs and spas, and general messaging on digital and physical media.

## **Public Outreach Events**

A variety of public outreach events were attended and coordinated throughout the year to raise awareness about waste reduction and diversion. These events included:

### **Public Works Week Open House**

On May 25<sup>th</sup> the public had the opportunity to learn more about Solid Waste Resources alongside various City services. Staff showcased waste collection vehicles, baled recycling from the City's Material Recovery Facility (MRF), and an interactive waste sorting game to highlight City services and encourage waste sorting and reduction. Approximately 2,000 people attended this event.

### **RePurpose Fest**

This event was hosted by the Guelph Tool Library in May. At this event, City staff interacted with 120 people about waste reduction, waste sorting and other Environmental Services programs. More information can be found in [Community Sharing and Repair](#).

### **Repair Café**

City staff attended the June repair cafe hosted by the Guelph Tool Library. Approximately 59 community members were engaged about waste reduction, waste sorting and other programs of Environmental Services. More information can be found in [Community Sharing and Repair](#).

### **Student Move-In**

An outreach campaign promoting the Guelph Waste App was planned at University of Guelph in September, aimed at engaging students living off-campus. Staff set-up an outreach table on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> to talk to students about proper sorting, bag use and set-out requirements, and encourage the download of the

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Guelph Waste App. Approximately 280 students were engaged and 130 new downloads of the waste app were observed.

### **Village Fall Fair**

On September 14, staff attended this family-focused community event to share information on Environmental Services, including waste reduction and diversion. Over 120 people were engaged through fun activities including trivia and button-making.

### **Environmental Services Open House**

As part of Circular Economy Month, staff organized an open house of the Waste Resource Innovation Centre on Saturday, October 5<sup>th</sup>. Over 200 people attended the event and had the opportunity to engage with interactive displays and operations vehicles and participate in site tours of the Organics Waste Processing Facility (OWPF) and Public Drop-Off, as well as the Material Recovery Facility (MRF) before its planned closure at the beginning of 2025 with the Provincial Blue Box Transition.

### **EcoMarket**

This annual event attracts people from all over Guelph who are looking for ways to fight climate change, reduce their impact on the environment and save money. Over this two-day event on October 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, staff engaged in meaningful conversations about City services and programs with over 75 individuals from the community.

### **Youth Promotion and Education**

The 2021 SWMMP included recommendation 9.3.2.3 for the City to partner with local school boards and community organizations to develop age-appropriate educational materials that focus on the most pressing waste issues and conduct in-school outreach. The City delivered the following youth-focused programs throughout the year to raise awareness about waste reduction and diversion:

#### **School Presentations**

A curriculum linked program for Grade 5 and 6 students on the 4Rs challenges students to think critically about resource use and consumption, and the impact waste has on society and the environment. In 2024, four (4) presentations were delivered, engaging 115 students.

#### **Facility Tours (including Girl Guide and Scouts Badge Program)**

Guided tours of Guelph's Material Recovery Facility (MRF) and Organics Waste Processing Facility (OWPF) provided youth the opportunity to see first-hand what happens to their waste after it is set-out at the curb. The Waste Diversion Education Centre, which is located at the OWPF, provides visitors with an understanding of how Guelph's organics, recyclables, and garbage are collected and

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processed and how to minimize the amount of garbage created. In 2024, five (5) facility tours were delivered, and 101 participants were engaged.

### **Summer Camps**

Summer camp activities related to the City's Environmental Services areas, including waste reduction and diversion, water and wastewater were delivered to youth through a collaboration with the City's Culture and Recreation Services team. In 2024, eight (8) camp programs were delivered, and 274 youth were engaged.

### **Increase Annual Promotion and Education Budget**

The 2021 SWMMP included recommendation 9.3.2.1 to increase the annual promotion and education budget from approximately \$2.30 to \$4 per household to support new initiatives, such as outreach and youth campaigns and develop metrics to measure promotion and education initiatives (e.g., diversion rate, decrease in contamination, activity on social media and website). This initiative is not currently funded as part of the City's 2024-2027 multi-year budget.

### **Enhance Support for Outreach and Communication**

The 2021 SWMMP included recommendation 9.3.2.2 to develop an education and communication strategy to reduce overall waste volumes per household and improve contamination rates.

In January 2024 the City retained two consultants, Kains Consulting and Behavioural Insights Team, to conduct market research and develop the outreach strategy, respectively. The work was completed in August 2024.

The two goals of the project were to:

(1) Conduct market research: Understand public knowledge, attitudes, understandings, and perspectives around solid waste management in the City of Guelph, especially as it relates to education and outreach programs and key management concepts like proper sorting and circular economy.

(2) Develop an outreach strategy: Apply what has been learned about target audiences to develop a public outreach strategy meant to achieve Solid Waste Management Master Plan goals, enhance solid waste programs, develop a circular economy culture, and support a successful Blue Box transition.

The market research found that a vast majority of both single family and multi-family residences are trying to sort their waste, recycling and organics properly, and that guelph.ca is the primary source of information about waste programs and collection. It also found that the Guelph Waste App is an important, but underused tool and that younger adults (18-39) and newer residents are less aware of waste programs and processes.

The outreach strategy provided research from other jurisdictions on barriers to, and best practices for, adopting new behaviours. It also provided a series of recommendations for existing and new programs, including:

- Make diversion the default in communication
- Proactively reach out to new residents
- Extend the impact of the Gold Star program
- Apply behavioural science best practices to post-secondary student programs
- Expand and improve in-person interactions at existing touchpoints

These recommendations will be incorporated and implemented in the solid waste program workplan.

### **Special Event Waste Services**

The City encourages event organizers to consider waste reduction and diversion at events hosted on City property, through the City's special events permit. This includes choosing sustainable serve ware (i.e. food or drink packaging that can be recycled or composted) to minimize waste sent to landfill. For large events serving food, the City requires the completion of a waste management plan, and will provide three-stream waste carts and collection services, along with educational signage to increase sorting behaviour. Blue and green carts are provided free of charge, and grey carts are provided at a fee per cart to encourage waste reduction and diversion.

In 2024, 22 special events were provided waste cart services, and 87 events were serviced by existing City bins in parks, the downtown area and facilities. Staff attended the two largest events serviced - the Guelph Multicultural Festival and Rib Fest - to set-up an information table next to a waste sorting station. Staff shared waste outreach material with 25 and 45 people respectively at these events.

### **Waste Diversion in City Facilities**

The City is committed to demonstrating sustainable waste management practices throughout its facilities and operations to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, give new life to valuable items that can be recycled or composted, and provide consistency to the public visiting City sites.

In 2024, a total of 10 facilities across Environmental Services, and Culture and Recreation departments were on-boarded with consistent three-stream sorting stations, educational signage, compliant bags, and outdoor collection bins.

### **Public Drop-off Programs**

The City offers reuse programs to help residents extend the life of products instead of disposing. These programs help divert material from landfill and reduce energy and resources that would be needed to make a new product.

#### **ReCycle Bike Reuse Program**

Throughout the year residents have the opportunity to donate bikes that are in working order to the Waste Resource Innovation Centre, and pick-up previously loved bikes to extend their life. In 2024, a total of 368 bicycles and 23 scooters

were redistributed to residents. In addition, staff organized a bike re-use event on June 13 at the Victoria Road Recreation Centre, where 49 bicycles were redistributed to 32 families.

### **Paint+ Reuse Program**

From the spring to fall, residents have the opportunity to donate and pick-up useable products that would otherwise be managed as household hazardous waste to the Waste Resource Innovation Centre. This including paints, stains, cleaners, care products, motor oil, grout, cement and more. In 2024, 899 kilograms and 3,755 litres of household hazardous waste items were redistributed to 319 residents.

### **Community Sharing and Repair**

The 2021 SWMMP included recommendation 9.3.3.1 for the City to collaborate with local groups to increase opportunities for sharing, reusing, repairing and repurposing, and to promote and provide space, and/or fund materials for programs and events.

In 2024 the City continued its collaboration with the Guelph Tool Library to engage the public in waste diversion programs and events focused on sharing and repair. The City supported the following programs delivered by the Guelph Tool Library:

- **Repair Cafés** – At these events, community members learn how to repair broken household items (including clothing) with the help of a skilled volunteer. In 2024, eight (8) events were delivered across the city, and 169 people were engaged, diverting over 689 kilograms of material from waste streams.
- **Seedy Saturday** – On March 9, this event welcomed over 500 attendees to swap and share seeds, participate in education workshops and swap gardening tools. Over 1,000 seed packets were shared and 100 kilograms of used gardening tools items were re-homed.
- **Repurpose Fest** – On May 25, this event aimed to divert hard-to-recycle materials and get the community engaged with repurposing items. In total, 640 kilograms of goods were collected, including 23 car seats (200 kilograms), two (2) bicycles (30 kilograms), sewing supplies and machines (90 kilograms), crafting materials and housewares (200 kilograms), and hard to recycle items like cork, coffee bags, shoes and oral care items (65 kilograms). In addition, the Tool Library recycled 10 cell phones and 25 pairs of glasses and rehomed five (5) power tools.
- **ReCycle Bike Reuse event** – On June 13, this City-run event was supported by the Freehub program at the Guelph Tool Library. A total of 49 bicycles collected by the City were inspected by Freehub before being distributed to the public.
- **Film Screening** – As part of Circular Economy Month, Guelph Tool Library hosted a screening of 'Landfill Harmonic' at the Bookshelf Cinema on October

24. This event drew 14 people and prompted discussion about waste reuse and tied into the month's theme of doing more with less.

- **Circular Computer Project** - Funding will support replacement parts, delivery of computers to support the Guelph Wellington Digital Equity Coalition and tools used for repair. In 2024, 51 laptops were collected, and 36 were refurbished and redistributed, for a total of 72 kilograms of e-waste diverted from landfill.
- **End-of-life shoe recycling** – A collection bin for end-of-life shoes was set-up at the Circular Store (the Tool Library's thrift store) and 50 kilograms of worn shoes were diverted from landfill through this program.

## **Support Community Organizations**

The 2021 SWMMP included recommendation 9.3.3.2 to leverage existing or develop a new funding program to support local groups that help to reduce materials sent to the landfill.

In 2024, the City worked with the Guelph Tool Library to establish a Community Benefit Agreement for 2025. In 2025, the City will provide a \$64,000 investment (\$62,000 from Environmental Programs and \$2,000 from Active Transportation) to the Guelph Tool Library to deliver waste reduction and diversion outreach and education opportunities for the community that supports Guelph's circular economy.

With a more pointed vision toward circularity and the circular economy, there are many materials that are not currently accepted through traditional City facilitated diversion. It is this gap that is filled by community organizations like the Guelph Tool Library. There is ample opportunity through donation, repair, reuse and skill development workshops to divert measurable waste, extend the life of products, and foster a growing community within Guelph, committed to product circularity.

Organizations like the Guelph Tool Library rely heavily on volunteer efforts and the investment from the City outperforms the investment and capacity needs that would be required to run similar programs internally.

## **Waste Recovery "Shopping"**

The 2021 SWMMP included recommendation 9.3.3.3 for the City to partner with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide space to establish a reuse centre where residents can drop-off items and buy gently-used goods at a nominal fee. The NGO would operate the reuse centre and the City would promote it. This initiative is not currently funded as part of the City's 2024-2027 multi-year budget.

## **Textile Reuse and Recycling**

The 2021 SWMMP included recommendation 9.3.3.4 to create a textile collection bin network for households to collect clothing or other textile waste for reuse and recycling, and approach charities collecting textiles to gauge interest in partnering. Additionally, it recommended launching a textile reduce, repair and donate

promotion and education campaign that promotes the collection bin program and other textile reuse programs operating in the city.

The City has developed an interactive [clothing donation map](#) to support residents with selling, donating or repurposing clothing items instead of throwing them out. The map includes donation bins, donation stores and second-hand stores in Guelph.

The City also supported the Guelph Tool Library with community diversion and reuse opportunities for textiles through the 2024 collaboration. End-of-life shoes were diverted from landfill through a third-party recycling program, and during Circular Economy Month in October, a clothing repair cafe helped 16 people learn about mending and repair 19 kilograms of clothing. More information can be found in [Community Sharing and Repair](#).

## **Organic Waste Reduction and Recycling**

The City operates a green cart collection program to divert organic waste from landfill. This material is composted at the City's Organics Waste Processing Facility (OWPF), producing a nutritious, rich soil amendment that can be used in gardening or farming. The City encourages residents to compost food waste at home and sells backyard composters at a subsidized rate.

### **At Home Composting**

The 2021 SWMMP included recommendation 9.3.5.2 to promote and provide ways for residents to compost at home and in the community, through educational materials, in-person outreach, and increasing the types and locations for the sale of composters.

The City continues to offer the sale of backyard composters at a subsidized rate to residents of Guelph. In 2024, 29 composters were sold. On October 23, a home composting workshop was held at the Evergreen Centre to educate residents on how to compost. There were 54 attendees. Marketing for the program was through social media, screenscapes, website updates and co-promotion through the City's Healthy Landscapes program.

### **School Organics Education Program**

The 2021 SWMMP included a recommendation to introduce organics collection services to schools not currently receiving City service. This project is currently planned for 2026 to align with the Blue Box Transition.

## **Data Gathering**

Understanding waste generation habits is an integral part of waste management. The City collects data to review patterns and identify problem areas that need to be addressed.

## **Community-Based Social Marketing**

The 2021 SWMMP included recommendation 9.3.6.1 to develop a community-based social marketing pilot to target behavioural change around sorting. The pilot project would include determining the barriers and benefits specific to the behaviour and developing a strategy.

The Gold Star pilot represented a scientifically validated behaviour change program outlined in the 2023 report Our Food Future: Resource Action Plan. A pilot program was created, using the Curbside Inspection Program as its foundation. The program aimed to improve household sorting behaviours overall, but more specifically to improve food waste diversion at the household level.

Households received a Gold Star sticker on corresponding compliant bins. The Gold Star was to reward residents with good behaviour and encourage residents who did not receive a gold star to improve their sorting behaviour. During the pilot, a portion of participating neighbourhoods were further incentivized with the opportunity to win a prize if they complied with sorting by-laws.

Some limitations were identified during the pilot, including: seasonality, sample representation, and time considerations. Neighbourhoods that were included in the Gold Star pilot improved sorting behaviours over the course of 4 weeks, however, improvements were not statistically significant when compared to baseline Curbside Inspection Program participation.

Staff returned to five pilot neighbourhoods in 2024 to determine if the program showed lasting results. Staff concluded:

- Curbside Inspections improved sorting behaviour
- Specific participation in the Gold Star program did not produce additional benefits
- Comparable programs in other municipalities came to similar conclusions

## **Conduct Regular Waste Composition Audits**

The 2021 SWMMP included recommendation 9.3.6.2 to gather information on what households are throwing out and how well they are participating in waste diversion programs to help the City understand future waste management needs.

In 2024, the City contracted AET Group Inc. to conduct waste composition audits for single family homes, multi-residential buildings and the downtown core. Audits were completed seasonally in the spring, summer, fall and winter on all (garbage, recycling and organics) streams. All sample material was sorted into material categories and weighed, and waste composition data was provided on the types and level of material, and the participation rates and contamination rates of the three waste streams.

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The following results were found:

### **Single Family Households:**

- Participation rate: 86.0%, 85.8% and 72.4% of grey, blue and green cart material, respectively.
- Overall diversion rate: 49.5% of a possible 64.9%. The diversion rate is the percentage of the total waste generated that is diverted from disposal into the recycling and organics.
- Overall capture-rate of all divertible materials: 78.6%. The capture rate is the percentage of all recyclable and organic material appropriately diverted through the blue and green cart collection programs.

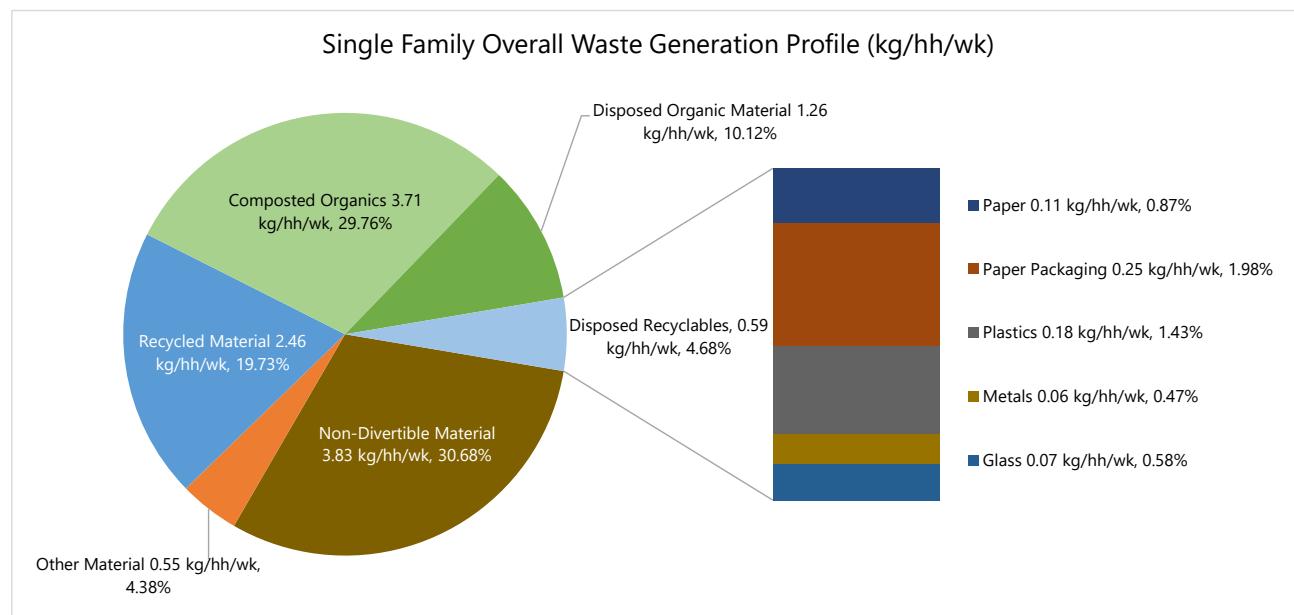
### **Multi-residential buildings:**

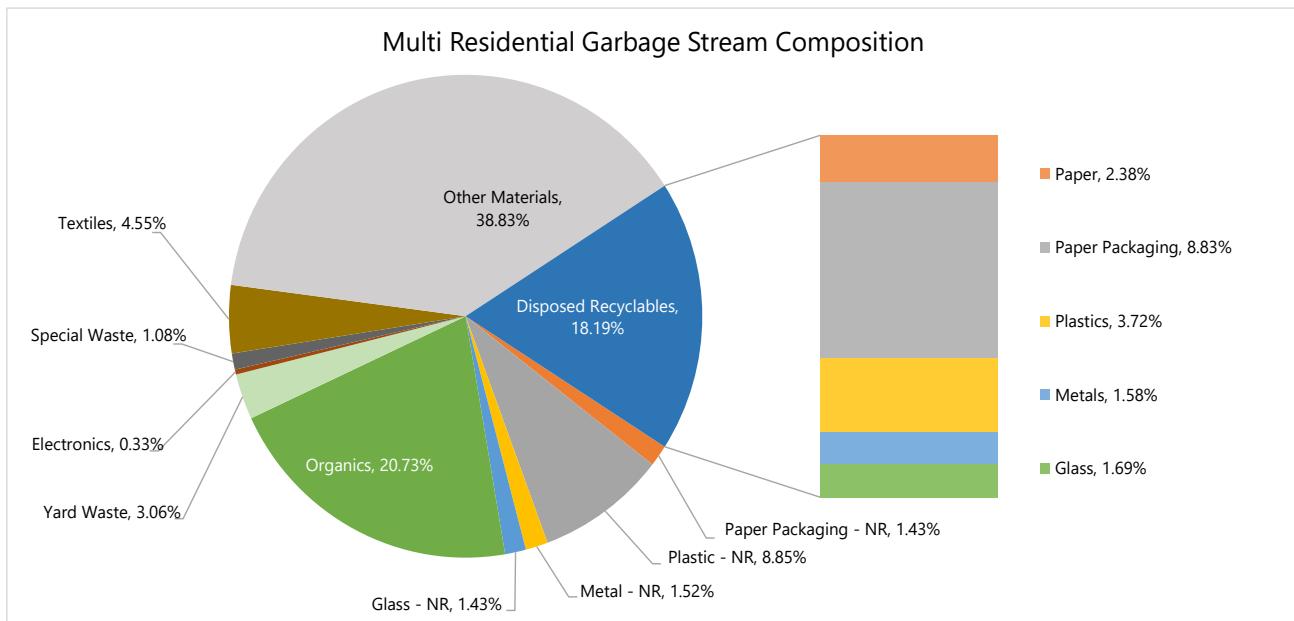
- Contamination rates: 19.1%, and 10.3% for recycling and organics respectively.

### **Downtown public space containers**

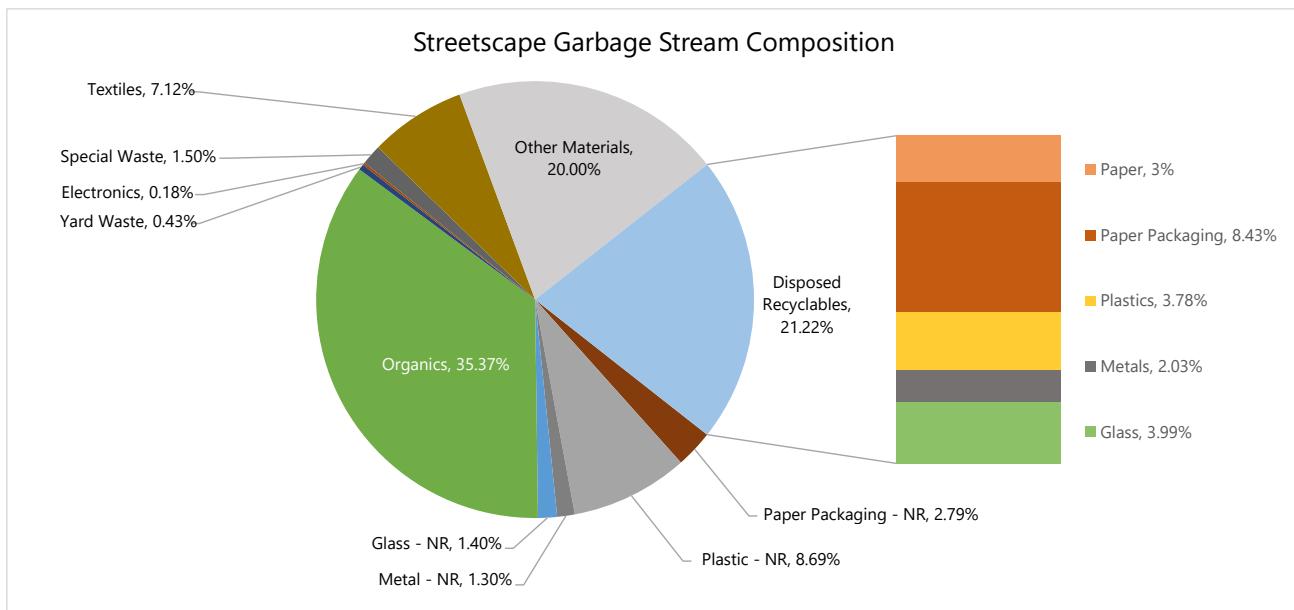
- Contamination rates: 21.1% and 30.9% for recycling and organics streams respectively

**Figure 2 Single Family Overall Waste Generation Profile**





**Figure 4 Downtown Garbage Profile**



**Table 1: Top Contaminants**

	<b>Single Family</b>	<b>Multi-residential</b>
<b>Recycling</b>	Other waste Containers with food Avoidable food waste Plastic film Containers with liquids	Other waste Other glass/ceramics Plastic film Containers with food Durable plastics
<b>Organics</b>	Other waste Containers with food Plastic Film Diapers/sanitary products Mixed paper	Other waste Containers with food Diapers/sanitary products Plastic film Corrugated Cardboard (OCC) + Boxboard

## **Enforcement Approaches**

Enforcing rules and regulations is an important tool for ensuring proper and safe waste disposal. City enforcement encourages people to become accountable for their own waste generation, habits and disposal.

### **Curbside Inspections Program**

The City inspects residential waste carts at the curb to see if residents are sorting their waste properly and provide educational tips and follow-up visits over a four-week period to help improve sorting behaviour.

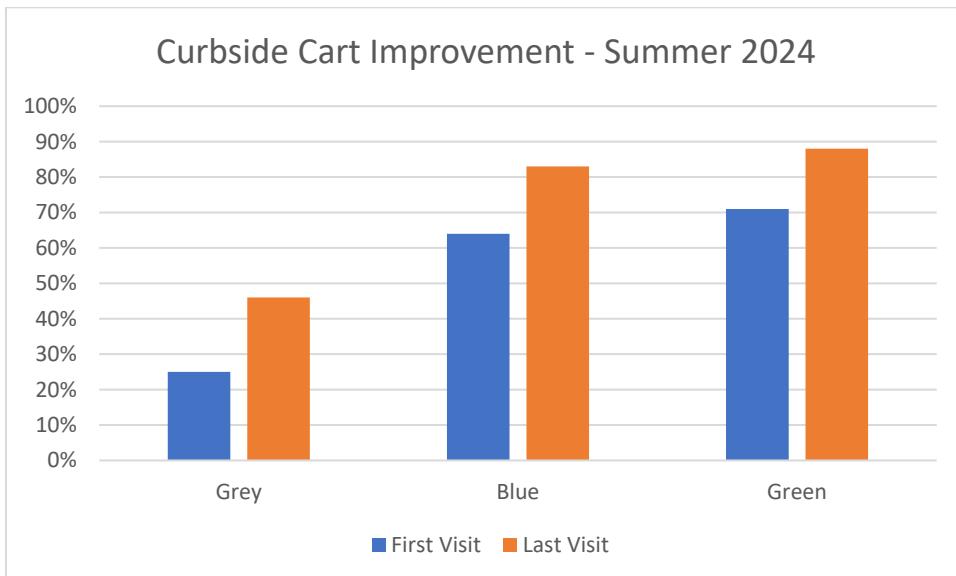
The curbside inspection program relies heavily on public education at the household level. Staff inspect household waste carts at the curb and assign a grade based on compliance (grade 1, 2 or 3). A grade of 1 means the waste cart is compliant with City by-law. A grade of 2 means that few sorting errors were present. A grade of 3 means that significant sorting errors were found. For inspections assigned a grade of 2 or 3, staff leave materials for the resident identifying errors, educating on proper sorting, and if required a compostable and/or clear garbage bag sample for future use.

In 2024 staff visited approximately 2,400 homes across 20 neighbourhoods during spring and fall programming. All neighbourhoods visited displayed an improvement in sorting practices, as well as an improvement in total compliance across all three streams.

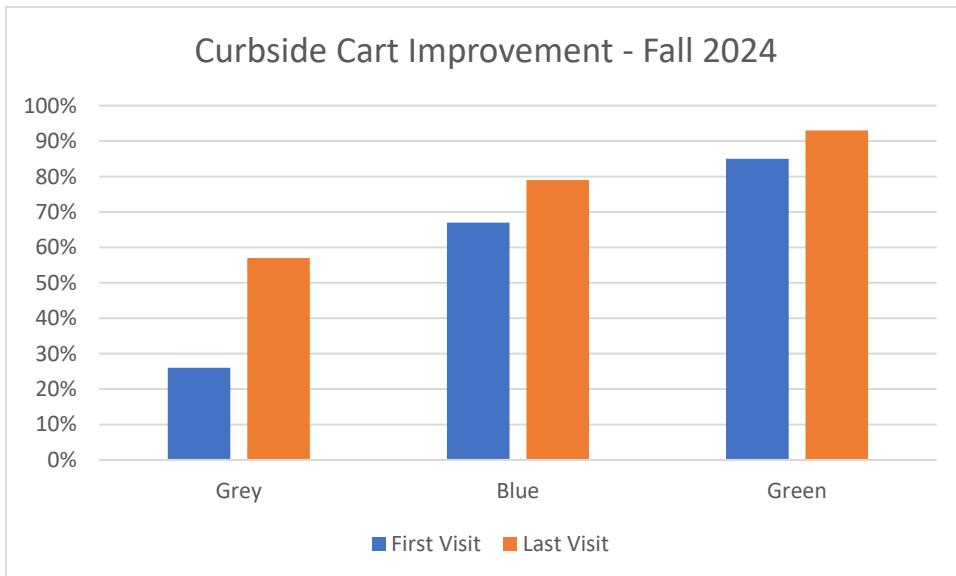
On average, between seasons, residential diversion in Curbside Inspection neighbourhoods improved by the following rates:

- Grey 24.5%
- Blue 14.5%
- Green 10.5%

**Figure 5 Curbside Cart Improvement - Summer 2024**



**Figure 6 Curbside Cart Improvement - Fall 2024**



In 2024, staff assessed how the Curbside Inspection Program accounted for maintained behaviour change year over year.

Participating households showed improvements over the course of initial Curbside Inspection. One year later the same households, on average, maintained or improved sorting behaviour. Net percentage improvements are as follows:

- Garbage: 21%
- Recycling: 2%
- Organics: 19%

## **Solid Waste Programs 2024 Progress Report**

### **Enhance Education and Enforcement Mechanisms**

The 2021 SWMMP included recommendation 9.3.7.2 to increase curbside inspections to ensure residents and non-residential customers are properly sorting their waste, and leveraging technology (e.g., artificial intelligence) to improve waste management program participation. This initiative is not currently funded as part of the City's 2024-2027 multi-year budget.