

# **MULTI-UNIT GARBAGE: BACKGROUND & SERVICE REVIEW**

## Background & Service Review

### Introduction

The City of Saskatoon (City) is improving residential multi-unit waste services with the design of a city-wide organics program for the multi-unit sector. As part of this work, the City is reviewing the current service delivery model for multi-unit garbage. The following is a review of multi-unit garbage that looks at City-provided service and other considerations that impact multi-unit solid waste services.

This review will explore the following components of multi-unit garbage:

- Background and overview of multi-unit sector
- Existing service level
- Cost overview of service and funding model
- Past public engagement
- Impacts of multi-unit residential recycling and considerations
- Industry scan and alternative options



## Background – Through the Years

In 2007, the Saskatoon Waste and Recycling Plan made policy recommendations that covered multi-unit waste services. It stated that providing equitable service to all residents should be a key element of future waste diversion planning. There were approximately 24,000 multi-units in 2007 with many being serviced by a private contractor. At that time, large round 300-gal garbage containers were spread around the city. These containers were often shared and often used by commercial users. In the plan, recycling and organics services were identified as future diversion improvements that should be implemented. The City identified that garbage services needed to be reviewed to improve data and provide a consistent service to prepare for expanded services (addition of recycling and organics).

Throughout the 2000s, the Garbage Container Conversion project saw a large change for residential garbage services in Saskatoon. All curbside properties across the city converted to individual rollout garbage carts and all neighborhoods were brought into the regular collection calendar. Multi-unit garbage was also standardized, and in 2011 many 300-gal garbage containers were removed. Properties were asked to get their own metal container and apply for the Multi-Unit Dwelling Metal Garbage Bin Grant<sup>1</sup>.

The 2012 decision to launch curbside recycling and add a utility fee to bills was closely followed by a resolution to add a multi-unit residential recycling (MURR) program. In 2014, the MURR program launched through a sole-source service agreement with Cosmo. The program uses a utility fee model with per-unit billing and partially offsets the cost with funding from SK Recycles (formerly Multi-Material Stewardship). This new program increased costs for many multi-unit properties that had existing recycling service contracts. Cosmo subcontracts out the collection portion of the service agreement.

## Overview of Multi-Unit Residential Sector

The definition of multi-unit residential for waste services, as per the Waste Bylaw is:

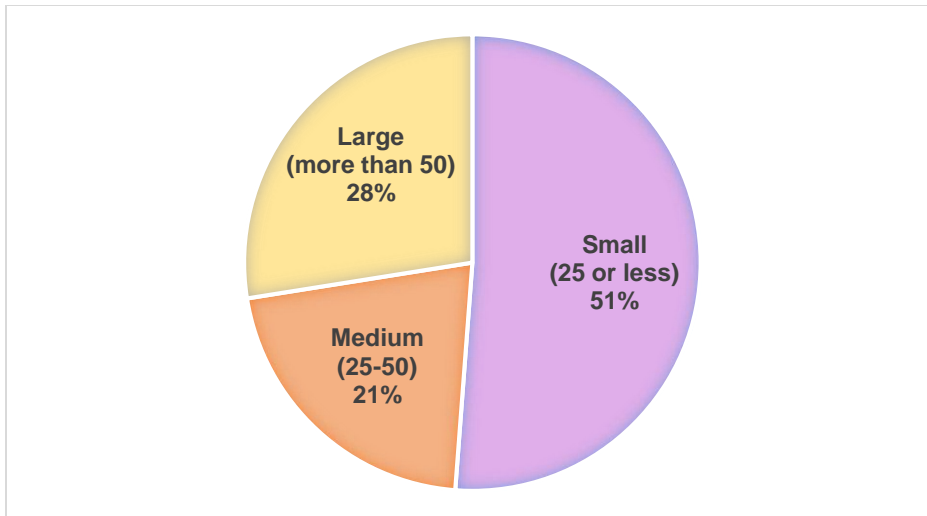
- (i) a building or portion of a building designed for or occupied as five or more residences, but does not include an institutional premises; or
- (ii) a residence best serviced by stationary containers, as determined by the General Manager.

With the introduction of the MURR utility, multi-unit properties became managed at the Site level.

Around half of multi-unit properties in Saskatoon have 25 or less units. Around 26% have 50 or more units and 25% have between 25 and 60 units. Some townhouses that do not receive curbside collection services are also considered multi-unit service properties.

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<sup>1</sup> [Multi-unit Dwelling Metal Garbage Bin Grant](#)



### ***Multi-Unit Property Size by Number of Units***

Population growth and new properties have and will continue to influence the multi-unit sector. Around 75% of the new multi-unit sites in 2023 were in new neighbourhoods. Most properties were large developments of 50 or more units.

### **Multi-Unit Garbage Waste Service Level**

The City of Saskatoon provides a weekly garbage collection to apartments and condominiums using metal bins. Building property owners, managers, or condominium associations purchase their own metal bins and can apply for an annual grant from the City to offset their costs. Buildings may contract services privately.

There are approximately 900 buildings and 39,000 multi-unit households in Saskatoon<sup>2</sup>. Around 85% of multi-unit properties in Saskatoon use the City-provided multi-unit garbage service.

It is estimated that the multi-unit sector produces around 17,500 tonnes of garbage every year (7% of the solid waste landfilled in Saskatoon)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> [2022 Integrated Waste Management Report, City of Saskatoon \(May 2023\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Waste Diversion Opportunities Report, City of Saskatoon, \(May 2017\)](#)

## Residential



### ***Image from Integrated Waste Management Report, City of Saskatoon, 2022***

Larger apartments and complexes are more likely to use a private service provider. Some properties also contract out additional services with a private contractor, such as container rental, cleanup of waste area, and extra collection.

## **Waste as an Essential Service**

Waste management is an essential public service. Mismanagement of solid waste can lead to health and safety risks. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Waste and Garbage collectors and processors (compost, garbage and recycling) were listed as essential<sup>4</sup>.

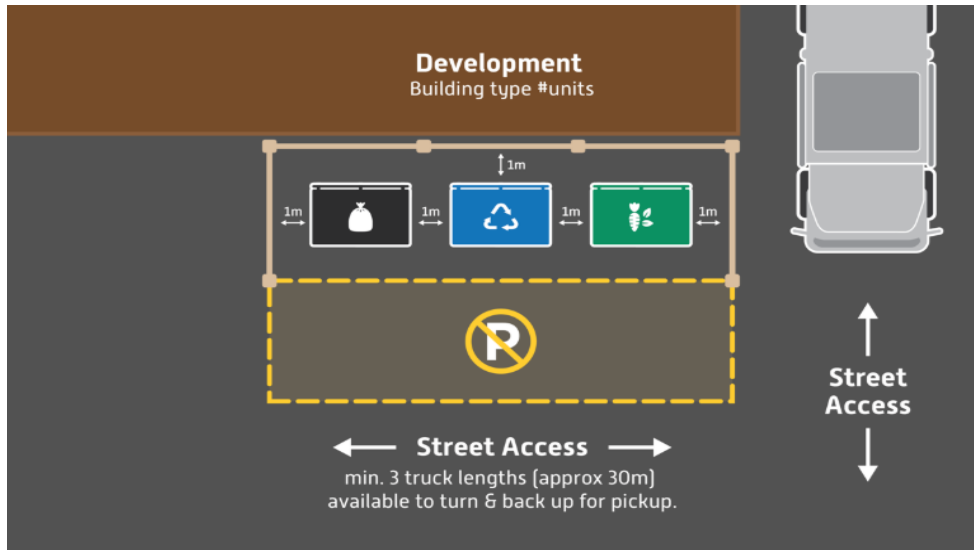
“These services and functions are considered essential to preserving life, health, and basic societal functioning”.

## **Waste Collection Design Guidelines**

On December 11, 2017, the first version of the Waste Collection Design Guidelines for Residential Developments was released by the City. This document laid out requirements for curbside and multi-unit collection. This document was updated in December 2021 to reflect program updates and make improvements based on feedback. The document can be found [here](#).

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/ntnl-scrtr/crtcl-nfrstrctr/esf-sfe-en.aspx>

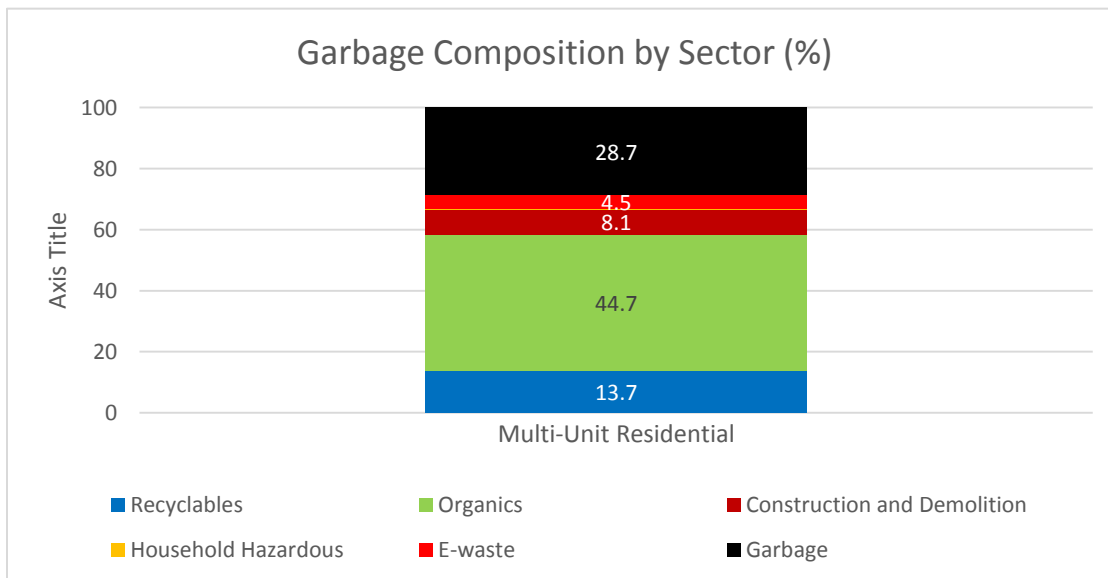


*Image from Waste Collection Design Guidelines*

## Waste Characterization

The 2019 City of Saskatoon Waste Characterization Study<sup>5</sup> reported multi-unit garbage samples contained 63% divertible material (44.7% food waste/yard waste/compostable paper, 13.7% recyclable material, and 4.5% E-waste). The largest material category in the garbage samples was food waste & organics at 29%. Yard waste accounted for 11%.

The overall capture rate for recyclable material was 43%, which includes all materials accepted in the multi-unit residential recycling program in the City of Saskatoon at the time of the study. This was lower than curbside which had a 66% capture rate.



<sup>5</sup> [2019 City of Saskatoon Waste Characterization Study](#)

## Cost

Current Costs of providing multi-unit garbage are taken from the 2025 Multi-Unit Garbage Budget. The costs of providing this service is funded by property tax.

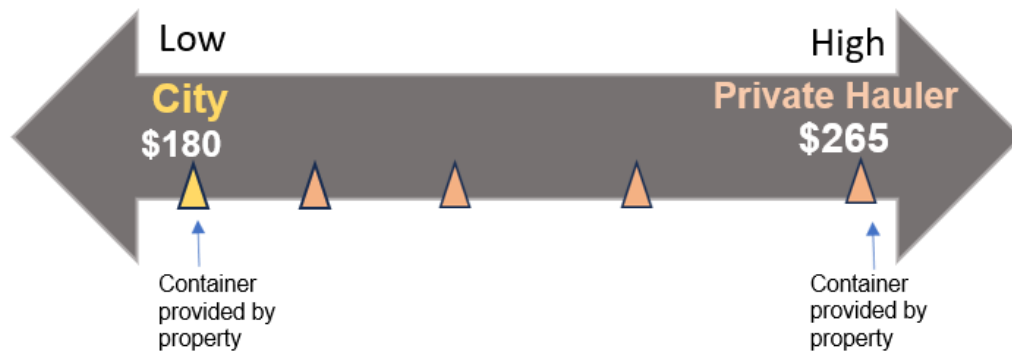
Category	Annual Costs	Further Details
Vehicle Lease, Fuel, and Maintenance	\$418,500	Includes Fork Truck rentals and partial costs of supervisor trucks
Salaries & Payroll Costs	\$403,000	Includes Fork Truck Operators & allocated portion of admin staff
Landfill Tipping Fee	\$1,570,800	Based on estimated tonnages for MU properties per tonnage projections
MUD Grant	\$228,500	Intended to offset the price of renting a unit, budgeted at \$8/habitable unit, and application based. If we were to provide to each HU, we would need additional funds.
Other (Overhead, Corporate Cross Charges, and Reserve)	\$67,700	No program management salaries are included here.
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,688,500</b>	

Multi-unit garbage containers vary in size. The City currently services 7,400 yards worth of container volume per week. When converted to 6 yard containers this results in approximately 1,233 customers. The most common container size is 6 yards – around 53% of containers are this size. The next most common size is 4 yard (21%) followed by 3 yard (12%), 8 yard (9%), and 2 yard (5%).

For the purpose of comparing City pricing with current industry pricing a standardized price was used for the most common service - a 6-yard container emptied weekly. Four private haulers provided service pricing. The estimated cost for the City to service a 6-yard container weekly is approximately \$180 per month. It is important to note that the City does not provide containers (metal bins) for multi-unit service.

Monthly pricing estimate for 6yd multi-unit residential waste bin collected weekly. Weight is estimated at 200kg to 300kg per tip.

### Price Range for City and Private Waste Service



The lowest cost was the City at \$180 per month (based on the 2025 Approved Budget). The price range for private waste haulers surveyed in 2024 ranged from \$189 to \$285 per month. It should be noted that property managers with multiple sites often get a volume discount and better contract pricing is often available dependent on quantity and location.

### Multi-Unit Residential Recycling (MURR)

The MURR program launched on October 6, 2014, and was fully operational by the end of 2015. The service is provided by Cosmopolitan Industries (Cosmo) through a sole-source agreement that covers collection and processing. The agreement included an option for Cosmo to extend the term. The current agreement is in place from 2024 until the end of 2029. Agreement language has also been added that allows the City to transfer responsibility of multi-unit recycling to the Province as it shifts towards a full Extended Producer Responsibility model and sets fixed costs for early termination<sup>6</sup>.

All residents living in apartments and condominiums that receive metal bin garbage collection or communal waste collection are part of the program. Unlike multi-unit garbage, multi-unit recycling is a mandatory program for all properties considered multi-unit residential.

New provincial regulations that have been recently introduced will require producers and distributors of regulated materials to cover 100% of the cost of residential recycling programs. SK Recycles (formerly Multi-Materials Stewardship Western) is the organization that will operate the new program on behalf of producers. The new SK Recycles program plan that has been approved by the province requires municipalities to have a garbage program in place to be eligible for participation. Additional reporting on this is planned in the first half of 2025.

### Impacts and Considerations for MURR

**Space Constraints:** During the deployment process one of the greatest challenges was finding space for an additional metal container for recycling. To address this concern, Cosmo used rollout carts (96 gal/ 360L) more often than anticipated to help address space constraints. Around 14% of properties in the recycling program are serviced by rollout carts.

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<sup>6</sup> [Recycling Program Update – New Household Paper and Packaging Program \[EUCS2024-0904\]](#)



**Colocation challenges:** Best-practice research suggests that colocation is an important aspect of a successful multi-unit diversion program<sup>7</sup>. When recycling is less convenient than garbage it makes participation more challenging. Many property configurations have more garbage containers than recycling. Garbage is usually located in a more prominent location. Some anecdotal information from property managers and Environmental Protection Officers suggests that colocation may also lead to contamination as recycling serves as an overflow for garbage.

**Service challenges:** With the addition of recycling there are more properties that have issues accessing containers for collection. The Waste Collection Design Guidelines stipulate that 1 metre is required between containers and any other object in the collection area (fence, tree, vehicle, enclosure, etc.). In practice, this is often not possible. Many metal recycling containers are located behind the metal garbage container. On collection day, the metal garbage container is moved out to the side to access the metal recycling container for collection. This leads to inefficiencies in collection and increases risk of misplacing container or damage during collection. All containers need to be placed back in their original position.

**Multiple service providers:** the service agreement for MURR requires that metal garbage containers have access. Garbage operations will not move a recycling container in order to access garbage.

**Billing Model:** Certainty and easy method to determine costs.

**Signage** – Many metal garbage containers do not have any signage. With the addition of MURR, signage has become more important. MURR containers have a decal stating it is recycling and includes acceptable materials (visual and words).

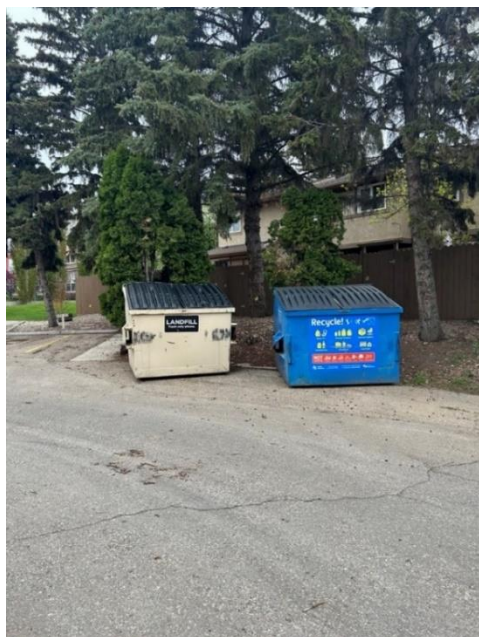
*Image of 2014 recycling decal and multi-unit garbage container with no decal.*



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<sup>7</sup> [Summary of Findings: Multi-Unit Mandatory Waste Sorting Program](#) (City of Edmonton, June 25, 2021)

**Image of garbage decal distributed in 2015 as part of education initiative (left) with Cosmo MURR decal installed in 2018 (right).**



**Contamination:** MURR shows that contamination is usually higher than the curbside recycling rate. The contamination rate has been as high as 23% for MURR (compared to 15% for curbside recycling). The current rate (2024) is 21%.

**Education:** Education for the multi-unit residential sector is unique because property managers and residents both need to be informed and engaged. Education efforts for curbside residents is simpler as it usually happens directly with the resident. Efforts to educate multi-unit residential properties on how to correctly use garbage and recycling have been challenging. The turnover rate in multi-units is higher so regular interactions are key. Other needs, such as tailoring material for newcomers is also important. An education and communications plan is prepared annually to outline specific activities to be carried out by the City and Cosmo.

## **Public Engagement**

“Saskatoon Talks Trash: Multi-Unit” engagement campaign ran from February 12 to March 6, 2018. In that time, over 600 people participated in a variety of engagement activities. Residents, property managers, owners, condo boards, and landlords were asked questions on organics, garbage, recycling, and other diversion & reduction. Engagement topics for garbage included satisfaction with current service model, barriers and opportunities for improvement, interest in bulky item collection program, and implications of changing the funding model.

Most participants were satisfied with current frequency and capacity of their garbage service. Several respondents expressed concern or frustration that they are being double billed, as their Condo building receives garbage collection from a private contractor because they cannot be serviced by the City. In regard to switching multi-unit garbage to a utility, the majority (43%) of the 56 respondents were unsure, with 25% expressing support and 32% opposed.

Participants were most concerned about bulky items being dumped in their building’s bins, primarily from non-residents. While there was some moderate interest in the City providing a bulky item collection service, there were concerns about cost and where to store these items in the interim. They were very supportive of offering this service to single-family homes, as they felt it would reduce illegal dumping in multi-unit garbage containers.

## Industry Scan of Multi-Unit Garbage Service Models

Municipalities across Canada have a variety of service models for providing waste to multi-unit properties. The below table provides a summary of municipalities.

Municipality	Garbage	Recycling	Organics
City of Regina 4 or more units on the same parcel of land.	Private contracted service. Exploring City service (2024).	Bylaw mandates that all multi-family properties must offer recycling.	Bylaw starts July 1, 2025, that mandates food and yard waste.
City of Calgary 5 or more units on the same parcel of land.	Private contracted service. City services are available for a service fee.	Bylaw mandates that all multi-family properties must offer recycling.	Bylaw mandates that all multi-family properties must offer organics.
City of Edmonton Moving to communal vs curbside.	City-provided service.	City-provided service.	City-provided food scrap services being implemented 2023 to 2027.
City of Lethbridge 6 or more units.	Private contract.	City-provided service. Exemption for properties with more than 45 units.	City-provided service.
City of Winnipeg Multi-Family is 8 or more units.	City-service available.	City-service available.	No City service or bylaw.
City of Victoria	Mostly Private	New City service coming 2026.	New City service coming 2026.

The following section identifies the strategic improvement areas for multi-unit garbage and a list of recommendations to be considered over the next 5 years. A table at the end of this section provides proposed timing to bring decisions forward in a coordinated approach.

## Findings and Recommendations

### 1. Finance

A fiscal restructuring is in progress that moves solid waste programs from a property tax funded model to a user fee. The first move to this approach occurred with the launch of curbside and multi-unit recycling. Both services were setup as utility models. Curbside organics was launched in 2023 using the same utility funding model. The most recent change for curbside

residents was the launch of the curbside waste utility in 2024 that saw garbage services moved from property tax to a utility. A pay for service model increases transparency for service costs and funding.

The next step for the City is to improve the funding model for properties that have City multi-unit garbage collection and those that may switch to City services in the future. The goal of this work is:

- Ensuring that only those receiving the solid waste collection services pay for it
- Increase transparency for service costs and establish a transparent link between waste disposal and the cost of waste services
- Open the door for pay for service based on additional service needs, container size, etc.

**Recommendation:**

Remove multi-unit garbage from property tax. Announce service price for multi-unit garbage. Move multi-unit garbage from property tax to a direct billing - per unit or variable service pricing per container. Determine a funding strategy that includes billing, enforcement, and education.

**2. Service Levels**

The current service level for Multi-Unit Garbage is a weekly collection frequency using metal bins. Property owners, managers, or condominium associations purchase their own metal bins and can apply for a grant to offset their costs. Buildings may contract service providers privately for garbage services.

There are approximately 82% of multi-unit properties that use the City-provided weekly service. Some properties use the City for base service needs and also use a private service provider for additional tips as needed and to deal with illegal dumping and cleanup of the waste area.

Sector Needs

The multi-unit residential sector has a demand for more service options, including the ability to pay for extra collections. Streamlined service offerings (using one service provider for all service needs) would help with managing waste needs, improving the waste area, and dealing with illegal dumping. Rental properties often face more challenges with behaviour that leads to overfilled containers.

**Recommendation:**

Explore service offerings for extra services and look at a pricing model that accurately reflects costs of providing service. These service offerings can include:

- Additional collection and an on-demand service
- Twice per week collection
- Waste area cleanup
- Pull/ pushout service for containers that are stacked or must be moved prior to tip
- Bin size change
- Bin cleaning

### **3. Waste Design Guidelines and Property Engagement**

The [Waste Collection Design Guidelines for Residential Developments](#) have provided guidance on future developments in Saskatoon and identify important considerations for site layout, serviceability, and requirements for multi-unit solid waste services.

As the City works towards a housing strategy that may lead to more compact housing and targets to achieve greater density, this may lead to further strains on accessibility and the need for new service approaches to effectively service multi-unit properties.

Having guidelines, guidance documents, and resources to work with developers and property managers is an essential component of a successful solid waste service model.

#### **Recommendation:**

Explore further design regulations or guidelines for solid waste storage in new multi-unit residential properties.

Look at ways of engaging with developers to ensure there is regular correspondence with this stakeholder.

Look at options for improving site configurations for existing properties and offering site assessments with an emphasis on encouraging best practices and safety. Site assessments could be formalized and streamlined for properties that are changing their waste area, redoing their parking area, or are just curious on how to improve diversion at their complex.

### **4. Asset Management**

Ownership of metal containers is an important aspect of solid waste service that needs to be explored as part of a future delivery model. Building property owners, managers, or condominium associations currently purchase their own metal bins and can apply for a grant to offset their costs. This makes it challenging to change the size and location of a metal bin.

#### **Recommendation:**

Review the Multi-Unit Dwelling (MUD) Metal Garbage Bin Grant. As part of the review explore a service model that includes City ownership and maintenance of metal bins and other containers for multi-unit service.

### **5. Route Optimization**

Another important consideration for GHG emissions is route efficiency. Regular planning and review of routes must be completed to ensure efficient routes for all streams. New technologies are emerging that use more inputs to maximize efficiency, such as real-time data (traffic, weather, etc.), service constraints, and driver preference. Transfer stations are another option that can be used to improve route optimization for waste collection by reducing the number of vehicles needed, the distance traveled, and the overall cost.

#### **Recommendation:**

Ensure future route planning utilizes new technologies and is completed regularly to ensure routes are optimized for customer satisfaction and efficiency.

## Draft Timelines

	Phase 1 2025/ 2026	Phase 2 2026/2027	Phase 3 2028/2029
<b>Finance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Decision on removing multi-unit garbage from property tax.</li> <li>➤ Determine service fee structure and property tax implications.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Develop a detailed implementation plan with financial implications.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Implement changes.</li> </ul>
<b>Service Levels</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Start exploring different service offerings for multi-unit in conjunction with similar work for the commercial sector.</li> <li>➤ Townhouse complex review (multi-unit and curbside properties)</li> <li>➤ Make a decision on the role of the City in multi-unit recycling collections pending SK recycles outcomes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Develop a detailed implementation plan and funding strategy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Implement service level changes and additions.</li> </ul>
<b>Waste Design Guidelines &amp; Property Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Review the current waste design guidelines and identify improvements.</li> <li>➤ Develop engagement &amp; communication strategy for developers/ property managers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Complete new version of waste design guidelines</li> <li>➤ Execute engagement and communication strategy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Review and refine as needed.</li> </ul>
<b>Asset Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Explore a business case for the City providing metal containers.</li> <li>➤ Make a decision on future of MUD Grant.</li> <li>➤ Determine cost implications and decide on next steps.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Develop implementation and funding strategy.</li> <li>➤ Pending MUD Grant decision, look at new grant program for smaller garbage container or retrofit of solid waste storage area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Implement new strategy.</li> </ul>
<b>Route Optimization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Complete a scan of route optimization approaches and new technologies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Proceed with route optimization process if required.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Implement new routes.</li> </ul>