

Multi-Unit Organics – Pilot Findings and Next Steps

ISSUE

In the 2022/2023 Multi-Year Budget, City Council approved funding for development of a multi-unit organics program through a phased approach. Building off public engagement completed in 2018, a pilot study was carried out in 2024 to inform the design of a multi-unit residential organics (multi-unit organics) program.

This report provides an update on the multi-unit organics pilot study including the engagement results, introduces guiding principles that will be used to design and assess program options, and outlines next steps.

BACKGROUND

City Council, at its meeting held on May 23, 2017, received the Waste Diversion Opportunities report identifying various tools and approaches to improving waste diversion in Saskatoon, including organics diversion for the multi-unit sector. On February 13, 2018, an overview of [Multi-Unit Residential Waste Diversion Opportunities](#) was brought to City Council with a recommendation that Administration explore opportunities for the diversion of organic waste from multi-unit residential buildings and proceed with engagement with citizens and stakeholders.

Engagement with stakeholders was carried out and a report with findings went to City Council on September 10, 2018: [Multi-Unit Residential Proposed Changes to Waste Management – Engagement Results](#).

The [Waste Diversion Plan Update](#) report to the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities and Corporate Services on January 7, 2019, provided an update on all waste diversion activities. Work was prioritized on the Industrial, Commercial, and Institutional (ICI) sector as the waste diversion potential was higher than the multi-unit sector. Further development of the multi-unit organics program resumed with funding for 2022/2023.

Further details on each sector are provided in Appendix 1 - 2025 Solid Waste Overview – Sectors and Services. The 2022 [Integrated Waste Management Report](#) provides an overview of services and diversion and is presented publicly every second year. The next Integrated Waste Management Report will be prepared in Q2 2025 with 2024 data.

CURRENT STATUS

The City of Saskatoon (City) does not have an organics diversion program for the multi-unit residential sector. Properties within the multi-unit residential waste sector are ineligible for the green cart program and were ineligible for the previous green cart subscription program.

The City operates both garbage and recycling collection programs for the multi-unit sector. The City provides weekly garbage collection to multi-unit residential properties

with metal bins, funded through the property tax, or properties can choose to contract services privately to augment the base service level. Building property owners, managers, or condominium associations purchase their own metal bins and can apply for a grant to offset their costs.

The City launched multi-unit residential recycling in 2014, through a contracted recycling service with Cosmopolitan Industries. All residents living in apartments and condominiums that receive metal bin garbage collection or communal waste collection are part of the program and receive recycling service through a metal bin or rollout carts. Unlike multi-unit residential garbage, multi-unit residential recycling is a mandatory program for all properties considered multi-unit residential.

Guided by the Solid Waste Reduction and Diversion Plan, the City is addressing organics waste diversion through an approach which targets the largest waste generating sectors first. In 2023, the City launched the green cart program to collect organics from curbside residential households. A phase-in of a regulation that requires businesses and organizations that generate food or yard waste as part of their operations to divert these materials also began in 2023, with enforcement beginning in the fall of 2024. Additional work is underway to develop an organics diversion approach for public spaces and events, as well as to expand organics to additional civic facilities.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

The multi-unit residential sector poses unique opportunities and challenges in waste collection compared to curbside collection. While there are efficiencies, such as communal (shared) containers, there are also challenges such as: higher contamination rates, lower capture rates, high incidents of illegal dumping and unauthorized use of residential containers. Organics waste generation for the multi-unit sector is also a higher proportion of food waste than the curbside residential sector. There are also various types and sizes of properties in the multi-unit sector. Each property has unique site considerations and servicing needs. For these reasons, multi-unit organics programs are not as common in Canada as curbside organics programs.

A pilot study has now been completed to gain and verify information required to design a multi-unit organics program in Saskatoon. The pilot findings will inform a program design which:

- addresses outstanding items from the 2018 public engagement;
- defines the service requirements for the specific sector and waste stream (container size, collection frequency, collection method); and
- projects the expected diversion potential from the program.

Important components of the pilot include specific design elements that can be replicated by the City or properties, as well as collecting direct feedback from participants (properties, residents, and other stakeholders).

Pilot Methodology

The Multi-Unit Organics Pilot Study has been developed to help shape a future multi-unit organics program for the entire city. Lawson Heights Suburban Centre, Lawson Heights, River Heights, and Silverwood Heights were selected for the pilot study due to a mix of different types of multi-unit properties in that area. Sixteen properties that include 24 buildings and 3 multi-unit townhouse complexes participated in the pilot study.

The pilot looked at certain approaches and design considerations for organics diversion at multi-unit properties. It assessed collection frequency, cart capacity, and collection location and helped identify what design best meets the need of the multi-unit sector. Education and resources were also assessed to determine what works best for encouraging proper participation. The pilot provided the opportunity to get direct feedback from residents and property managers through engagement that included surveys and interviews. The pilot included a variety of property managers and condo boards.

Organics service for the pilot were provided through a service agreement with Loraas Disposal north that was awarded through a competitive request for proposal process. The service agreement included provisions of containers, collection, and processing of material. Although the official pilot is complete, participating properties will receive organics service to the end of 2025, while analysis and decision-making is underway. Additional information on the methodology, participating properties, and organics services are available in Appendix 3 - Multi-Unit Organics Pilot Study Findings.

Engagement Findings

The City engaged residents, tenants, and property managers participating in the Multi-Unit Organics Pilot. Appendix 2 - Multi-Unit Organics Pilot (Engagement Report) provides the full results of engagement completed for the multi-unit organics pilot, with highlights summarized below.

Resident and Tenant Engagement

A launch survey at the start of the pilot and a closing survey eight months into the pilot were used to collect feedback for the pilot. The closing survey received 144 responses. Survey responses indicate that 96% of residents participated in the organic pilot at least once. When asked whether they supported the City in implementing a city-wide multi-unit organics program:

- 81% stated “yes”;
- 11% stated that they “somewhat” supported;
- 5% stated “no”; and
- 3% were “unsure”.

Property Management Feedback

A representative from each property provided feedback eight months into the pilot through an interview to gather information on:

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- organic service approaches;
- waste funding methods;
- collection frequency;
- container type and location;
- multi-unit garbage and recycling; and
- education.

Engagement outcomes show that most property managers are supportive of a utility funding model for a future multi-unit organics program. Advanced notice of at least one year was identified as a key requirement for smooth implementation. Gathered through interviews with pilot study property management, the outcomes show that 13 of the 15 interviewees prefer a city-provided service for a future multi-unit organics program, as they do not like having to setup and manage service contracts.

Pilot Study Findings

The pilot study shows that successful diversion outcomes are possible with proper design, education, and property engagement. Detailed pilot study findings can be found in Appendix 3 – Multi-Unit Organics Pilot Study Findings.

Capacity analysis findings show that:

- A 360L green cart can comfortably service about 30 units with weekly collection.
- Weekly collection is the preferred frequency by pilot participants as it requires fewer carts.
- Carts are serviced with a rear loader truck that requires each cart to be rolled to the back of the truck to be tipped.
- This collection method along with weekly collection helps address space issues as carts can be tucked next to other waste containers or placed in another accessible location.

Education and outreach are shown to be important aspects of encouraging residents to participate in the pilot. Kitchen pails, BPI certified compostable bags - 10-pack of BPI bags, and information post cards were given out to most properties during deployment. It was found that kitchen pails are a great prompt for getting residents to divert food waste. The two properties that only gave kitchen pails to units that requested them had low participation compared to other pilot properties where every unit received one. The pilot study survey shows that kitchen pails and BPI certified compostable bags are useful tools to encourage residents to participate.

Additional findings show that most pilot participants state that they have little or no yard waste, as landscape services are often hired out as part of a service contract and material is hauled away, consistent with the 2018 engagement results. However, audits in April 2024 show that several properties have large quantities of yard waste ending up in their garbage stream and going to landfill.

Landscaping service providers fall under the Industrial, Commercial, and Institutional (ICI) sector. Yard waste can be handled through education and enforcement but there

also are opportunities to include yard waste needs in the design of a future multi-unit organics program. Through engagement we heard that the main concern is finding the option that is most cost effective. A decision on how yard waste will be dealt with by the multi-unit sector will be addressed in the future option analysis report.

Contamination is not a significant issue according to the pilot study. Plastic is the highest contaminate found during the pilot, which is consistent with containerisation found in the curbside green cart program. The level of participation in the pilot varied based on property type. The findings show that owned multi-units or senior living complexes usually have better engagement and participation than rentals. Rentals have a lower rate of participation and higher levels of contamination.

Guiding Principles

A list of guiding principles has been developed to support option analysis and recommendations for a city-wide program design. The guiding principles are informed by past waste diversion program development, feedback from engagement, experience in delivering multi-unit garbage and recycling services, and the City's Triple Bottom Line Policy.

The guiding principles include:

- Service level satisfaction;
- Transparency (funding model);
- Flexibility;
- Waste diversion and GHGs avoided;
- Reduced contamination;
- Sector alignment;
- Integrated waste; and
- Responsibility.

A description of these guiding principles is available in Appendix 4 Guiding Principles – Multi-Unit Organics Program.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial considerations will be included in a planned report for Q2 2025, that presents the option analysis for the city-wide multi-unit organics program design. A second report with detailed cost implications of the chosen option will be reported as part of the implementation plan.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Environmental

Waste audits and weights were taken during the pilot to determine how much organic material was being collected and how the garbage material composition changed with the introduction of organics. Weight collected (per unit average) during the pilot varied significantly across the different pilot participants. Average weights collected eight months into the pilot suggest that around 2000 tonnes of organic material could be

diverted through a city-wide program. As a comparison, the Multi-Unit Recycling program diverted 1821 tonnes of recycling in 2023.

GHG

It is estimated that a city-wide multi-unit organics program could avoid 2500 tonnes of CO_{2e} per year that would have been released as methane gas if the same materials were landfilled. This is the equivalent of removing 550 passenger cars from the roadway.

NEXT STEPS

Administration has developed a list of options and will present four options that could best meet the specific needs of Saskatoon. The detailed options and analysis will be presented in a decision report in Q2 of 2025.

APPENDICES

1. Solid Waste Overview 2025 – Sectors and Services
2. Multi-Unit Organics Pilot Engagement Report
3. Multi-Unit Organics Pilot Study Findings
4. Guiding Principles – Multi-Unit Organics Program

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