



Department Source: City Utilities - Solid Waste

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: January 4, 2021

Re: Report: Solid Waste Update – Curbside Refuse and Recycling Collection

## Executive Summary

The Council approved changes to curbside collection requirements as part of the FY 2021 budget process in an effort to improve working conditions while encouraging conservation. The intent of the changes in residential trash collection reduces the potential for large volumes of refuse and large bulky items placed at the curb for collection. The first phase was implemented November 1, 2020 which required all material left curbside to be placed in bags and eliminated the unscheduled collection of large bulky items.

The second phase of the changes is scheduled to begin February 1, 2021. This change includes the implementation of a “pay as you throw” model. All material placed curbside for collection must be in City provided bags with a City logo. Via a voucher program, customers will be provided 104 trash bags per year. Extra bags, if needed, will be available for purchase at the rate of \$2 per bag. As this program affects all residential customers in Columbia relying on Solid Waste curbside collection, a communication plan has been formulated in an attempt to make certain the public is informed about the change, is aware of the timeline and understands the process.

This report is intended to provide an update on the progress on implementation of the second phase, update on staffing levels regarding curbside collection of recyclable materials and a status of recycling drop off collection sites.

## Discussion

### **Curbside Refuse Collection**

In November, the first phase of the changes to curbside refuse collection was implemented. The first phase changes included requiring all refuse collected at the curb to be placed in bags and that bulky items to be collected at the curb would have to be scheduled and an additional charge for the collection would be included on the customer's bill. Overall, there have not been significant challenges associated with the implementation of these changes.

Beginning February 1, the second phase of the changes are anticipated to be implemented. These changes include requiring all refuse to be collected at the curb to be placed in City provided refuse bags that have a City logo on the bag. Refuse not in these City provided bags will not be collected. The City will provide 104 bags for curbside



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customers annually through a voucher program. If a customer needs additional bags, they will be available for purchase in rolls of 5 bags for \$2.00 per bag.

A considerable amount of work needs to be completed in order to implement these changes by February 1, 2021. A contract is in place for the supply of the new logo bags, a purchase order has been issued and the bags are being manufactured. The vendor will be sending bag vouchers to customers in January with the intent of customers having the vouchers by January 18, 2021. The vendor will also have the bags distributed to local retailers so customers may begin redeeming vouchers for bags on January 18, 2021. This provides a two week timeframe for customers to redeem vouchers so the logo bags can be used beginning February 1, 2021.

The Solid Waste Division will be hosting a drive through event where customers can exchange vouchers for bags the week of January 18, 2021. The drive through will be located at Cosmo Park and will be provided Tuesday, January 19 through Saturday, January 23. This will reduce the demand on local retailers providing bags during the conversion and will offer a contactless method to obtain the bags during the ongoing COVID pandemic. Depending on the success of the drive through, it could be extended through the following week.

In an effort to make this transition go as smooth as possible, the Solid Waste Division has developed a communication plan with the goal of making certain the public is informed about the change, is aware of the timeline and understands the process. A summary of the communication plan is attached with a summary timeline of activities for each week through the end of January.

## **Curbside Recycling Collection**

The curbside collection of recyclable materials was temporarily suspended in July 2020. The suspension of this service was necessary due to the number of vacant positions in Solid Waste, there simply was not sufficient staff to provide this service reliably. Currently, there are 59 full time budgeted positions for Refuse Collector and Senior Refuse Collector. Curbside collections accounts for 28 of these 59 positions. These staff are required each day to fully staff the curbside routes (8 refuse, 5 recycling, 1 bulky item route), without requiring additional staff from a temporary agency.

In August 2020 there were 17 vacant collector positions in Solid Waste, 11 of these positions were in curbside collections. In addition to the vacant positions, additional staff were unavailable due to injury. Currently, there are 14 vacant collector positions in Solid Waste, 12 are in curbside collections. In addition, one curbside collector is unavailable for other reasons. This leaves only 15 staff available to perform the routes and temporary agency personnel are required to supplement the operations. While it appears there are sufficient personnel to staff a driver for each route, it is common for one to three people to be unavailable due to sickness or vacation each day. In addition, several of these individuals are still being trained and are not qualified to operate a route on their own at this time.



Once sufficient trained staff are available to provide service on a reliable basis, the collections of recycling at the curb can resume.

## **Recycling Drop-off Sites**

The suspension of curbside recycling collection has resulted in a large increase in the use of the recycling drop-off sites. These sites are serviced each day of the week. The fiber is generally being collected 4 times per day at each site and the containers are being collected 3 – 4 times per day. Even with this frequency of service, the sites are being overwhelmed. These sites were never intended to be used to provide recycling collection for the entire City however, with the suspension of the curbside collections this is the result. These sites have a very unappealing appearance and are not being used properly. The largest contributing factor to the unsightly appearance is all the material piled up around the collection containers. This is caused primarily to users not breaking boxes down before placing them in the container. The containers are then filled with empty boxes which take up all the volume. If the boxes were properly broken down and folded flat, they would most likely all fit in the existing containers, eliminating the unsightly appearance of the facilities. Based on conversations during the work session on December 29, 2020, it seems that some actions are expected to address the appearance of these facilities. The Solid Waste Division intends to have temporary personnel staff these facilities between the hours of approximately 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. to educate the facility users of the need to break down and fold flat the boxes prior to disposal at the drop off locations. These staff will be provided with tools necessary to break down boxes that are not properly prepared when dropped off at the facilities. This should provide the additional volume necessary for the users to place material in the containers without the need to have the material left on the ground around the collection containers, improving the appearance of the facilities. An additional benefit of this will be to reduce the disposal of materials that are refuse and not recyclable with our existing system.

Additional drop off locations would help to relieve the congestion in the short term and are needed in the long term for individuals without access to collection at their residence. A virtual Interested Parties meeting was held from December 14, 2020 through January 1, 2021 for a potential drop-off recycling center at the Parks Management Center at Cosmo Park. This proposed site would be similar to the existing sites at State Farm Parkway and on South Providence Outer Road. It would have an enclosed area with up to five receptacles for fiber and containers (plastics, tin cans and aluminum cans). Once the comments from the Interested Parties meeting are received, staff will propose a Public Hearing for this project. Another site has been identified on City owned property at Vandiver and Oakland Gravel Road and staff will follow up with an Interested Parties meeting for the addition of this site. Staff will continue to identify sites for additional drop-off locations and bring them forward as identified.



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Short-Term Impact: No fiscal impact due to this report.

Long-Term Impact: No fiscal impact due to this report.

## Strategic & Comprehensive Plan Impact

### Strategic Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Not Applicable, Secondary Impact: Not Applicable, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

### Comprehensive Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Not Applicable, Secondary Impact: Not applicable, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

## Legislative History

Date	Action
None	None

## Suggested Council Action

Report is for information only.