

## CHICAGO WASTE PROGRESS UPDATE: SHORT-TERM PRIORITIES

[SEPTEMBER 2023]

As the City of Chicago moves forward with specific actions to advance the Materials Management Strategy, regular updates will be issued to inform stakeholders and interested parties of the measurable progress made toward the short-term priorities described in this document. These short-term priorities are targeted for completion by the end of 2023.

### POLICY REVIEW AND EXPLORATION

The City of Chicago seeks to review existing materials management ordinances to identify opportunities to increase impact and conduct initial research for new potential legislation.



In Progress

#### **Researching potential for implementing waste hauling zones for commercial waste**

The Department of Streets and Sanitation (DSS) has conducted a best practices assessment, interviewing waste agency staff members that have transitioned to commercial waste zones using franchise agreements. DSS staff also continued researching the benefits, costs, and potential barriers to implementing waste hauling zones here in Chicago, and in 2023 began engaging the City's Department of Law regarding which municipal ordinances would need to be updated.



In Progress

#### **Supporting ambitious statewide extended producer responsibility (EPR) legislation**

A statewide EPR group was created in 2021 to inform a pathway to EPR legislation in Illinois. The City of Chicago teamed up with several solid waste agencies, and throughout 2021 and 2022 engaged in numerous stakeholder meetings, following an initial draft of an EPR bill for Packaging and Paper Products authored by the Product Stewardship Institute. In Spring 2023, the decision was made to follow the example of Maryland, and SB1555 passed through the legislature. This bill establishes a needs assessment study, the findings of which will determine the second phase of this EPR program. When fully implemented in 2026, this legislation will provide curbside recycling to all communities in Illinois with over 1,500 residents, with Chicago's DSS, Park District, and CPS Blue Cart recycling programs having their collection service expenses fully reimbursed.



In Progress

#### **Assessing Construction & Demolition Debris (C&D) Recycling Ordinance compliance and identifying opportunities for increased contractor education**

CDPH plans to procure a waste tracking management software to modernize the current paper-based C&D debris recycling tracking and enforcement process. Tracking and enforcement of the recycling ordinance requires coordination among multiple City departments to ensure the data entered in the new web-based system is accurate. CDPH is working to customize the waste management software to

ensure all the various data sources can be integrated. Until the web-based, waste tracking management system is operational, CDPH is revising its manual process to better notify contractors during the DOB permitting process that they are subject to the C&D Debris Recycling Ordinance. Additionally, CDPH is developing an online training to provide an updated resource for contractors subject to the C&D debris recycling requirements.



In Progress

### **Adjusting the C&D Recycling Ordinance to specify targeted material types and parameters for reuse**

CDPH meets with the City’s Chief Sustainability Officer on a regular basis to collaborate on ways to protect the environment. One idea we are exploring focuses on the deconstruction of buildings—meaning, carefully disassembling rather than demolishing them—to maximize the amount of salvageable materials for reuse and recycling. CDPH is in discussions with the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) about increasing the C&D recycling requirement from the current 50% to 75%.



In Progress

### **Identify partnership and support opportunities for industrial, commercial, and institutional entities implementing food waste diversion programs**

Multiple city departments and sister agencies continue to collaborate on the National Resource Defense Council (NRDC) Food Matters initiative along with external partners, including Cook County, Chicago Sustainability Task Force, Wasted Food Action Alliance, Illinois Food Scrap & Composting Coalition, Chicagoland Food Sovereignty Coalition, Urban Canopy, Plant Chicago, Green Era/Urban Growers Collective, Illinois Tech Institute of Design, DePaul Steans Center, and Illinois Sustainable Technology Center. Additionally, DSS and the Chicago Public Schools’ Energy and Sustainability team meet regularly to collaborate on their food waste reduction and composting programs.

## **INCREASING OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS**

The City of Chicago seeks to provide new programs and educational opportunities for Chicago residents to engage with the materials management system and improve residential diversion.



Completed

### **Leverage the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) Food Matters Great Lakes Regional Cohort participation to conduct a food rescue assessment of existing infrastructure and gaps**

The Chicago Food Rescue Assessment has been completed with a set of recommendations, with a primary focus on the development of a Chicago Food Waste Action Plan.



In Progress

### **Maintaining clear and consistent messaging around recycling contamination**

DSS received approval to bring on new staff to assist with education campaigns. Two staff were added to the team in 2022, which included an Assistant Commissioner and a Program Director, with a new Program Coordinator joining DSS in mid-2023 as well. Together, this new staff worked with the Recycling Partnership on a contamination study report based on field reporting, which clarified that the most common contaminants have not changed. The City of Chicago also continues to partner with Recycle by City to support this effort, and in 2023, Recycle By City plans on releasing a new app of their recycling guide designed for smart phones. Also coming in 2023, the Food Packaging Institute, in collaboration with DSS and LRS, will be unveiling ads throughout the City to notify residents that “hot cups” can now be accepted in Blue Carts.



In Progress

### **Establish permanent drop-off sites for residents at the Sanitary District or Ward level**

DSS is preparing to launch a Food Scrap Drop-Off Program in 2023, which will be based at several DSS ward yards geographically spread across the city. All Chicago residents will be encouraged to drop off their household food scraps using this new, free city service. The food scraps will be hauled to a commercial composting facility located within the city to be processed into finished compost.



Ongoing

### **Introduce drop off locations through “pumpkin smash” events**

In November 2022, DSS collaborated with the University of Illinois Extension to coordinate Pumpkin Smash events at four locations across the city (Morton School of Excellence, Gary Comer Youth Center, Lake View High School, and Plant Chicago), and helped promote events at two additional locations hosted by Edgewater Environmental Council and Guild Row. Nearly 18 tons of pumpkins were diverted from landfills on this day. At a Pumpkin Smash, residents are invited to drop off their leftover pumpkins and smash them before they get hauled off for composting. Pumpkin Smashes are a great way to introduce residents to the practice of composting and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by keeping pumpkins out of landfills. DSS and Extension are currently planning for Pumpkin Smash 2023, with expansion to additional locations.



In Progress

### **Provide opt-in curbside organics collection for all Chicago residents served by DSS**

DSS applied for a USEPA Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling grant in February 2023 to establish an opt-in residential curbside organics collection pilot program that prioritizes environmental justice communities; awards are expected to be announced in Summer 2023. Should the proposal not be awarded, DSS intends to establish a smaller scale pilot program. In preparation, DSS is modifying its waste transfer stations to accept and forward organic material for composting and has

engaged with cities including New York City and Minneapolis to learn more about their programs and best practices.



Ongoing

**Support increased adoption of backyard composting and composting at community garden sites**

A [community garden composting pilot program](#) was established during 2022 - 23 through a partnership between DSS and NeighborSpace as part of the NRDC Food Matters Initiative. Six small-scale community garden sites are now composting limited household food scraps and garden/yard waste. Each garden received a three-bin compost system, tools, and signage, and leaders from each garden received training on how to manage their composting program. Composting operations started in late Spring 2023. The compost produced will be used to enrich the soil at each garden.



In Progress

DSS is currently evaluating a Backyard/Home Composting Program that will provide thousands of free backyard compost bins to residents at distribution events across the city. Residents will receive education on how and why to use the bins to compost their household fruit and vegetable scraps and yard waste. While not all food scraps (such as meat and dairy) are appropriate for backyard composting, it can keep many household organics out of the regular waste stream, eliminating the need to transport to landfills.



In Progress

**Incorporate food donation and food scrap composting into City events to reduce organic waste and provide high-profile educational opportunities**

Chicago recently completed a Food Rescue Assessment and one of its recommendations includes the City of Chicago exploring the implementation of policies that incentivize or mandate food rescue and composting efforts as part of its event/facility permitting requirements. This recommendation is currently being piloted at the Daley Center Farmer’s Market and to date is working well.



In Progress

**Establishing a revenue-sharing partnership with a textile recycling company for collection of clothes, shoes, and other textiles otherwise ending up in landfills**

In 2023, DSS staff surveyed several potential vendors, and engaged Park District staff to learn more about the Park District’s experience with implementation scenarios and associated barriers. DSS continues to explore opportunities to strengthen promotional efforts to increase awareness of existing collection locations.

## STRENGTHENING INTERNAL OPERATIONS

The City of Chicago seeks to improve internal operations related to materials management to increase efficiency across departments and improve waste diversion in the city.



### **Improving high density residential recycling ordinance compliance based on 2020 Chicago Office of the Inspector General report findings and a subsequent update made in March 2023**

Several steps were taken to improve the DSS enforcement of the recycling ordinance including: 1) Reconfiguring electronic ticketing, 2) Improved tracking of inspections and private hauler reporting, and 3) Exploring a software solution to improve the reporting requirements for haulers and buildings to ensure compliance. In March 2023, the OIG recognized progress, while continuing to note that the City does not have a building database that would enable DSS to effectively enforce the Chicago Recycling Ordinance.



### **Invest additional staff and resources to materials management initiatives across departments**

Since Fall 2022, DSS has added three new staff positions to support materials management initiatives, and will be hiring for an additional three new positions in Summer 2023.

To read the complete *2021 City of Chicago Waste Strategy* visit <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/progs/env/2021-waste-strategy.html>