Plan Fort Collins Question of the Week: Q4 - Composting

One of our goals is to help people find more ways to divert waste from the landfill, including biodegradable materials like yard debris and food waste. How should we do this?

Responses submitted via Online Comment Form:

Answer: My friends in Boulder have curbside compost pickup by the city. Is this feasible? Also, where can I find more information about backyard composting? Thank you!

Answer: Building a city owned yard waste facility is re-inventing the wheel, and not needed when there is a perfectly good facility (Hageman's Earth Cycle) up and running. What is needed is curbside pick-up for those who have no means of getting yard waste to any facility. I would expect that most landscapers already use Hageman's for their waste, so it makes sense to concentrate on those who do their own yard work and don't have a truck/trailer. There is a company that recycles food waste, but most probably don't know about it. Perhaps the city could include information about the business in the utility bill inserts. The city does not need to take business away from the private sector, especially in this time of budget shortfall.

Answer: My recommendation, start with the largest supply of materials, the landfill, give them incentives to sort, separate and recycle at the largest level. Though many individuals do paper, aluminum and plastic... it’s really the tip of the "waste" ice berg...and there are several such facilities in operation in the US.

Answer: We lived in Longmont for several years, and, while it's no Fort Collins, one thing they did right which we miss, is waste management. First of all, trash hauling is a city utility rather than being handled by several private companies. Much, much better than what we have here. Every fall the city provides free compostable leaf bags at several locations around the city, and on a pre-arranged schedule households put out leaves and the city collects them. Finally, the city runs a great yard waste collection facility. Residents can bring leaves, grass clippings and branches to be dropped off, and for no charge also collect mulch made from the branches. It's not the nicest mulch, but fine for the base layer which helps reduce water requirements in gardens. Regarding kitchen waste composting, I'm not sure what the answer there is. We have always done our own in our back yard. But obviously this isn't an option for apartment and condo dwellers. Maybe the city could make its first inroad into a waste management utility by providing pickup of kitchen compost as an additional (preferably optional) service, especially for apartments and other types of residential units where backyard composting isn’t practical.
Answer: Food waste is garbage & should continue to be picked up by the garbage truck. Yard waste is unsightly, and can be tree & bush branches, leaves, dead grass and the like. Unless it's mulched or chipped really fine, it should go to the dump where they have facilities to handle waste. I don't think most folks want to be bothered with yard waste after all the time they put in creating it & moving it for pick-up.

Answer: After having lived in Loveland and used their recycle area for yard waste as well as clean wood, I highly recommend a City-owned/operated recycle site. I believe that by issuing permits to FC residents and asking them to present them at the time of drop-off, we can monitor use of site. I do not know if FC is able to use the processed yard waste, but if not the cost may be prohibitive to have it hauled off. It might be possible to work in conjunction with a private firm to bag and sell the composted material. Certainly a subject worth discussion and collection of ideas from residents.

Answer: I think you need a combination of approaches, including those described above. It's important to remember that many people don't have a backyard for composting, or maybe their backyard is too small or unsuitable. It's also important for any recycling effort to make it as simple and accessible as possible. Too much present recycling effort depends upon complicated sorting.

Answer: There are a LOT of towns that now collect yard waste (free) curbside. I would LOVE to see Ft. Collins do this. For half the year more than half my "garbage" could go to a composting site.

Answer: This issue ties in very nicely with the suggestion for community gardens, as well as encouraging residents in general to engage in family gardens. While I will be composting my organic waste at home for my own garden, it would be great if the city of Fort Collins and/or Larimer County could take organic materials from waste pickup or dropoff by residents at designated sites during the year and use it to generate compost. The compost could then be given or sold at a nominal cost to residents for their gardens. It would be especially beneficial if the organic matter were chemical-free to support organic gardening.

Answer: - Incentives for curbside yard waste collection I really like this one. We don't have an easy option now and this would be very convenient. - Build a City-run yard waste drop-off site This would also be a great idea. Can we do both curb side and this? if not I'd chose curb side just like recycling and trash. - Focus on the commercial sector to separate more organic material from the trash (such as landscape maintenance companies, grocery stores, restaurants, etc.) I really think this is a great opportunity to partner with pig farms, worm farms, chicken farms etc.... Restaurants could somehow have incentives for separating the waste. Leachate in landfills is a big concern. If we were to remove the organic kitchen material from our trash, this would be very beneficial. - Explore bio-digester systems that generate energy This would be nice if the pig/chicken partnering didn't work. Probably more expense and need to do a comparison with pros and cons to leachate treatment in standard landfills. This is done with the food waste that gets shipped from Antarctica science stations to Port Hueneme in Southern California. You could contact them for more information. - Your ideas? This will likely not be popular with the amount of controversy the trash districting ended up causing, but here is another idea. From my memory while in ChristChurch New Zealand, they had mandatory solid waste pick up. The solid waste was left on the sidewalk with a form that had check boxes indicating why the solid waste was not collected. The bag I saw had several checks indicating kitchen waste, yard waste and recycling was mixed in with the bag and thus the bag was left for the owners to resort. This would likely not be popular, but I thought it was very effective.
**Answer:** I'm guessing that providing a good, convenient, inexpensive/free way to dispose of electronic items would be very appealing, especially given the high penetration of technology in our community. I volunteer at the Fort Collins Bike Co-op. One of our key goals is to recycle unusable bikes & components to keep them out of the landfill. Anything the city can do - publicity, funding, etc. - would really help us in pursuing that goal.

**Answer:** I have been composting for 30 years in my backyard. It is not complicated. I have a bin for food waste and a bin for yard waste (I grind up leaves and plant debris with my lawnmower to speed decomposition. I let them decompose for about a year and then spread the material around plants and use it as mulch. This is one approach that should be promoted through education.

**Answer:** Thank goodness the City has finally accepted the challenge of addressing THE most pressing issue facing our community! We don't need roads; they only invite delivery vans. We don't need to tackle the festering issue government intrusion upon the private sector; it simply acknowledges governmental dependence upon tax revenues and forestalls the actualization of utopian ideal. The best way to divert waste from landfills would be to close landfills. Duh. Beginning January 1, 2011, all subjects of the Fort Collins Politburo will no longer be allowed to foist their refuse upon society. Any material acquisitions must be fully consumed on site without benefit of sanitary disposal of biological byproduct. Reduce, reuse, recycle to its full and ultimate extent. Consumption is evil and digesting every ounce of materialistic endeavor will lead to a more peaceful and verdant, yet flaccid, society our children can be more proud of if it weren't so selfish to procreate.

**Answer:**
- Provide a municipal composting program that can include both yard waste and food scraps for homes and businesses (coffee shops, etc.). This way not everyone has to be a composting expert to participate.
- Encourage restaurants that offer take-out to use compostable containers. Many do, but not all. (Maybe even consider a Styrofoam ban like they have in California and Washington? It’s awful not only in terms of waste but also health, as it’s toxic when in contact with hot food.)
- Create a program for collecting waste oil from restaurants for creating biodiesel. I also was out of town during the Local Food question week, so here are my comments for local food:
  - Allow people to use mower strips for curbside gardening
  - Coordinate a community fruit tree harvest to contribute fruit to local food banks
  - What about a permanent farmer's market location like they have in Nashville and Seattle?
  - Provide for rooftop gardens on new development
  - Have community gardens for every neighborhood, especially high-density areas.
  - Community gardens could be co-located with parks and/or schools.
  - Encourage schools to have working, learning gardens where kids can learn about nutrition and science, and also can harvest food that can become a part of their meals. Portland and Berkeley have great programs like this. See this link to how Portland incorporated local food into school lunches: [http://www.grist.org/article/seven-cents-to-a-healthier-lunch-portland-schools-serve-up-local-fare/](http://www.grist.org/article/seven-cents-to-a-healthier-lunch-portland-schools-serve-up-local-fare/)

**Answer:** Curbside is definitely preferable to having a drop-off site, because some people won't go that extra step. I think having both is the best balance. As an incentive to participate, it would be great if people who participate in the yard waste composting program could get a free bag of compost in the spring to start their gardens. Also, as part of the local food portion (and related to backyard composting), create policies that allow people to have some animals like chickens and goats (maybe 2-4 chickens per household, 1 goat). This can help provide
compost for yards, provide a local food source, and even help people take care of their grass. Provide classes for people to learn about backyard composting. Also provide information to people about what's appropriate to put in the yard waste bins so that the compost doesn't get contaminated with anything that shouldn't be there. Encourage schools to compost on site as a learning project, preferably in concert with an on-site garden. The same for community gardens throughout town. Definitely have a program for the commercial sector - restaurants, grocery stores, etc. Make it really visible when local businesses participate - some sort of special logo that they are reducing their waste and helping feed the community through the compost program that ties into community gardening and food production. This will be an incentive for businesses to participate since it gives them props for being eco friendly and helping the community, and also help people get informed. It would also be great if regular workplaces (offices) had access to this. No doubt there's plenty of waste generated in the lunchroom that could contribute to this - coffee grounds, lunch bags, etc.
**City of Fort Collins, Colorado**

How should we help people find more ways to divert waste from the landfill, including biodegradable materials like yard debris and food waste? Weigh in on our newest Discussion Board topic: Plan Fort Collins-Composting.

September 16 at 3:06pm · Comment · Like

Kenneth Anton Barker likes this.

Beth Higgins I'd love to compost, but I have so many questions... my dogs, neighbors' cats, small yard... how about a neighborhood-based composting class at the elementary school? I'd pay a few bucks to learn how to do it correctly, and we could get the kids involved.

September 16 at 4:10pm · Like · 21 person

Richard Keller I would agree the composting would be one of the best suggestions. Would the city be willing to provide compost boxes as well as directions on how to create the product? Another solution for yard waste...here in Delaware they sponsor a number of yard waste disposal sites where folks discard of grass and tree clippings while others collect what's been composted. It's been very successful.

September 16 at 6:26pm · Like

Don Owlsley If the city could not provide the compost boxes, perhaps the city could make arrangements to provide them at wholesale?

September 16 at 7:33pm · Like

Mandy Bingham I tried starting a compost with just yard clippings and got a warning from the city to clean it up...it was just to the side of our house and it really was just clippings and they wanted to fine me. The property manager I rented the house from wouldn't allow it either. So start there..

September 16 at 9:12pm · Like

David Monahan Have a weekly pickup of all my compostable waste by Clean Air. Its great because many things are compostable commercially that I can't do in my backyard system. This has reduced my waste stream going to landfill to a single kitchen trash bag weekly for the family.

September 17 at 6:11am · Like

Cassandra Turner I'm going to second Clean Air Compost. My trash/recycling has been cut to every other week with RAM since we started composting with Clean Air. It's the best $21 I spend a month, because I feel good about what we're doing, there's less trash going to the landfill and it's so easy!

September 17 at 6:26am · Like

Karen Johnson Educate the public with "How-to's. We moved into Fort Collins last month & have already built a 3' compose bin using chicken wire, spare 2'x4' and leftover stain to match the deck. We were using a "yard waste sticker" system in Illinois. I don't think we would utilize a weekly pickup of our yard waste BUT we will have to do something when in need.

September 17 at 9:18am · Like

Brent Waugh I agree that education is important. I also like Plan Fort Collins' ideas of an incentive for curbside yard waste collection. Also, if there were a city-run yard waste collection site I might use it...would it also take food waste?

September 17 at 9:42am · Like

Emily Elmore I really like the idea of Commercial composting / specifically restaurants, and having Anaerobic Digester systems Downtown, and close to restaurants. If we're thinking 20 years out, I think this is a fabulous idea... John "Wormman" Anderson is a HUGE fan of said digestion! (Also, does Clean-Air pick up compost for Apartment units around this City?)

8 hours ago · Like

Emily Elmore Ps. I think Education is super important. The Rocky Mountain Sustainable Living Association could be a good group to host Composting (and other related) classes.

8 hours ago · Like
City of Fort Collins, Colorado

One of our goals is to help people find more ways to divert waste from the landfill, including biodegradable materials like yard debris and food waste. How should we do this? (examples below)

- Incentives for curbside yard waste collection
- Build a City-run yard waste drop-off site
- Focus on the commercial sector to separate more organic material from the trash (such as landscape maintenance companies, grocery stores, restaurants, etc.)
- Explore bio-digester systems that generate energy

Share your ideas!

- Andrew Hoelzel: education, education, education. also, keep it simple for people. composting cuts down. 4 locations for yard waste would be convenient. have people and restaurants separate food wastes for soil for the community gardens you are trying to put into place. recycle everything possible and make the process as easy as possible. incorporate the youth and college kids and seniors along with the general population. fly city reps from other cities into FC who have already dealt with this.

- Jordan Beard: 1) Not entirely in line with bio-waste, but I fill my recycling bin every single week. In fact, it's usually full after 3 days. Picking up recycling only every other week does not work, at all. I know it was changed that way to save carbon from the trucks rolling every week but now it's forcing me to throw away recyclable materials.

- 2) Curb side pick up. Not everyone has the time to drop materials off no matter how convenient you make it. A third, probably smaller, bin for bio-waste included in the curb side pickup would work wonders.

- 3) We should absolutely look into bio-waste/energy solutions. There would be nothing better than knowing our compost-able materials could be turned into energy instead of filling up the dump.

Incentives are not needed. We have a thriving, eco-friendly and compassionate community that would love to make this kind of dream a reality. If you can just make it easy enough for them to do a lot of people would get on board.

- Alexis Zanetich Soffler: More places to bring yard waste (and ones you don't have to pay for) for composting. We've lived here for 5 years and take ours to Hageman. Is there even a place for the city? If so, I have not heard of it.

- Francesca Pardo Berger: I compost what I can, but woody trimmings don't do well in my little pile. I don't have a truck and have either had to take yard waste in small batches to Hageman and pay to dump, pay to have someone with a truck come and take it, or cram it in with the other garbage.

If there were a few designated days in the fall and spring for yard waste pickup, I'd definitely use those. I'd also be willing to pay a little more to my regular garbage company if they would take and recycle my compostable material.

- Chuck Cotherman: Hi all, if you have yard waste (leaves and grass clippings, that has not been treated with pesticides) or kitchen waste, Mulberry Community Gardens is interested in taking the material for free. (A donation would be nice since we are a small struggling non-profit) Please contact me to arrange a drop off, chuck@geomart.com Thank you

- Edward Antrobus: I agree with the above posts that there should be a community compost pile. Maybe with a way that fully composted material could be returned to the community.

- Meg Dunn: I’d like to see all of the schools composting. I’ve seen the videos Kinard made and they’re really inspiring. Wish that would happen elsewhere as well.

10 hours ago