

The City of Reading's Sustainability Manager, Bethany Ayers-Fisher, on Curbside Composting

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What is the current plan for curbside composting in Reading? What are the goals of this plan?

Right now, it's a "wish list" item- we are exploring best practices that other cities are implementing and we are looking at our options. City Council passed a "Zero Waste" resolution in 2015, and composting is a viable, identified method of reducing our landfilled waste. Approximately 1/3 of our landfilled trash is food waste- by developing a curbside composting program, we can reduce about 11 tons per year going into the landfill, that's just residential and does not include all our restaurants and grocery stores. Proper composting of this waste could be used to create biodiesel to fuel some of our heavy equipment, used in generators, or heat buildings like The Greenhouse and Pagoda. The solid compost can be sold to our gardeners and nearby farmers. Our goals are to reduce our landfilled waste, operate the program at no additional cost to residents and taxpayers, and reduce our carbon pollution emissions which are contributing to climate change. Some cities are using drop off programs to start transitioning, and that is another option we are looking at.

What impact would this have on The City of Reading?

Residents and included businesses would need to separate their trash from organics. We recognize the need to provide special containers that would reduce odor and animal break-ins. Historically, the City waste management services did collect compostable organic waste separately from landfilled trash. In the early stages of the program, we would have additional trucks on the collection routes, and this is always a concern in our streets. Some cities, like Alexandria, Virginia, who have been collecting organic waste separately for over a decade, only collect landfilled waste and bulky items twice a month now. Whether the program is operated by Public Works or in partnership with a contracted provider, we will need people to collect the organic waste and operate the

digester (for fuel) and composting operations. These are good paying jobs that do not require a college degree. It is a way to reduce operational costs and possibly provide revenue to the city.

Why should people care?

Pollution prevention is always the most cost-effective manner to deal with pollution. Landfilled organic waste (food waste), which is nearly 1/3 of our landfilled waste is bulky and produces methane gas during decomposition. Landfills are typically about 500-600 acres, and last about 20 years. Eliminating food waste from landfills extend their useful life and keeps disposal fees low. Composted food waste and yard waste are very good soil amendments and fertilizers, which reduces synthetic fertilizer use and pollution of our rivers. We recognize the need to make the program easy and convenient, and that the program decisions are made as a community. We also recognize that backyard composting is not feasible for most people, and welcome conversations with our neighbors about designing the program.

Bethany Ayers Fisher, Sustainability Manager, City of Reading