

November 15, 2023

202302409

To: Mayor and Members of City Council

From: Sheryl M.M. Long, City Manager

Subject: Short-Term Upgrades for the Yard Waste Removal Program

Reference Document #202300951

The Climate, Environment & Infrastructure Committee, at its session on March 28, 2023, referred the following item for review and report:

MOTION, submitted by Councilmember Cramerding, WE MOVE that the Administration prepare a report in the next forty-five (45) days that outlines the cost, feasibility, and timeline for solutions to improve the City's yard waste disposal program. Solutions to be considered should include, but not be limited to:

- Amending or updating the current contract with Rumpke to provide for more initiatives as it relates to separated yard waste, including restricting yard waste or compost from being placed in a sanitary landfill, including as an alternative daily cover.
- Educating property owners as to their responsibility under C.M.C. 729-88 to separate yard waste and the issues with commingling yard waste with garbage or recycling.
- Incentives or enforcement mechanisms that can be utilized to encourage property owners to be more conscientious with their commingled waste.
- Any other recommendations to improve the program in the cycle of collections.

Background

The City of Cincinnati is contracted to deliver yard trimmings collected from residents to the Rumpke Sanitary Landfill in Colerain Township. The City provides curbside yard waste collection bi-weekly from April to January to respective solid waste customers. The current agreement for yard waste disposal with Rumpke has an initial term that expired at the end of February 2023, with three one-year renewal periods extending as late as February 2026. Rumpke currently meets requirements for collecting, separating, and disposing of yard trimmings. Rumpke uses the City's curbside collected yard waste as daily cover in the sanitary landfill which is helpful in odor control at the facility. Factors such as contamination level and aftermarket value for materials such as compost or mulch limit how Rumpke can utilize the City's curbside collected yard trimmings.

Due to these factors, an amendment or change to the current contract may result in changes to the cost structure of providing yard trimming disposal services to the City.

Local Vendors

The City's options for alternative approaches to curbside collection of yard trimmings are limited by (1) an under-developed pool of local vendors with sufficient capacity to service the entire city, and (2) a local market to buy and sell the composted material with current rates of contamination.

Several other Hamilton County municipalities have curbside collection including the cities of Norwood, Montgomery, and Woodlawn. All curbside yard waste collection from these communities is utilized by Rumpke as alternative daily cover in the sanitary landfill.

Rumpke also provides curbside yard trimmings collection for the City of Columbus. This yard waste is taken to a third-party with an anaerobic digester that can biodegrade materials without oxygen or the release of gases into the air. The administration is unaware of a similar third-party in this region, however, is aware of multiple regional anaerobic digesters currently in various stages of site development. Siting and permitting for anaerobic digesters is complex, and the timing for these digesters to enter operation is unknown.

Drop-off Sites

Hamilton County has several drop-off locations (outside of City limits) for residents to dispose of yard waste. Yard waste contamination is greatly reduced at drop-off sites when compared to curbside collection because of monitoring at the location.

These drop-off sites are available to all city and Hamilton County residents, although many Cincinnati residents are unaware of the locations. Hamilton County drop-off locations include Oakdale Elementary in Green Township, Rumpke Landfill in Colerain Township, and Bzak Landscaping in Anderson Township. These sites have dedicated hours of operation and are staffed and monitored. All material collected that meets program guidelines is composted by local companies.

Campaigns to promote and educate the public on the availability of these drop-off sites may increase diversion of organic matter from the landfill. Additional drop-off locations strategically placed may also increase diversion. The Administration is actively working with community partners to explore the potential utilization of yard trimmings for local compost creation and additional drop-off sites.

Enforcement & Incentives

The City Municipal Code (C.M.C. 729-88) states "Yard waste materials from a dwelling shall not be co-mingled with other waste if the city provides separate yard waste collection." Enforcement of this code could range from citations for commingling yard waste with garbage or recycling to not collecting improperly prepared yard waste. Monitoring how citizens dispose of waste in bags and carts adds inefficiency if done during collection. Resources for dedicated staff to issue citations for improperly prepared yard trimmings would be needed for additional enforcement. The result could have unintended consequences such as increasing dumping and/or commingling into regular trash collection.

The Administration has not seen examples of incentives to encourage participation in yard trimming collection programs. However, some municipalities implement a "volume-based

pricing” or “pay-as-you-throw” model to reflect the true cost of waste generation and incentivize recycling and composting practices at the household level.

Near-term Next Steps – Solicitation for Solutions

As noted above, the City has recently issued a Request for Proposals (RFP RFP019_2024) to solicit yard trimming collection solutions. The RFP is hoped to provide details on the current local market options available, including collection, processing, and cost information. The Administration believes that this next step will help to understand the marketplace and cost impact for meeting the desired outcomes and environmental goals of the motion. The RFP is open for responses until December 28, 2023.

cc: Virginia Tallent, Assistant City Manager
Oliver Kroner, Director, Office of Environment & Sustainability
Jerry L. Wilkerson, Jr., Director, Department of Public Services