



Office of the City Manager

INFORMATION CALENDAR

March 8, 2011

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From:  Phil Kamlarz, City Manager

Submitted by: Andrew Clough, Acting Director, Public Works

Subject: Residential Recycling Cart Program Overview

INTRODUCTION

This report is an overview of the process and early results of our recently completed residential cart program. The City provided new recycling carts and information to the 1-9 unit residential properties serviced by our contractor, the Ecology Center. The new recycling cart program plan and implementation proved to be an example of successful collaboration among multiple contractors and City departments. The program has resulted in safer collection by reducing bending and lifting, and, with the larger capacity of the carts over the old tubs, there's a greater amount, and more efficient collection of better sorted recyclables at each stop. Comparing December 2009 to December 2010 the increase is 66% for bottles and cans, and 11% for paper and cardboard.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

The Ecology Center has been collecting residential recycling in small curbside tubs for over two decades. This system had numerous disadvantages compared to the cart-based programs that most cities have adopted. The tubs contributed to blown away litter, and reduced material quality due to exposure to the weather. They were also very easy to poach from, and required repeated lifting of tubs for a relatively small amount of recyclables. The Ecology Center split body trucks are designed to handle split carts and keep paper materials separate from bottles and cans. Now that the carts are in use, we see a marked improvement in the tonnage, separation and quality of our residential recyclables. While the market value of these materials hasn't changed, the separation has improved sorting efficiency at the Community Conservation Center, especially as the carts keep papers dry during the winter months. Staff will monitor collection rates to determine the long term impact of the split carts.

BACKGROUND

Because residential properties with 10 or more units already have cart-based recycling service provided by the City, this new program only addressed residential properties with 1-9 units, which are serviced by the Ecology Center. During planning discussions, the decision was for single-family homes and duplexes to receive 1 split cart per unit,

and 3-9 unit buildings would receive and share a pair of standard carts: 1 for papers and 1 for bottles and cans. In June 29, 2010 the City Council approved a contract with Arata Equipment Company, and a \$115,000 contract amendment for the Ecology Center, which added the operational aspects of providing cart service, and outreach necessary to promote the new program. Distribution of the new carts took place during October and November: 21,700 split carts, and 6,280 standard carts were delivered to 24,840 properties, serving 36,840 residential units.

As part of the delivery process, the City's IT Department provided necessary parcel data to determine how many carts to order and deliver, based on the number of units in each residential building. Solid Waste and Parks, Recreation & Waterfront staff coordinated efforts to provide a secure staging and assembly area for the carts at the Marina.

The outreach materials directed residents to call The Ecology Center for problems or questions and, from October to December, Ecology Center staff reported 1,689 calls and emails, less than 4.6% of the residential units in the program. The City's 311 Call Center had basic program information to answer questions, but in most cases 311 operators referred calls to the Ecology Center. While many callers had simple questions, like when could they expect their cart, most of the calls requiring action were requests for cart exchanges at multi-unit buildings, usually where a split or standard cart was more suited to the building's layout than what had been delivered. Problems and exchanges were resolved with assistance from City staff.

The City anticipated that the new split-cart program would provide an easy way for residents to divert more of the recyclable materials that they generate, and from the first months of implementation, the program exceeded expectations. In addition to seasonal factors (holiday packaging and related materials), the increased tons of recyclables can be attributed to the convenience of a clearly marked system and larger capacity of the carts for recyclables. Staff also believes there's a reduction in poaching activity since the carts were delivered. In any case, the new carts are helping residents recycle more effectively, and helping the City reach its waste diversion goals.

POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

None

FISCAL IMPACTS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

None

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