



**To:** Zero Waste Advisory Commission

**From:** Ken Snipes, Director  
Austin Resource Recovery

**Date:** February 19, 2020

**Subject:** Director's Monthly Report to the Zero Waste Advisory Commission

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### **Climate Action Plan Update**

The Office of Sustainability is updating Austin's Community Climate Plan. The goal of this update is to identify actions that local government, businesses, and community members can undertake in the next 10 years that will help Austin reach its goal of reducing as many global warming emissions as created by 2050.

City staff, including representatives from Austin Resource Recovery, will host five workshops that coincide with the five advisory groups working on the Climate Plan Update. The "Climate Change and Consumption Community Workshop" will have discussion related to Austin's zero waste efforts.

- *Transportation Electrification Community Workshop*; February 4th from 5:30-8pm at Austin Energy Town Lake Center - Assembly Room 130
- *Sustainable Buildings Community Workshop*; February 8th from 2-4:30pm at Huston-Tillotson University - Dickey-Lawless Science Building
- *Natural Systems Community Workshop*; February 11th from 5:30-8pm at the Carver Library Auditorium
- *Transportation and Land Use Community Workshop*; February 13th from 5:30-8pm at the Carver Library Auditorium
- *Climate Change and Consumption Community Workshop*; February 22nd from 10:30-1pm Location has not been determined

More information at: [austintexas.gov/climateplan](http://austintexas.gov/climateplan)

### **Curbside Textile Recycling Methods**

In regards to questions raised at the previous ZWAC meeting, we are providing the following clarification with regards to the curbside textile program:

*The proposed program is an on-call collection program that accepts textiles and other gently used household goods.* The term "gently used" applies to "household goods" other than textiles, as the contract allows for donations of other materials as well. The description has been modified to read: *The proposed program is an on-call collection program that accepts textiles and other household goods.*

For clarity, section 3.1 of the contract states:

*All marketing shall state that Textiles are acceptable in any condition (except wet or infested materials) for collection and shall encourage residents to use the program to recycle damaged, torn, or stained Textiles.*

Regarding the process for recycling textiles, once material is collected through the curbside collection program, it is sent to one of the retail thrift stores throughout Central Texas. If the material doesn't sell within approximately four weeks, it will then go to one of two outlet centers within Austin and given a chance to sell by the pound. If the material doesn't sell in the thrift stores or outlets, it is then sorted, baled and sold as a commodity.

### **Compostable Food Service Containers**

As access to composting services increases, there has been an increase in food service containers marketed as compostable. The variety of composition has posed challenges for organics recyclers and segmentation in materials accepted by haulers and processors. Solutions to this issue are complex and tied to public education and product stewardship.

The City of Austin provides education to thousands of food permitted businesses and customers each year that directly references the prohibition of "take out boxes with wax or plastic lining." Education is provided via social media, presentations, onsite meetings, and telephone conversations. Staff encourages containers that can be reused, recycled, or composted within local systems when speaking with food permitted businesses. Regional haulers and processors also provide similar education resources.

Municipal compostable food service policies have typically been housed with single use serviceware prohibitions that require food serviceware to be recyclable, reusable, or compostable. While these policies do not directly address items such as plastic lined cardboard boxes, these items could be deemed as non-compostable within local systems. Notable food serviceware bans include Seattle and San Francisco.

Due to the scale of the value chain of items such as food containers; much of the work to improve the design and stewardship of compostable food containers is being undertaken at the state or federal level. Here are some examples of organizations working to create more consistency in labeling and standardization of products:

- The Sustainable Packaging Coalition ([sustainablepackaging.org](http://sustainablepackaging.org)) works to develop tools, applications, and services that can help companies take action toward packaging sustainability. Ongoing collaborations include the "Compostable Packaging Collaborative" in which members from across the value chain discuss issues and share resources.
- The National Stewardship Action Council ([nsaction.us](http://nsaction.us)) is a national advocate of product stewardship and works to develop state and federal policy related to the circular economy.
- The State of Texas Alliance for Recycling [STAR] ([recyclingstar.org](http://recyclingstar.org)) Product Stewardship Council works to develop State programs or policy related to product stewardship.

### **Clean Community Fee**

The City of Austin's Clean Community Fee was established by ordinance to support cleanup and sanitation services that yield communitywide benefits. While only curbside collections customers pay Austin Resource Recovery's Base Customer and Trash Cart Fees, **every residence and commercial property is billed a monthly Clean Community Fee**. Commercial properties pay more due to additional services provided by the Department. As of December 2019, more than 407,000 residences and 25,000 commercial properties pay a monthly Clean Community Fee.

### **Impact on City Services and Sanitation Challenges**

Clean Community Fees make up about 26% of ARR's revenue and solely fund the following services:

- Litter Control in public areas and right-of-ways (including waste and litter removal in illegal dumpsite cleanups, homeless encampment cleanups, and other citywide litter abatement activities)

- Street Sweeping
- Dead Animal Collection
- ARR's Recycling & Reuse Drop-Off Center (RRDOC)
- Landfill Closure and post-closure requirements
- Zero Waste Strategic Design & Development
- Brownfields Remediation

Additionally, **Clean Community Fees collected from commercial properties constitute the sole funding for ARR's Business Outreach services** — including administration of the Universal Recycling Ordinance (URO) and other business-related Zero Waste programs. **Clean Community Fees collected from residential properties fund Household Hazardous Waste Drop-Off** at RRDOC for residential customers.

### **Strategic Outcomes and Sustainability of Rates**

Based on a recent affordability study\* of 16 Texas benchmark cities, **only Austin provided all of the benchmark requirements to its residents and community.** The study noted that, while “total monthly fees appear higher” than in 3/4 of benchmarked cities, Austin “**provides many additional services, funded by the Clean Community Fee**, which are either not provided by benchmark cities, or [are] funded by other sources or city departments.” The study adds that, **as a percentage of average annual income, ARR's fees compare more favorably with benchmarked cities** than in direct cost comparison. Austin has the most ambitious recycling goals among benchmark cities, and currently holds the highest recycling rate at 38%.

The level of funding provided by the Clean Community Fee has met the expense requirements of the services it supports. As directed by City Council during the last budget cycle, the Department is currently developing a proposal to add environmental cleanup services, including increased litter abatement citywide and enhanced street sweeping services. As Austin grows and homeless encampment cleanups continue to expand beyond highway underpasses to City parkland, the Department will be challenged to keep up with increasing demand while maintaining household affordability.

### **Multifamily Compost Pilot Update**

Staff began recruiting properties to participate in the multifamily composting pilot in January 2020 with an application deadline of February 1. As of the February 1 deadline, three properties had applied, resulting in a deadline extension to February 14. As of February 7, six properties have committed to participating in the pilot. These six properties represent four council districts: 9, 4, 3, and 7 and include a mix of apartments and condominiums. Staff is in regular communication with eighteen property managers who have expressed interest in participating, but have been unable to commit to applying.