

City of Ann Arbor Source-Separated Single-Stream Recycling Program Proposal

1. What is source-separated single-stream recycling? How is it different than the city's current two-sort recycling program—where we place mixed papers into one recycling bin and mixed containers in another recycling bin—for collection, processing, and shipping to recycled markets? *A source-separated, single-stream recycling program combines the mixed papers and containers into one collection bin. This provides convenience to the consumer—just one bin to handle—and creates efficiency for storage and hauling in the recycling collection trucks.*
2. Does a single-stream recycling program mean that the city would take ALL trash and sort the recyclables from garbage? *No, the city is maintaining a source-separated recycling program. Residents, schools and businesses will need to choose to place recyclables into ONE recycling bin and place nonrecyclables in a trash bin (and compostables third cart or paper bag during the curbside collection season, April through November).*
3. Will there be more materials accepted to recycle? *Yes! As part of the upgrade of the city's recycling plant, the Materials Recycling Facility (MRF), the capacity for sorting and storing more types of items will be expanded. **Most notably the city is proposing to add and recycle all clean plastic bottles and household rigid containers marked #1, #2, #4, #5, #6, and #7. Bulky plastic HDPE #2 items such as buckets, crates, trays, and many toys will be accepted. Only plastics marked with a #3 (PVC), polystyrene foam (aka Styrofoam™), and plastic bags will not be included.** The city will continue to accept and recycle: glass bottles and food containers; tin/steel cans; aluminum cans, foil, and trays; metal scrap (such as pots and pans up to 1 square foot and 20 pounds/piece); milk cartons and juice boxes; newspapers; magazines; corrugated cardboard (including pizza boxes free of food); paper bags; junk mail; office paper; boxboard (e.g., flattened cereal boxes); telephone books; and gift wrapping paper.*
4. Why not take PVC, Styrofoam™, or plastic bags? *Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic does not have dependable markets for recycling and the PVC material is a serious contaminant for all other plastic recycling markets. Just one #3 bottle will contaminate an entire bale of #1 plastic water bottles! Both plastic foam and plastic bags create expensive havoc at recycling plants—Styrofoam™ crumbles into pieces and will static-cling to other materials—including papers—and then contaminate these items for recycling. Plastic bags get caught in machine gears throughout the MRF sorting lines and require shutdowns throughout the day to manually cut out the bags from the machinery. To address these items and facilitate recycling, the city will be promoting locations that accept foam and bags, such as the Drop-Off Station and promote waste-reduction options, such as reusing bags.*
5. Will the additional plastics accepted in the Ann Arbor single-stream plant be actually recycled and not landfilled or shipped overseas for unknown purposes? *The city's MRF operator, FCR, has been domestically recycling additional plastic types from several of their other plants. The plastics marketplace has improved recently and the city is committed to recycling all the items identified under the program. The inclusion of the larger "mixed rigid plastics" is especially exciting given the large quantity of plastic pails, kitty-litter buckets, and toys that are in the waste stream. The exclusion of #3 plastics, foam, and plastic bags underscores the city's commitment to recycle all the materials on the city's acceptance list. It would be easier to simply accept all household rigid plastics marked #1-7 and trash the #3s, but that approach would not involve the consumer in understanding and being a partner in the recycling fate of collected materials.*
6. What is the anticipated timing for a source-separated recycling program to be available in Ann Arbor, if approved by City Council? *If the concept is approved in November, 2009, the orders*

for equipment upgrades to the city's MRF and initial recycling trucks will be placed. Depending on the delivery time, the new system could be online by July 2010. If this direction is approved, the public will be kept updated about when the transition would take place.

7. Will new recycling bins be included? *A source-separated single-stream recycling program works most efficiently by using a cart to hold recyclables. Carts—teamed with automated arms on collection trucks—have been used to boost collection efficiency with the A2 Trash Carts and with the city's optional compost carts. If approved, the city will select a cart manufacturer to distribute recycling carts at no extra cost throughout the city around mid-2010 in conjunction with an educational single-stream recycling startup program. In addition, two-sort recycling carts have been used since 1991 at many multi-family and business locations. Most of these original carts are reaching the end of their serviceable life and are due for replacement. However, those newer recycling carts in good shape will be given new signage and retained for reuse.*
8. Is Ann Arbor considering partnering with RecycleBank to provide recycling tracking information to consumers and a green rewards program, similar to Rochester Hills and Garden City in Michigan? *The city is in discussion with RecycleBank regarding a possible partnership.*
9. My business location has a recycling dumpster for paper and cardboard, and several containers recycling carts. Once single-stream recycling is provided, does that mean we can put our containers into the paper recycling dumpster and not need to use the container carts? *Yes! The combination of papers and containers will help streamline the collection, transfer from inside the building to the storage area, and pickup from the city's largest location.*
10. One of the early concerns with the first single-stream recycling plants in the 1990s was that co-collection paper with glass creates contamination for paper mills. How has that concern been addressed? *Again from RRSI – The same companies that make single-stream equipment also supply equipment to the paper companies. In simple terms, they are matching the “feedstock” processing needs of the paper industry with high quality processing equipment both at the plant and at the MRF. The paper companies have very tight “specifications” for the paper they buy and single-stream MRFs are expected to meet those specifications just like any other supplier. Millions of tons of paper sourced from single-stream MRFs are purchased by the paper industry every year – and that number is increasing.*
11. I was surprised to see that Ann Arbor's glass is not sent to glass plants, but is used as a replacement for gravel in road building. And these roads are located at landfills! What's going on? *The regional glass markets dried up years ago, with glass losing market share to plastic containers. Glass factories currently have all the broken glass (cullet) they need for manufacturing new glass containers and have not been buying—or even accepting for free—glass from customers outside their immediate community. Many recycling plants have dropped glass entirely from their recycling program. Ann Arbor is in a holding pattern for collecting glass and is hopeful that over time new higher-level markets for used glass will develop.*
12. Many countries with high recycling participation already—such as northern Europe and Japan—do not use single stream recycling programs. If they are not moving in this direction, why should Ann Arbor/USA consider it? *For this response, the city turned to a locally-based, international recycling consulting company, RRSI (at www.recycle.com) for comments: European countries are also transitioning to single-stream at a similar pace as the US. This transition is taking place at different rates in different parts of Europe. In fact, some of the leading single stream equipment systems are European (see Bollegraef <http://www.bollegraef.com>). Many German communities invested much more in their recycling facilities years ago for a wider range of materials and developed a series of drop-off locations for source-separated materials. German recycling programs are slowly being adapted to single-stream as new trucks are purchased and MRFs upgraded. In Japan there is a wide discrepancy of recycling programs in different areas*

throughout the country: curbside collection of waste and recyclables is much less common (given that communities are much higher density) and many Japanese cities require citizens to take their materials to trash/recycling depots where material is asked to be sorted into burnables (where a lot of paper goes) along with categories of recyclables.

13. Does single-stream collection impact the number of employees employed to sort the recycling once it reaches the MRF facility? How about the city's contracted recycling collector, Recycle Ann Arbor (RAA)? *The MRF is owned by the city and contracted to a recycling company, FCR, to operate. FCR has indicated that employment in the company will be similar to current levels. Similarly RAA has a multi-year performance-based contract with the city and does not expect staffing changes. The savings in a single-stream recycling collection program comes from collecting increased tonnages of a wider range of materials and processing them more efficiently.*
14. Does Ann Arbor need a program to increase recycling? We are already cutting our trash in half with residential recycling and composting waste diversion efforts. *Ann Arbor's diversion rate is at an annual 400 lbs per household average rate. Similar single-stream recycling communities can achieve 800 to 1,000 lbs/year per household diversion rate. The extra convenience of an easier recycling program will help increase participation from households, and create a system that is easy to use from multi-family locations and the commercial sector.*

Information on the city's recycling program and single-stream recycling is posted online at www.a2gov.org/recycle. Please direct questions to recycle@a2gov.org.