



## ***Solid Waste: Residential Collection Fees and Options***

### **November 2024 Study Pages**

Hamilton County ReSource (formerly Hamilton County Recycling and Solid Waste District) has a newly approved 15-year Solid Waste Plan, as required by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. A solid waste plan is a guidance document that a local solid waste district uses to implement programs and initiatives to continually improve recycling and waste reduction within its jurisdiction. [Hamilton County Solid Waste Management Plan Update 2024-2038<sup>1</sup>](#)

These Study Pages will focus on residential waste collection and alternative systems for paying the cost of collection and disposal. Should trash collection be a free public service? Are there ways to incentivize waste reduction through alternative fee systems? In 2020, Hamilton County generated 2,404,520 tons of waste material. Waste generation is defined as the sum of tons landfilled, tons recycled, and tons composted. Of the total amount of waste generated, the commercial sector contributes 47%, the industrial sector 39%, and the residential sector 14%. Of the total amount of waste generated, 57 percent was diverted from landfills through recycling, composting, reuse, and food recovery.

Like recycling collection, the waste collection system in Hamilton County is predominately serviced by the private sector. Of the 48 political jurisdictions within Hamilton County:

- 4 provide their own waste collection (Cheviot, Cincinnati, Indian Hill, and St. Bernard).
- 36 contract with the private sector for waste collection.
- 8 are subscription-based.

In the region, monthly fees for private trash collection vary<sup>2</sup>.

\$21.81 Monroe	\$17.17 Wilmington
\$21.50 Forest Park	\$16.81 Middletown
\$21.48 Lebanon	\$14.89 Fairfield
\$19.17 Hamilton	\$14.75 Harrison
\$17.97 Mason	\$13.95 Williamsburg

### **Cincinnati**

Cincinnati City Council spends \$10 per month per household to collect and dispose of trash. The service is provided free to residents, with no limits on disposal. The city trash collection program costs \$12.5 million annually. The Department of Public Services provides

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<sup>1</sup> Although these pages focus on Hamilton County, Warren County also approved a new Solid Waste Plan in 2024. <https://co.warren.oh.us/Solidwaste/GenInfo/MP.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Cincinnati Futures Commission, p. 54

weekly solid waste collection, biweekly yard waste collection from April to January, and scheduled bulk item collection for residential properties up to four units. Commercial and residential properties larger than four units are responsible for contracting with a private entity for collection services at their own expense. The City outsources recycling to Rumpke. Several groups have proposed changes that would involve charging Cincinnati residents for trash collection.

### **Pay-As-You-Throw Environmental Proposal**

A Pay-As-You-Throw program, often called a Smart Trash program, can incentivize waste reduction, increase recycling, and increase household awareness of trash generation. Many cities charge residents for trash based on the quantity of trash they generate. It is a multi-tier fee structure based on the trash cart size utilized: 24, 32, 64, and 96 gallons. The lower the trash cart size, the lower the monthly service fee. There are more than 8,700 cities in the U.S. that offer this type of billing structure for trash collection.

It is argued that some residents abuse the current free system, throwing away usable items that should go to Goodwill and even hauling trash in from the suburbs (where residents pay for trash collection) so they can set it at the curb and have the city take it for free. A Smart Trash billing system could incentivize recycling and waste reduction since residents pay less if they recycle and generate less trash. It is considered fairer because residents would pay for their level of service and not their neighbors' wastefulness.

A local group is currently organizing a team of volunteers to work toward a Smart Trash program for Cincinnati. Want to be part of it? Contact Larry Falkin at [L Falkin7@gmail.com](mailto:L Falkin7@gmail.com) or Bob Gedert at [robert.gedert@gmail.com](mailto:robert.gedert@gmail.com).

### **Futures Commission**

After over a year of work, the Cincinnati Futures Commission made its recommendations earlier this year on the City's long-term financial health.<sup>3</sup> The Commission, composed primarily of business leaders, made numerous recommendations, one of which was to charge residents for trash collection.

The Commission proposed its recommendation as a way to raise revenue for the City to fund the waste collection services of the Department of Public Services and to diversify revenue sources. It evaluated both Pay-As-You-Throw systems and flat fee billing. It recommended a flat fee system with a discounted rate for low-income households.

*The Futures Commission is recommending a flat fee model, in part, because it is significantly simpler to implement. Under a Pay As You Throw (PAYT) fee structure, the City would need to invest up front in new garbage collection cans of various sizes, because under this model, residents pay a variable fee based on the size and number of cans they need for trash collection. However, the Futures Commission believes there is*

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[https://cincinnati-futurescommission.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/cincinnati-futurescommissionreport\\_webversion.pdf](https://cincinnati-futurescommission.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/cincinnati-futurescommissionreport_webversion.pdf)

*benefit to a Pay As You Throw (PAYT) model, and if the City could identify grant or other funding streams to defray the cost, it might be a feasible approach to consider.*<sup>4</sup>

The recommendation was for a fixed monthly fee of approximately \$15.30 per household and \$7.60 for low-income households. They pointed to three peer cities charging a flat curbside collection fee, with an average monthly fee of \$12.42 (Raleigh – \$14.50; St. Louis – \$14.00; Cleveland – \$8.75).

A Cincinnati Charter amendment approved in 2011 specifically bans a trash fee from being implemented, so any action to implement a fee would require an amendment to the Charter and a vote of the citizens.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. How do you dispose of trash? Do you have curbside pickup? Do you pay for it?
2. How do you recycle and compost? Curbside pickup? Where do you take things for recycling? (Share ideas!)
3. What do you think of the Pay-As-You-Throw system? Would it be an incentive to reduce waste, if you paid based on how much is thrown away? What if the difference was \$5.00 a month, would that be enough to make a difference?
4. How likely is it that Cincinnati voters would pass a charter amendment instituting a fee for trash pickup as recommended by the Futures Commission? What circumstances or arguments would make it possible?
5. What personal habits would need to change to reduce the amount of waste households generate? Share waste reduction ideas (not recycling after the waste is created, but preventing a material from becoming waste in the first place).

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid p.54