

12.3.2018

18-1458 - Memo on Denver Recycling

To
City Councilmembers

From
Jonathan Griffin,
Legislative Analyst

CC

Re
Denver Recycling

Denver Recycling

I was asked to provide background on Denver's recycling programs and to look at what other cities do regarding the issue.

Denver's Current Recycling Programs

Denver's Department of Public Works manages recycling programs for authorized residences. [Authorized residences](#) are "1. Single family units, or; 2. Multiple dwellings designed for and occupied as seven units or less; and; 3. Townhomes or row homes not more than two stories in height above ground level with exclusive entries for each unit." Recycling bins will be provided to every authorized residence [this month](#), but prior to this, individuals had to sign up for recycling service to receive a bin. [Multi-family units with over 7 units](#) and [commercial businesses](#) must privately contract for recycling services.

2016 Report

A 2016 report entitled "[Recycling: A Missed Opportunity to Make Denver More Sustainable](#)" pointed out many factors that have contributed to Denver's low recycling rate. The report was published by Colorado Public Interest Research Group and Eco-Cycle. It pointed out that Denver was recycling 18% of its waste, putting it among the lowest in the front range, and below cities such as [Boulder \(54%\), Fort Collins \(32%\), and Longmont \(31%\)](#). In comparison to peer cities outside of Colorado, Denver's recycling rate was below Seattle (64%), Austin (42%), and Salt Lake City (38%). The report noted that the lack of business and MFU recycling, along with the city's trash rate system, were the main reasons Denver's recycling lagged behind other cities.

Changes Since the Report

Denver is not alone in its struggles with recycling, as the State of Colorado [reported](#) a 2017 recycling rate of 12%. In 2017, the Colorado Solid and Hazardous Waste Commission voted to set [statewide diversion rate goals](#), defining diversion as "recycling, composting, and anaerobic digestion." The state goal is to have a 28% diversion rate by 2021.

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Recycling Practices in Other Cities

Seattle

Seattle [requires](#) “apartments, condominiums, co-ops, fraternities, sororities and house boats” to provide recycling services, along with single-family homes and commercial businesses. [The city allowed for a three-year phase-in](#) to properly provide owners with notice and to educate them on recycling services and penalties for non-compliance. In 2011 (and revised in 2013), Seattle Public Utilities produced a [“Solid Waste Management Plan”](#) to provide guidance to lawmakers on how to stay in compliance with state laws and to provide recommendations to improve their recycling efforts.

Boulder

In 1994, Boulder citizens approved a ballot initiative that charges a tax on residential and commercial waste. Commonly known as the [“Trash Tax,”](#) it currently charges \$3.50 per month for households and \$0.85 per cubic yard of trash for businesses and MFUs that use centralized dumpsters. The money generated from the tax has allowed Boulder to implement many strategies to encourage recycling, such as a switch to single-stream recycling and the purchase of land to house recycling offices and facilities. In 2015, Boulder enacted the [“Universal Zero Waste Ordinance”](#) that expanded citywide recycling and composting services by requiring all homeowners to subscribe to wastehauling services, all property managers to provide adequate trash, recycling, and composting services and all businesses to separate recyclables and compostables from their trash, among other requirements. The ordinance is part of Boulder’s [Zero Waste Action Plan](#) to divert 85% of their waste by 2025.

San Francisco

In 2009, San Francisco passed a [mandatory recycling and composting ordinance](#). The ordinance applied to all residences, commercial properties, and multi-family properties. The city provided all customers with [three color-coded canisters](#) for trash, recyclables, and compost. The city also incentivized recycling and composting by charging the same rate (\$6.73) for 32 gallons of recycling or composting as it does for 16 gallons of trash. By incentivizing recycling and composting, one [large business park](#) saved \$24,000-a-year and two [large hotels](#) saved roughly \$100,000 each.