

What We Heard Report: Multi-unit Mandatory Waste Sorting Program

Phase Two

April 2021

SHARE YOUR VOICE
SHAPE OUR CITY

Edmonton

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What We Heard:

Multi-unit Mandatory Waste Sorting Program

Public Engagement – Phase Two

Project Overview

Edmonton's [25-year Waste Strategy](#) sets the City of Edmonton on a path towards an ambitious goal of diverting 90 percent of waste from landfill. One of the initiatives intended to contribute to the goal is the implementation of a mandatory three-stream waste separation program for the multi-unit residential sector.

The City is in the process of developing a Multi-unit Mandatory Waste Sorting Program for multi-unit residences with communal collection. Multi-unit properties refers to apartment and condo buildings including four-story walk-ups, highrise apartments, townhomes and detached or semi-detached condominiums, where residents may rent or own their units. The program will apply to any multi-unit property with communal waste collection containers where waste containers are shared between residents (i.e. multi-unit properties not receiving curbside collection). Residents

will be required to sort their waste into three streams for waste collection: food scraps, recycling and garbage. To inform the design of a three-stream waste collection program, the City of Edmonton conducted research consisting of a literature review, jurisdictional scan and discussions with municipalities and industry experts. This research, along with two phases of public engagement inform the business case for the implementation of this program that will be presented to City Council in mid-2021, with implementation targeted to begin in 2023.

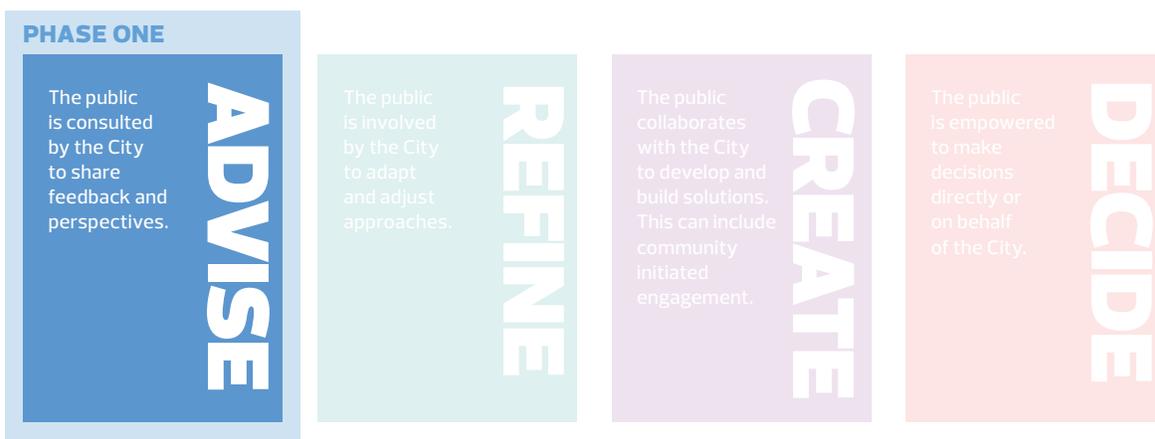
Public Engagement Overview

Engagement was conducted in two stages with residents, managers and service providers throughout Edmonton. The purpose was to determine preferred options and potential solutions to provide the three-stream waste collection program to all multi-unit residential properties with communal collection.

For the purpose of these engagements, managers include property managers, condo board members and developers. Service providers include waste haulers and processors.

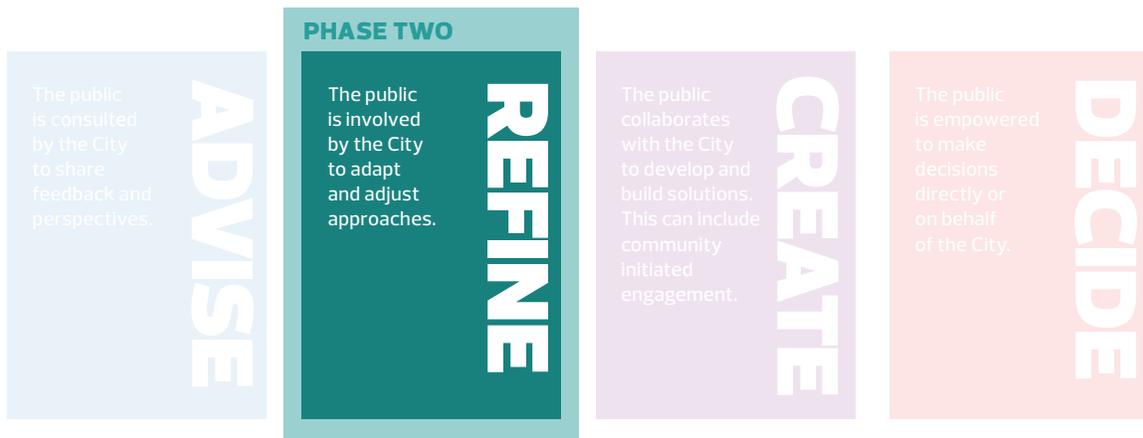
Phase One of engagement was held from September – October 2020 and was designed to learn about resident and stakeholder needs, barriers and potential solutions for separating waste. Stakeholders were asked to participate in the engagement process in an **Advise** capacity along the City of Edmonton's Public Engagement Spectrum, in order to provide feedback on the development of this program.

Managers and service providers were invited to use an Engaged Edmonton page to learn about the five topic areas of the program (program rollout, collection containers, regulatory requirements and incentives, education and outreach, and program success measurements) and discuss these topics with other stakeholders. Online workshops were also held to provide managers and service providers with an opportunity to learn more about the program, ask the project team questions and collaborate in breakout sessions. A total of 67 managers and service providers participated in three workshops to discuss the five topic areas.



Residents living in multi-unit buildings with communal collection were also engaged in Phase One. A total of 52 multi-unit residents participated in one of eight online focus groups to discuss their perspectives on barriers and potential solutions for separating their waste. Ten phone interviews were also conducted with multi-unit residents who had previous experience sorting food scraps in other jurisdictions. The *Phase One What We Heard Report* documents the first phase of engagement for the Multi-unit Mandatory Waste Sorting Program in detail. An *Executive Summary What We Heard Report* was also developed to provide a brief overview of both phases of engagement.

Phase Two of engagement was held in February 2021. This *What We Heard Report* documents the input that was received in Phase Two. Residents and stakeholders participated in the engagement process in a **Refine** capacity along the City of Edmonton's Public Engagement Spectrum, where participants were provided with more information about potential options of this program and asked to provide feedback on how those options would work for multi-unit properties in Edmonton. The engagement results are being used alongside other criteria to weigh each program alternative and decide on the program recommendations to be presented to City Council in mid-2021.



How We Collected Input

For Phase Two of engagement, property managers and condo board members were asked to complete a survey. Engaged Edmonton, the City of Edmonton's official online public engagement space, was also used to gather input from managers, service providers, developers and other stakeholders through a forum for participants to engage in discussion with other stakeholders, as well as a question and answer tool that enabled site users to ask the project team questions. A separate survey was developed to reach Edmonton residents living in multi-unit properties.

PHASE TWO ENGAGEMENT TACTICS

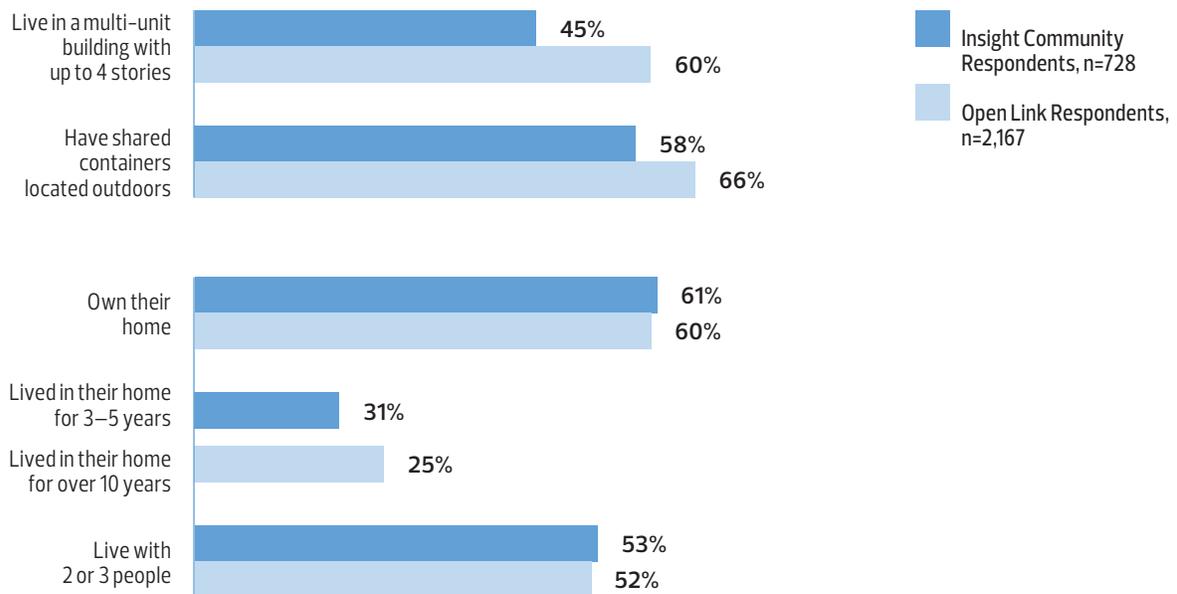
Engagement Tactics	Stakeholders
Resident Survey	Residents
Manager Survey	Managers (Property Managers and Condo Board Members)
Engaged Edmonton Page	Managers, Service Providers, Developers, and other stakeholders



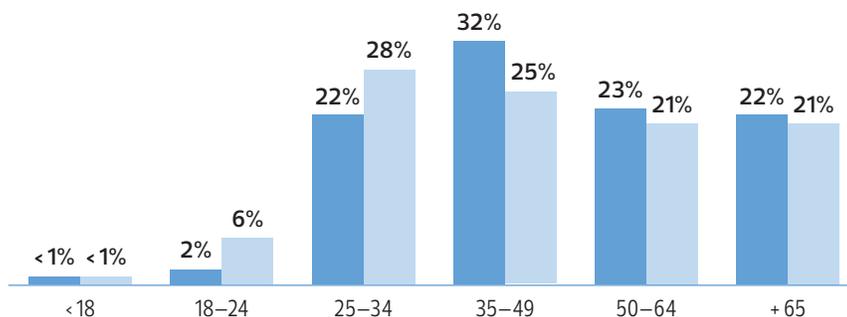
Resident Survey

A survey was used to reach Edmonton residents living in multi-unit properties with communal waste collection. The resident survey was sent to the Edmonton Insight Community, which is an online citizen panel of Edmontonians who provide feedback on a variety of programs

and policies, and the broader public via an open link. The open link was shared on social media and the City's website. A total of **2,896** residents completed the resident survey with the majority of responses coming from the open link (75%).



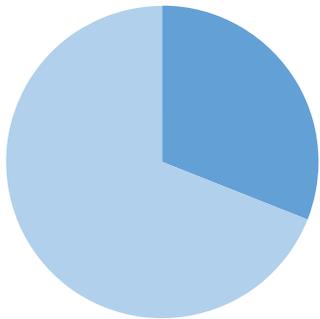
Age of Respondents



Manager Survey

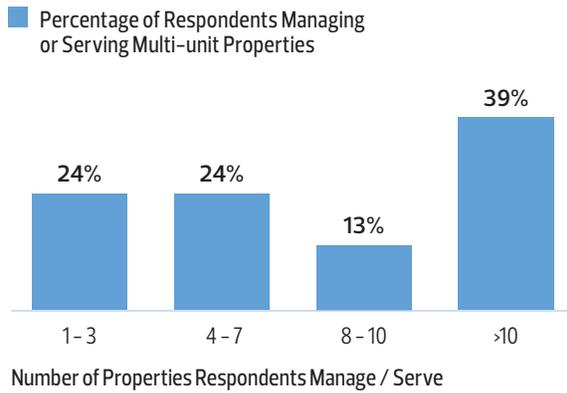
A survey was used to ask property managers, condo board members, or those in equivalent roles, about how potential options for this program could affect their buildings and to solicit solutions to challenges. A total of **239** respondents completed this survey; 31% were property managers or those in an equivalent role and 69% were condo board members.

Survey Respondents

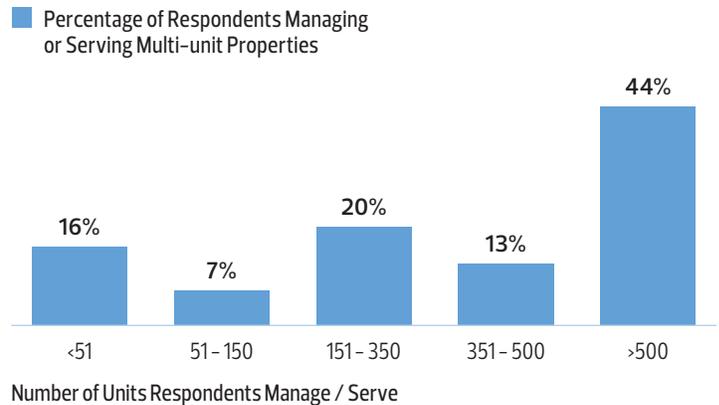


- **31%** Property Managers
- **69%** Condo Board Members

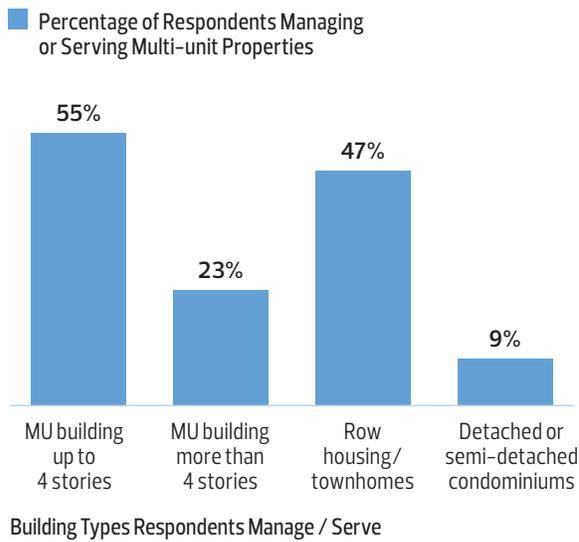
How many properties do you manage?



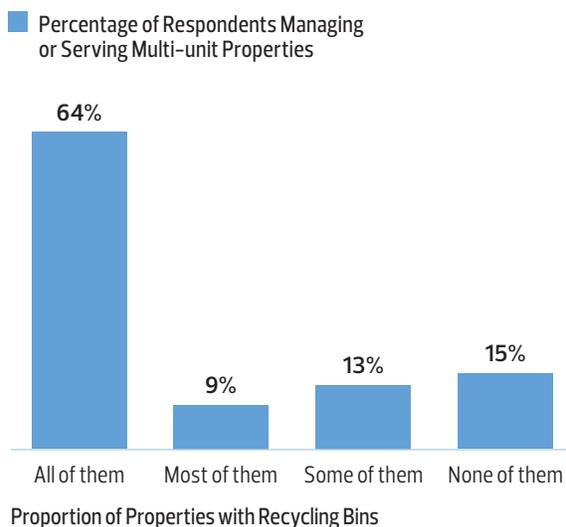
What is the total number of units across all the properties you manage?



What building types do you manage /serve?



What proportion of the properties you manage/serve have recycling bins?



Engaged Edmonton

An Engaged Edmonton page was made available to managers, developers, service providers and other stakeholders to provide opportunities to learn more about the program, engage with other stakeholders using a forum, and to ask questions of Waste Services using a question and answer tool.

No stakeholders provided direct comments or questions on the Engaged Edmonton page, however, **271 site visits** during this engagement phase indicate interest in accessing information about the program.

What We Heard

Resident Survey

Residents living in multi-unit properties with communal waste collection were asked about their current garbage and recycling practices, potential barriers and solutions to sorting food scraps and education and outreach approaches to help teach and support sorting. The findings are presented below.

Garbage and Recycling

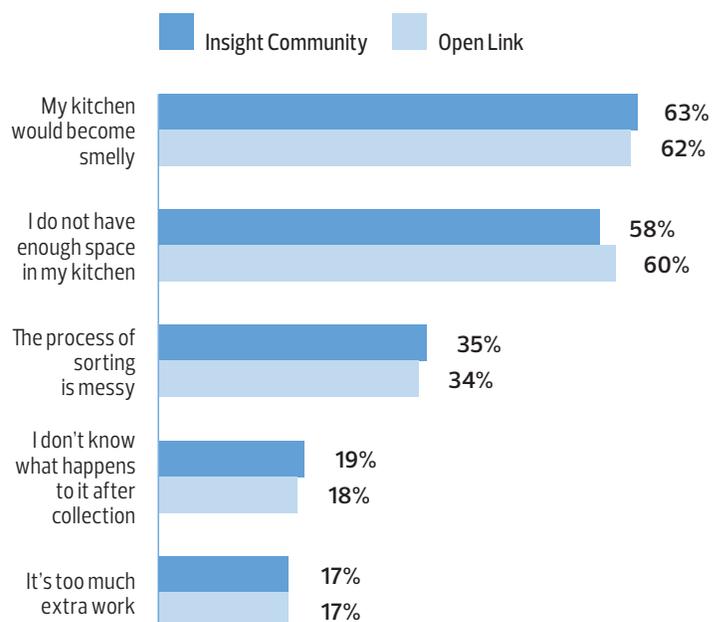
The majority of respondents indicated that they have both garbage and recycling containers on their property (85%, open link; 88%, Insight Community), with the greatest proportion indicating that garbage and recycling containers are located next to each other in the same area or room (70%, open link; 69%, Insight Community).

Most respondents indicated that they recycle as much as they can using the communal containers for recycling on their building property (78%, open link; 83%, Insight Community). Respondents living in properties with recycling containers tend to recycle regardless of where the recycling and garbage containers are located on the property. However, most people that do recycle have garbage and recycling containers located beside each other (79%, open link; 77%, Insight Community).

Only a small portion of respondents indicated that they do not recycle (4%, open link; 3%, Insight Community). The main reasons why residents do not recycle are because their buildings do not have recycling containers, it is not convenient to access the recycling containers at their complex, or because they prefer not to.

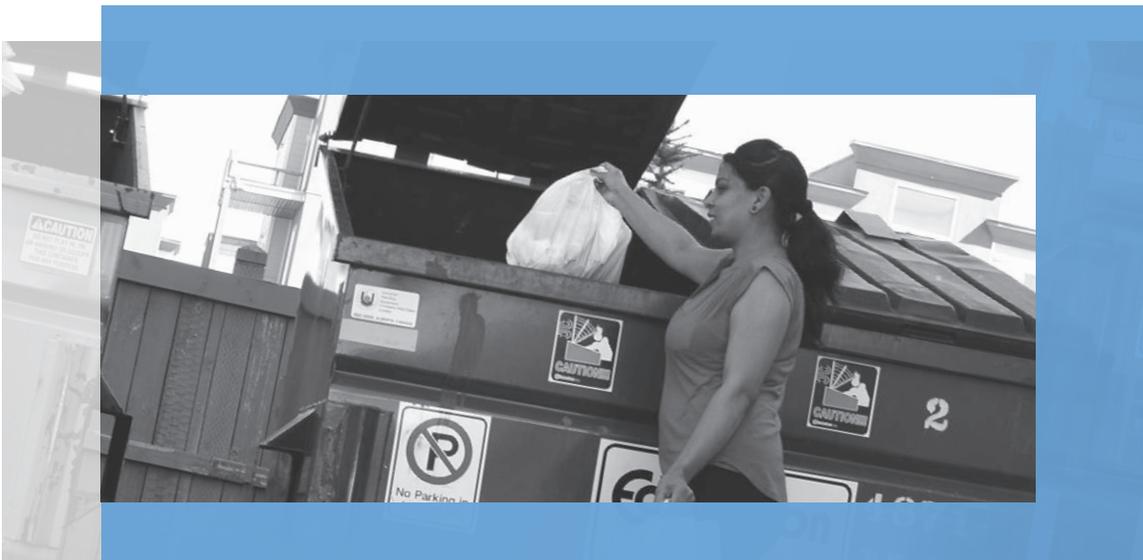
Food Scraps and Recycle Sorting: Barriers and Solutions

When it comes to challenges in resident's suites, respondents identified that smell (62%, open link; 63%, Insight Community) and lack of space in their kitchen (60%, open link; 58%, Insight Community) are the biggest challenges that they anticipate facing when sorting food scraps. Respondents who do not currently recycle are more likely to identify barriers to sorting food scraps, including smell, mess and that sorting food scraps is too much extra work.



The majority of survey respondents felt that each type of information or tool proposed in the survey would help with waste sorting practices. The most valued components include information on how to sort waste into the correct streams (86%, open link; 86%, Insight Community), instructions on what steps to take to sort recycling and food scraps (82%, open link; 83%, Insight Community) and having a food scraps pail for their kitchen (86%, open link; 82%, Insight Community). Respondents also think that information about the results of waste sorting efforts should be shared regularly with residents (72%, open link; 71%, Insight Community). Respondents that currently do not recycle were more likely to express a need for recycling containers in their suites to help them with sorting recyclables.

Prior to the implementation of the program, respondents would also like to receive print information on how to sort their waste into correct streams, either from the City and provided by property/building managers (60%, open link; 66%, Insight Community), or directly mailed by the City to multi-unit residents (60%, open link; 65%, Insight Community). After the program is implemented, respondent's preference would be to refer to the City of Edmonton website for ongoing information and educational materials (60%, open link; 67%, Insight Community).



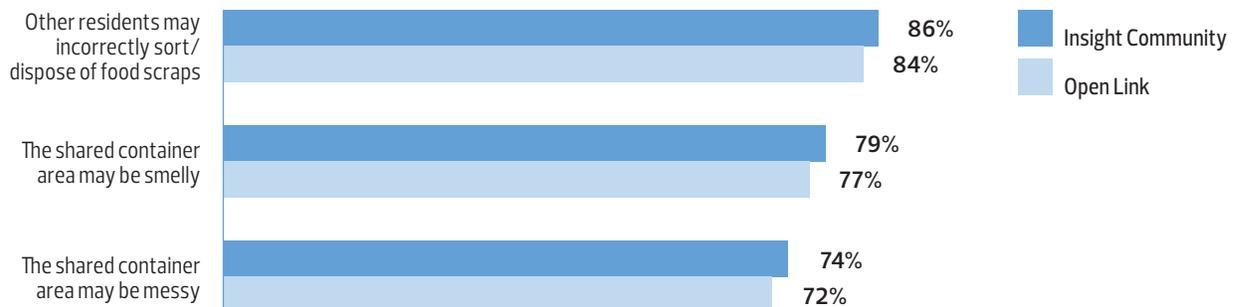
The main challenges associated with disposing of food scraps in communal containers anticipated by residents are that other residents may incorrectly sort/dispose of food scraps (84%, open link; 86%, Insight Community) and that communal waste areas may become smelly (77%, open link; 79%, Insight Community) or messy (72%, open link; 74%, Insight Community).

When residents bring food scraps and recycling from their suites to communal waste areas, having the communal waste areas be clean and well lit (92%, open link; 91%, Insight Community), as well as having waste containers located next to each other in the same common area (82%, open link; 80%, Insight Community) are considered very important. Using compostable bags to bring food scraps from one's suite to their communal containers was also discussed as a helpful tool (76%, open link; 74%, Insight Community).

The majority of respondents with chutes would like to keep them open for garbage and would bring their food scraps and recycling to the communal waste areas (40%, open link; 43%, Insight Community). Some respondents would like the chutes to be modified for food scraps

(26%, open link; 27%, Insight Community), while others would like to keep chutes for garbage and add containers for organics and recycling on each floor (21%, open link; 16%, Insight Community). Only 6% (both open link and Insight Community) would like chutes to be closed.

Respondents were also informed about the possibility of an ambassador program, which involves training volunteers to promote the program in their buildings and assist fellow tenants with waste sorting. Over half of respondents agreed, or strongly agreed, that having an ambassador would help residents sort and dispose of waste properly (52%, open link; 54%, Insight Community); however, less than half of respondents indicated that they personally would like to receive information from an ambassador (38%, open link; 40%, Insight Community). Even fewer indicated they would volunteer to become ambassadors themselves (16%, open link; 14%, Insight Community). While uptake of an ambassador program might seem low in percentage terms, 416 residents agreed, or strongly agreed, that they would be willing to become an ambassador to help residents sort and dispose of their waste.



Manager Survey

Managers (i.e. property managers, condo board members and those in equivalent roles) were asked various questions about their preference for collection containers, program rollout and education, outreach and communication. Participants were also given an opportunity to share other general thoughts, ideas or questions.

Collection Containers

The survey informed property managers and condo board members of the collection container options that were identified through the options analysis as being the most preferred. The preferred containers presented in the survey were: front load bins, carts, roll-off compactors and underground containers. This survey aimed to receive feedback from stakeholders to determine if these options would work for all three waste streams.

Many respondents that currently have front load bins for garbage and/or recycling stated that front load bins are effective for these waste streams and would like to keep this type of container for garbage and recycling. While not all respondents discussed container options for food scraps, most of those that did felt that at least one of the collection container options would work for food scraps in their buildings; the responses indicated a slight preference for front load bins compared to carts.

However, many managers also discussed space concerns. This was especially the case for buildings that currently have only garbage containers and would be required to add both recycling and organics containers. To help with space, a few managers suggested downsizing the bins so that containers for all streams could fit on the footprint currently used by garbage containers. In some cases, increasing the frequency of collection for some waste streams might be necessary to support the use of smaller containers. Some respondents also had suggestions for using waste containers that could help residents with accessibility issues or encourage proper waste sorting (for example, containers with side doors that are easy to open, or food scrap containers with smaller openings so large waste cannot fit).



We currently use front load bins. They are located outside of our building. I believe they would be the only realistic option going forward. They work well for our building currently...

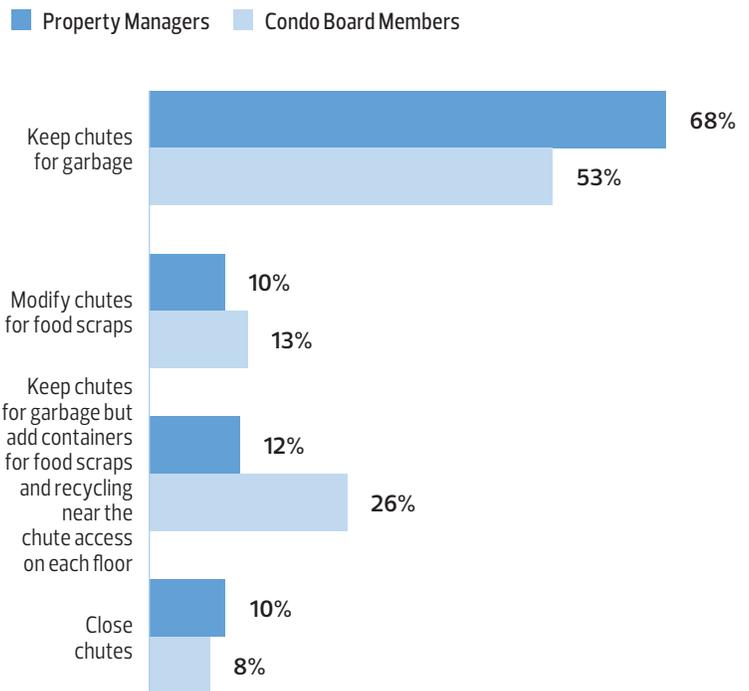


Respondents with chutes in their buildings (31% of total respondents) were asked if they would prefer to keep, modify, or close their chutes once residents are asked to sort their waste into three streams. Total respondents of buildings with chutes prefer to keep chutes open for garbage (property managers, 68%; condo board members, 53%). In buildings where chutes are kept open for garbage, residents would be expected to bring food scraps and recycling to the building's communal waste area. More respondents would prefer to keep chutes open and have collection containers for all three streams on each floor (property

managers, 12%; condo board members, 26%) than close the chutes (property managers, 10%; condo board members, 8%). However, there was some concern that keeping chutes open for garbage would mean residents would be less likely to sort and instead throw all food scraps down the garbage chute. For example, one participant stated that, “... sites with chutes [should] close as residents will not separate with chutes.” Condo board members are more likely to prefer keeping chutes for garbage and adding collection containers for recycling and food scraps on each floor (26%) than property managers (12%).

We have a garbage chute... so a small organics bin located near the... chute would work well for the mobility challenged residents. Then a larger organics cart in the parkade would be ideal.

Property Managers and Condo Board Members Chute Preference in Multi-unit Properties

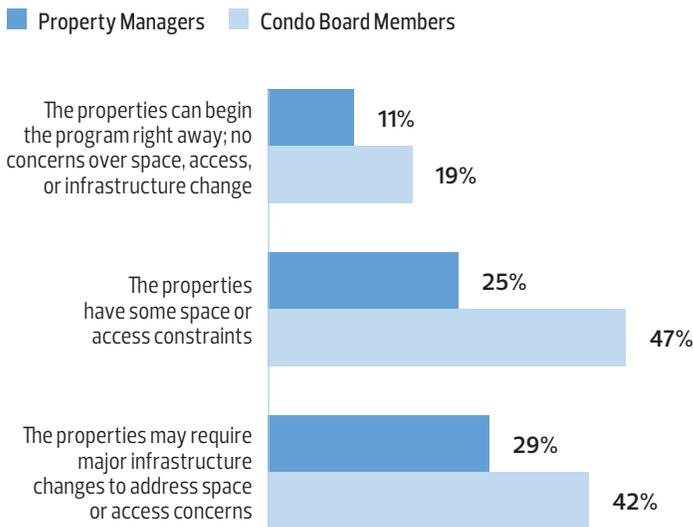


Program Rollout

The City has committed to providing containers for all streams and educational resources for residents. Based on this level of support, property managers and condo board members were asked about their level of readiness for this program. When asked to state how ready their property(ies) is/are to participate in this program, 11% of property managers and 19% of condo board members stated that their properties could begin the program right away, as there are no concerns over space, access, or infrastructure change. All respondents were more likely to report that all of their properties had some space constraints requiring *minor*

changes to enclosures and/or that they require some additional one on one support (property managers, 25%; condo board members, 47%), or that their properties required *major* infrastructure changes to address space or access issues, and/or require significant additional one on one support (property managers, 29%; condo board members, 42%). In buildings that do not currently have recycling containers, managers were more likely to state that properties have minor (57%) or major (46%) space constraints, infrastructure changes needed and/or one on one support desired.

Property Readiness to Participate in the Waste Sorting Program¹



¹Percentages are taken from three different questions where respondents state readiness for all of the properties they manage / serve

The City intends to use a phased approach to roll out the three-stream waste sorting program. When asked if any of the properties being managed or served would be interested in participating in the first phase, 21% of all respondents stated that all their properties could participate in the first phase (condo board members were more likely than property managers to state that their properties would be willing to participate in the first phase; 26% – condo board members; 11% – property managers). In contrast, 29% stated that none of their properties would be interested or able to participate in the first phase (condo board members and property managers had similar perspectives). A total of 38% of respondents stated that they were unsure.

Twenty-five percent of survey respondent's buildings are mixed use sites, meaning that the building has both residential and commercial tenants. Out of those properties, 52% of property managers and 38% of condo board members would prefer for the City to not require separate containers with controlled access for residential and commercial waste in shared waste areas, and have the City continue to collect mixed residential and commercial waste for existing properties. In contrast, 32% of property managers and 17% of condo board members would prefer separate containers for residents and commercial waste with controlled access and have the City collect residential waste only.

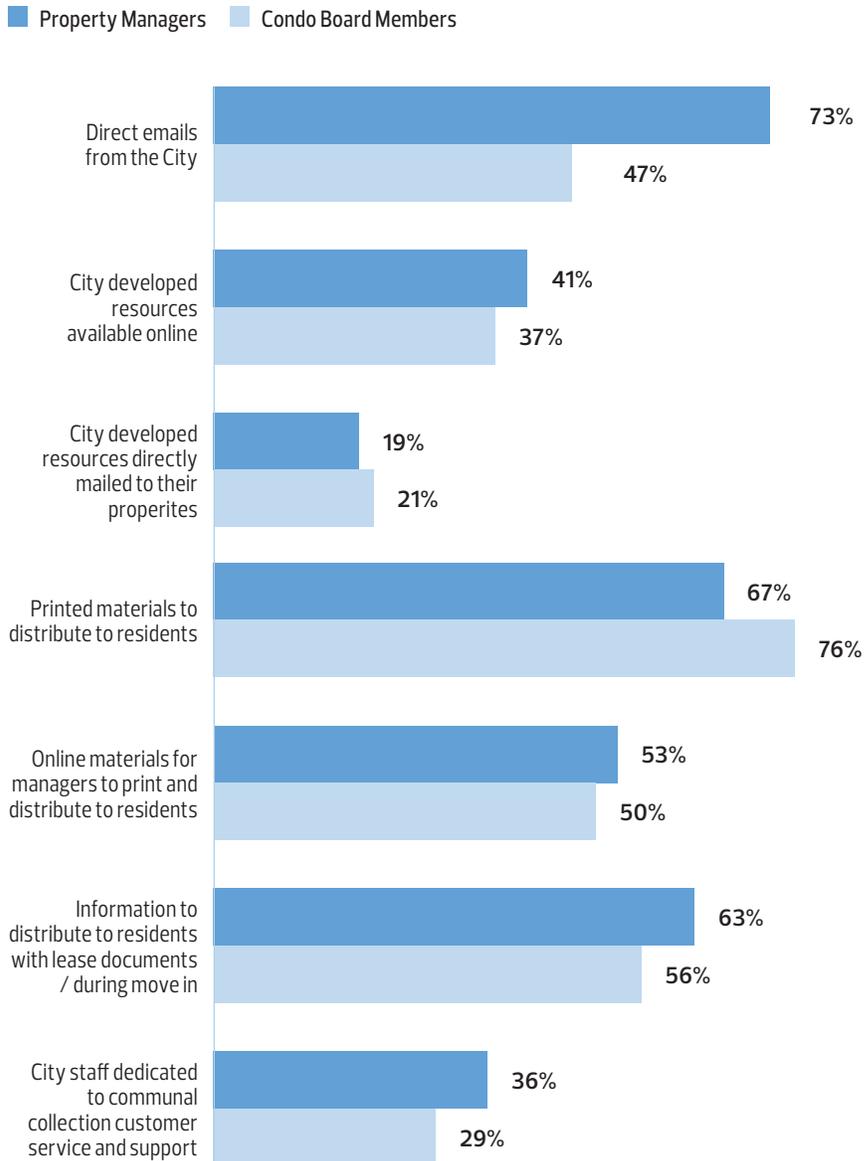
Education, Outreach and Communication

Both property managers and condo board members were asked how they would like the City to communicate with them about the program. Property managers (73%) were more likely to prefer direct emails from the City than condo board members (47%). Both property managers and condo board members would like City-developed resources to be available online (39%) or directly mailed to their properties (35%). Total respondents preferred to receive print (73%) and online (51%) materials for property managers or board members to print and distribute to residents. This includes information about the program that can be given to residents with lease documents and/or during move-in (58%). The provision of City staff dedicated to communal collection customer service and support was also identified by all respondents as helpful for learning about and supporting implementation of the waste sorting program in multi-unit buildings (32%).

Some respondents mentioned that they would be willing to provide space to City staff to host events or information sessions in the lobby or common space of their property/ies to provide residents with information about the waste sorting program (32%).

 *Will need lots of material to hand out to owners/tenants to explain what goes where.* 

Preferred Communication Methods and Information



All respondents were also asked about their interest in participating in a multi-unit stakeholder working group. Working groups are sometimes used to help prepare for and implement mandatory waste sorting programs. These groups can be an effective way for stakeholders to provide ongoing input into a project and can help build a constructive relationship between the City and stakeholders. About 30% of respondents stated that they may be interested in participating in a stakeholder working group. The majority of this interest came from property managers rather than condo board members. Property managers would like more information about the requirements of participating before making a decision.

In the open-ended responses, managers often stated that better communication is needed from the City to provide more clarity regarding timelines, implementation requirements, costs and enforcement strategies. Some managers need more time than others to make decisions and complete infrastructure upgrades; these respondents would like as much notice as

possible, with clear guidelines regarding what is needed from the buildings and managers for this program.

Resident education was identified as crucial for program success, including easy-to-read information that clearly describes how to sort properly, as well as recommendations for saving space in suites and mitigating smell/mess. Managers discussed the importance of focusing on areas with high resident turnover (for example students), as well as developing materials for seniors and immigrants learning English. Providing material in many languages or with simple graphics and visuals was discussed as being crucial.

In regards to ongoing communication about the impact of the program, property managers and condo board members are equally interested (about 50%) in receiving information on the multi-unit diversion rate, which is the percentage of waste not sent to landfill, contamination rate of different waste streams, for example, the amount of recyclables that end up in the garbage stream, and information on the change in quantity of waste collected per year.



Education will be important on an ongoing basis in areas populated by students as we get new residents from outside Edmonton regularly.

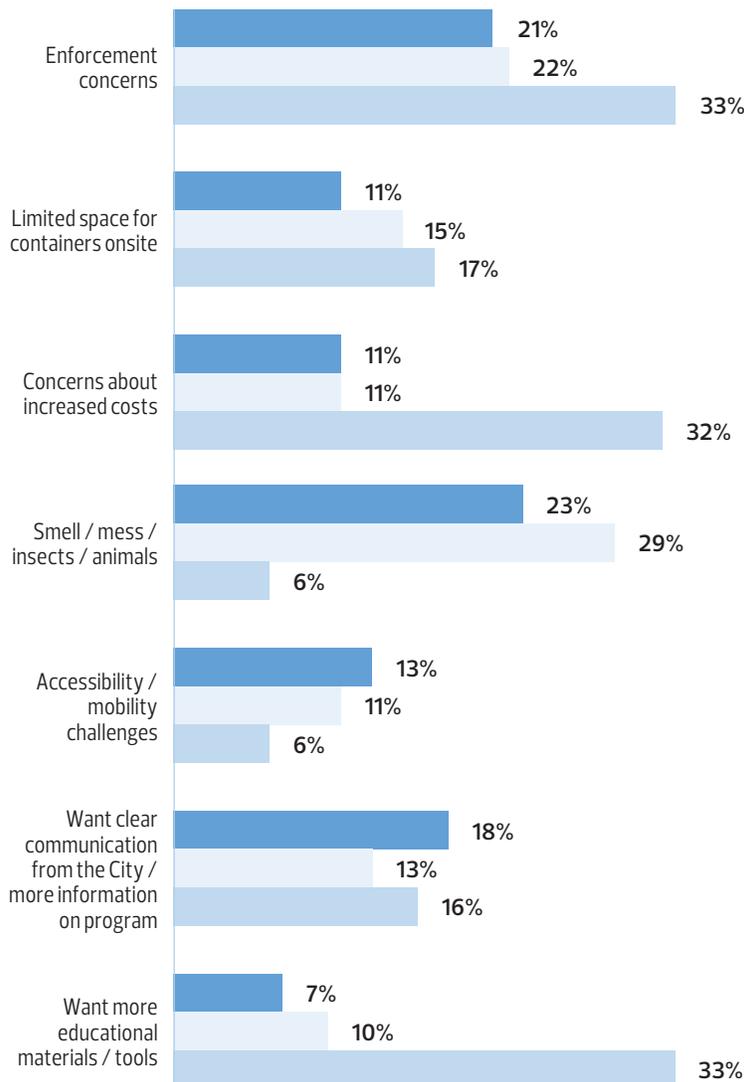


Similar Perspectives from Residents and Managers

Both surveys included questions that allowed respondents to ask questions and share comments about any aspect of the program. Residents and managers had similar questions and concerns about subjects such as enforcement, limited space for more waste containers, cost, smell, mess and attracting insects/animals, accessibility/mobility challenges, clear communication from the City and more educational material or tools.

Open-Ended Responses from Residents (Open Link and Insight Community), Property Managers and Condo Board Members

- Open Link, n=737
- Insight Community, n=355
- Property Managers and Condo Board Members, n=105



Enforcement Concerns

Both residents and managers think that many residents will not sort their waste properly. Respondents think that the use of communal containers will make it difficult to enforce mandatory sorting. Both residents and managers are concerned that this will lead to many residents not complying and will result in increased contamination of waste streams (for example food scraps in the garbage, or garbage in the recycling). One resident stated: **“we already have bins for recycling and garbage and the residents dump everything, everywhere and don't sort any of it...”**

One manager shared: **“from my experience with this property, the biggest issue will be getting residents to adopt sorting and/or enforcing that behaviour with a volunteer board.”**

Some managers posed additional questions about enforcement and compliance, and mentioned that non-residents sometimes throw waste into the property's waste containers, making it difficult to manage proper waste sorting: **“will there be penalties if waste is not properly sorted? This can be challenging to monitor and enforce when using communal disposal options (i.e. we do not have an enclosed garbage/recycling area and so it is sometimes used by [the] surrounding community).”**

Limited Space for Containers Onsite

Survey respondents discussed their concerns with limited space for collection containers in their property's communal waste areas. Adding one more container for food scraps is also challenging for many managers and may make waste sorting less accessible for residents. One manager mentioned that they **“do not have any room for a third bin. Some of our sites cannot even house a second bin... There is no more room to accommodate bins.”** One resident shared their concern that their “building was barely able to fit in both a recycle bin and the garbage bin so I really don't know where another bin will go.”

Concerns about Increased Costs

Residents and managers described concerns with costs and the potential for increases in utility fees, and wondered who would be responsible for paying for infrastructure upgrades if these are needed. This is especially the case for residents with lower income. One participant stated that: **“cost is also a HUGE issue as many [residents] in this building have limited/fixed income.”**

Some participants suggested rebate or grant programs to help buildings with the increased costs during this time. One manager felt that, **“the bigger problem is on the building infrastructure level... Funding or grants available from the City, plus consulting assistance to property managers and building owners would help a great deal however.”**

Smell, Mess, Insects and Animals

Respondents to both surveys discussed their concerns about the potential for odour and mess associated with separating their food scraps, both in their suites and in communal waste areas. For example, one resident mentioned that they **“fear that the building will start smelling... I fear my kitchen/[apartment] will smell. Ugh! I am not looking forward to this change, but I will comply as best I can.”**

Respondents think that the containers and the waste collection areas may become dirty and unsanitary as more people start to sort food scraps. If there is increased smell and mess, respondents felt that this may deter residents from sorting their waste properly. Concern was also raised that this smell and mess may attract bugs and animals. One resident asked about the smell in warmer months and how odour can be minimized. Another stated that: **“I am concerned about the smell. Unless the garbage is picked up frequently, especially the food waste, this will affect the quality of life for the people that live near the bins.”**

Accessibility and Mobility Challenges

Accessibility and mobility were discussed as important issues to address so that all residents are able to participate in this program. Many participants would like the communal containers or waste collection areas to be easy for seniors and people with disabilities to use. One manager stated that in their building, **“the majority of our condo residents are 70+. Many have mobility issues so the waste system for this particular building needs to be extremely easy to access and use.”** One resident living in an apartment mentioned similar challenges: **“As a senior who moved to an apartment because of physical challenges, carrying three garbage streams outside is very daunting.”** Thus, developing considerations to address accessibility and mobility challenges is very important.



“ The information needs to be very visual and easy to understand. **”**

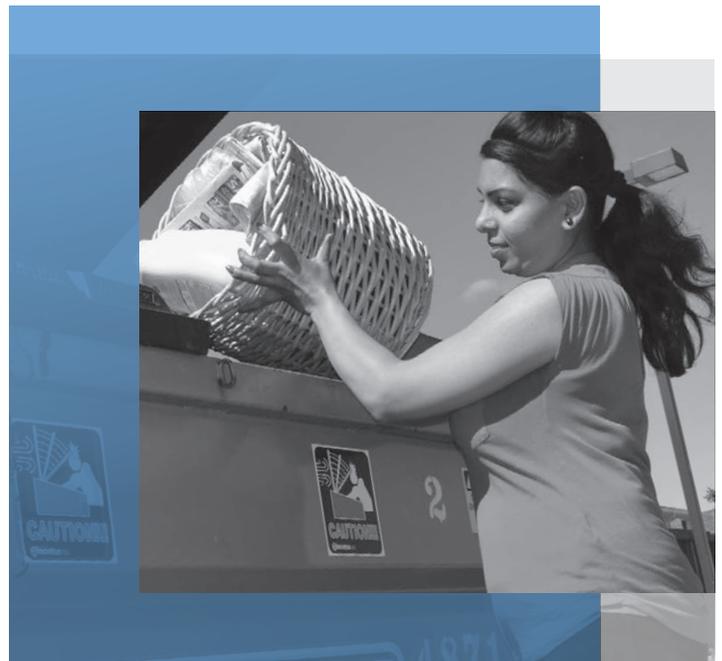
Want Clear Communication from the City / More Information on the Program

Managers and residents stated that more information about the program and better communication is needed from the City to provide clarity regarding implementation timelines and guidelines. For example, one manager stated that they need **“better communication from the [City staff] managing this policy once implemented.”** Effective communication will help property managers and condo board members to prepare their buildings and residents for infrastructure and behaviour changes.

Survey respondents also think more information is needed regarding where the food scraps and recyclables end up and how the changes will benefit the environment. One resident shared that **“one thing I have heard about recycling programs is that it takes more energy to run and is inefficient. I would like to know that programs like this are good for the environment and that extra measures taken in disposal are efficient in helping our planet.”** Thus, comprehensive information and communication strategies are needed to provide residents and managers with better clarity about the waste sorting program.

Want More Educational Materials and Tools

Respondents to both surveys discussed the importance of well thought-out informational materials and tools, including information on how to sort waste properly, colour-coded containers and online information. One manager stated that **“clear instructions, signage, and even colour coding are key elements to mitigate cross-contamination.”** Another participant gave some examples of useful informational guides to provide to residents. These include: **“1) A detailed sorting guide between all three streams, 2) Provide recommendation of how to store the organic material in their suite before taking it out to the communal collection site, 3) How to discourage the possibility of attracting bugs etc. within their suite.”**



What Happens Next?

Phase Two of engagement aimed to further validate stakeholder and resident perspectives on the Multi-unit Mandatory Waste Sorting Program and solicit suggestions for a successful program. The engagement results will be used alongside other criteria to weigh each program alternative and decide on the program recommendations to be presented in the business case to City Council in mid-2021. Specifically, recommendations around chute closures, co-location of containers and the communication and educational tactics will be shaped by these results. The engagement also identified concerns such as space constraints and illegal dumping, which will impact the implementation planning should the program be approved.

City staff aim to keep stakeholders and residents informed on the progress of this program, during its development and implementation. Please visit edmonton.ca/CommunalCollection for more information.

