

# Community Composting Pilot

## Recommendation

That the October 2, 2020, City Operations report CR\_7473, be received for information.

## Previous Council/Committee Action

At the July 16, 2019, City Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration provide a report to Committee that outlines options for a community composting pilot, including:

- Whether a full business plan is needed and how it can tie into the overall waste strategy
- Opportunities to support communities and residents through education and the removal of any barriers
- Opportunities to leverage the Master Composter Recycler Program
- An estimate of costs for materials and incentives (including possible subsidies for materials) and any potential savings from waste diversion
- A plan for engagement with residents, community leagues, nonprofits, and businesses.

## Executive Summary

Community composting occurs when a specific community or group collects materials to compost in a shared neighbourhood space, or residents compost in their own households. The City of Edmonton offers a variety of education and outreach programs that provide support on community and home composting. This includes the Master Composter Recycler Program, home composting education programs, outreach to community gardens and the Compost 'S cool interpretive site.

The 25-year Waste Strategy will expand the reach of household and community composting programming and include an internal scan and strategic realignment of existing education programs. Administration will undertake research and hold conversations with residents to discuss and understand benefits, barriers and preferences with regards to home composting. Initial opportunities have been identified and include: to expand the Master Composter Recycler Program; use the online platform ShareWaste; expand local partnerships with community groups; and leverage

other initiatives that facilitate home or community composting. Upon completion, Administration may develop a business case if deemed appropriate.

### Report

#### Background

The City offers a variety of education and outreach programs and initiatives that promote, facilitate and support home and community composting activities among Edmontonians. These programs and initiatives include the Master Composter Recycler Program, outreach to community gardens, home composting education programs and Compost 'S cool, an interpretive site at the John Janzen Nature Centre.

The Master Composter Recycler Program is built on a “learn and serve” model. The goals of the program are to:

- Educate and empower volunteers to become advocates for waste reduction in the community.
- Inspire behaviour and actions that result in sustainable waste management practices through volunteer engagements within the community.
- Increase awareness and use of all waste related City programs and services, including curbside recycling, recycling depots, Eco Stations and the Reuse Centre.
- Provide public education and build capacity for home and community composting.

As the 25-year Waste Strategy is implemented, objectives of the Master Composter Recycler Program will expand to promote participation in service changes and updated program offerings. Each year, the program receives an average of 200 applications and a cohort of approximately 30 members is selected through a detailed evaluation process. Participants receive comprehensive training over two months.

Since the inception of the Master Composter Recycler Program in 1991, 942 volunteers have completed the program. These volunteers go on to influence friends, family, neighbours and co-workers to take specific actions that divert or reduce waste. In 2019, Master Composter Recycler volunteers reached more than 36,000 Edmontonians. Volunteer activities include helping neighbours compost at home or at their community garden, educating people on effective waste reduction and disposal practices and supporting events at Compost 'S cool and throughout the city. Traditionally, Councillors also have attended training sessions and recognition events. Administration is working towards expanding this program from one intake of volunteers per year to two.

Compost 'S cool is an interpretive site located adjacent to the John Janzen Nature Centre where residents can learn about composting and drop off food scraps for composting. In 2019, Compost 'S cool welcomed 1,800 visitors for hands-on workshops, events, learning to compost, as well as specific teacher workshops. Compost 'S cool is also an official drop-off location for food scraps on *ShareWaste*, an online platform where people connect to share compostable materials with their neighbours.

The City holds outreach and education for local community gardens and spaces throughout the spring and summer. City employees visit local community gardens to provide support, recommendations and tips on composting. In 2019, City employees visited 76 community gardens to provide education on how to start, maintain and enhance their composting. Organizations such as Sustainable Food Edmonton also support community gardens and liaise with the City to provide composting education.

Other home composting initiatives in 2019 included 29 workshops and 26 community presentations. Residents also subscribe to the *Keep Composting* e-newsletter, follow the Compost 'S cool Facebook page, find resources online and contact the City's Compost Doctor directly by email and phone. Questions about home composting have almost doubled in the past year, with 389 inquiries in 2018 and 724 inquiries in 2019.

### **Community Composting Context**

Community composting occurs directly in neighbourhoods and in the homes of Edmontonians. Community composting can include a specific group or neighbourhood collecting materials (yard waste and/or food scraps) to compost in one neighbourhood location such as a community garden, school, multi-unit residence or urban farm. Additionally, home composting provides the opportunity for residents to compost on their own property. Home and community composting keeps valuable resources in the community, helps improve soil quality and reduces the volume of material that ends up in the waste stream, thereby diverting waste from landfill. Residents can also drop off their yard waste (grass, leaves and yard trimmings) at any Eco Station free of charge to help divert waste.

### **Jurisdictional Scan**

Various community composting programs exist throughout the Edmonton Metropolitan region and in cities across Canada. St. Albert, Strathcona County and Calgary have minimal online home composting education. These municipalities have source-separated organics programs.

Other Canadian municipalities examined include Saskatoon SK, Brandon MB and Winnipeg MB. Winnipeg runs a similar master composter volunteer program with the Green Action Centre and online home composting education resources. An external organization in Winnipeg also runs a social enterprise that provides a composting

service for a fee to residents, multi-residential buildings, on-site composters, small restaurants and cafes. Brandon and Saskatoon run voluntary green cart programs, while also providing free Compost Depots for residents to drop off their residential yard and food waste. Additional information is included in Attachment 1.

### **25-year Waste Strategy**

The City has been providing composting initiatives for nearly 30 years as the Master Composter Recycler Program was started in 1991. Composting initiatives have also been reflected in the 25-year Waste Strategy to expand the reach of household and community composting programming, even with the transition to food scraps (green) carts and source separation of organics.

The City started further research about what Edmontonians currently compost at home, perceived barriers and benefits, and how to improve home composting programs. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the research was delayed and will continue until 2021. The City will contact community leagues, community gardens and other stakeholder groups for feedback on current programming and future educational support. Upon completion, Administration may develop a business case if deemed appropriate.

An internal waste education and outreach strategy is also being developed to ensure that all education programs and resources align effectively and appropriately with the implementation of the 25-year Waste Strategy. The education strategy will be finalized by Q2 2021, ensuring alignment with pending decisions and Council direction related to other potential waste reduction initiatives, such as single-use plastics and potential changes to multi-unit waste sorting and collection practices.

While education program content has been updated to align with upcoming waste program and service changes, this work is expanding to include a complete current state analysis and a long-term strategic alignment of all education and outreach efforts. This will include a comprehensive strategic direction for the future of community and home composting programs, supported by insights from residents to integrate community composting into a holistic waste education approach.

Some initial program changes already underway include expanding the Master Composter Recycler Program to two cohorts per year to increase the number of volunteers, expanding the reach of volunteers, and providing support for home composting in the community. Volunteer training of the Master Composter Recyclers takes place from March to May. Waste Services will expand this to train a second cohort from August to October. The WasteWise app and other digital channels may also be leveraged to encourage home composting.

Administration is working to expand and establish more partnerships with community gardens, gardening groups, community leagues and organizations that have an interest in waste reduction to increase education on community composting. Another potential partnership opportunity includes leveraging the external platform *ShareWaste* to promote local neighbourhood drop-off locations for food scraps to be home composted.

**Budget/Financial**

Any materials and associated costs required will depend on the outcome of the education and outreach strategy, which will be informed by further research and analysis. The strategy will determine if and what infrastructure or materials may be required to further support community composting as well as a framework for how the City might handle materials directly or identify collaborative opportunities to support and incentivise community based organizations.

**Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management**

Corporate Outcome(s): Edmonton is an environmentally sustainable and resilient city.			
Outcome(s)	Measure(s)	Result(s)	Target(s)
Edmonton is an environmentally sustainable and resilient city.	Curbside Diversion Rate (weight based)	13% (2019)	13% (2020) 37% (2021) 65%(2022) 67% (2023)

**Attachments**

1. [Jurisdictional Scan](#)

**Others Reviewing this Report**

- M. Persson, Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer, Financial and Corporate Services
- C. Owen, Deputy City Manager, Communications and Engagement
- B. Andriachuk, City Solicitor