

**To the Mayor and Members of the City Council****August 5, 2025**

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SUBJECT: FY25 RECYCLING PROGRAM UPDATE

The purpose of this informal report is to provide an update on the City's residential recycling program and the planned opening of the state-of-the-art (SOTA) material recovery facility (MRF), scheduled for Fall 2025.

Background

The City of Fort Worth established a residential curbside recycling program in 2003, which accepts all major recycling commodities: plastic, paper/cardboard, aluminum/metal, and glass.

On February 28, 2023, the City Council authorized M&C 23-0148 for City Secretary Contract No. 61054 with WM Recycle America to process recyclable materials collected from the City of Fort Worth's solid waste residential collections. As of June 1, 2025, there are approximately 263,700 residential accounts that receive weekly curbside collection service for recycled materials (blue carts). Each material type is processed and baled for sale at the existing WM MRF located in Arlington, Texas. A new SOTA MRF is expected to be completed in Fort Worth in September 2025.

State of Recycling in Fort Worth

As of August 2025, Fort Worth has all the core foundations for a top-tier recycling program. To ensure a successful program, it is important that recycling is done correctly to reduce contamination. This means that all garbage or items that cannot be recycled should never be placed inside recycling (blue) carts. Also, all acceptable recyclable materials should always be loosely placed inside the recycling (blue) carts – do not put recyclable materials into plastic bags inside recycling (blue) carts. Mixing garbage or yard waste with recyclable materials causes contamination, making them unacceptable for recycling. The City aims to achieve and maintain a recycling contamination rate of 10% or less. Currently, the contamination rate has increased to 26%, which is above the historical average of 24%. For context, an average of 5,100 tons of materials are collected from recycling (blue) carts each month, and approximately 1,360 tons are contaminated and must leave the MRF for disposal at the landfill. The City of Fort Worth is currently engaging with WM Recycle America and other partners to help educate residents on proper recycling practices to help lower the contamination rate.

The expected completion of the SOTA MRF in Fall 2025 will also assist in this goal by: 1) capturing a greater percentage of the recyclable materials; 2) processing materials more efficiently; 3) providing educational resources and tours for residents and community groups; and 4) diverting more material away from the Southeast Landfill, thus preserving landfill life. Still, it is our community's responsibility to recycle correctly.

Commercial, industrial, and multi-family complexes/apartment partners are also supported with their respective recycling efforts. City staff are happy to assist residents and businesses with resources for responsible waste management and effective waste diversion strategies to encourage sustainable practices.



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It is important to note that recycling markets and commodity prices fluctuate. Recycling program expenses include the total processing costs and any revenue offsets associated with commodities sold.

As shown in Table 1, the City's net loss on recycling is \$1,933 – effectively a breakeven point for this period. For FY25 Year-To-Date (YTD), October 2024 - June 2025, net expenses are approximately \$400,000, which are within the FY25 planned budget of up to \$2M. FY25 YTD processing expenses are approximately \$4.4M, and FY25 YTD revenues are approximately \$4M. Strong commodity pricing, driven primarily by high-density polyethylene (HDPE) plastic and aluminum, have benefited the City's recycling program. While the current recycling market is not yielding net profits, there are still recycling benefits through waste recovery, diversion from landfills, and social responsibility. Reducing contamination rates can also help reduce expenses.

Table 1: Recycling Profit/Loss Per Month (FY21 - FY25 YTD)

| Month | FY21 | FY22 | FY23 | FY24 | FY25 |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| October | \$ (140,306) | \$ 315,509 | \$ (162,865) | \$ (197,728) | \$ (42,690) |
| November | \$ (126,645) | \$ 246,487 | \$ (169,796) | \$ (170,532) | \$ (52,465) |
| December | \$ (107,942) | \$ 176,887 | \$ (158,355) | \$ (133,209) | \$ (64,840) |
| January | \$ (68,283) | \$ 163,168 | \$ (138,308) | \$ (124,895) | \$ (80,147) |
| February | \$ (46,558) | \$ 173,806 | \$ (94,378) | \$ (84,746) | \$ (45,881) |
| March | \$ 185 | \$ 304,720 | \$ (78,862) | \$ (69,407) | \$ (13,687) |
| April | \$ 32,003 | \$ 298,382 | \$ (86,690) | \$ (79,113) | \$ (11,063) |
| May | \$ 109,394 | \$ 312,146 | \$ (109,549) | \$ (66,497) | \$ (30,804) |
| June | \$ 214,461 | \$ 263,599 | \$ (103,755) | \$ (38,499) | \$ (66,204) |
| July | \$ 273,004 | \$ 163,981 | \$ (99,488) | \$ (54,923) | - |
| August | \$ 343,057 | \$ (5,712) | \$ (166,037) | \$ (66,891) | - |
| September | \$ 300,117 | \$ (103,072) | \$ (197,933) | \$ (34,083) | - |
| FY Net Profit/Loss | \$ 782,487 | \$ 2,309,900 | \$ (1,566,016) | \$ (1,120,523) | \$ (407,781) |

Table 1 shows the monthly profit or loss related to the City of Fort Worth's recycling program between FY21 and FY25 YTD (October 2020 – June 2025). The overall net loss for this period is \$1,933, which is approximately a breakeven point. Recycling markets fluctuate and values account for any revenues.

Recycling Education and Resources

The City continues to promote its ongoing *Rethink: Waste to Resources* campaign to educate the public on proper disposal practices—specifically recycling—through social media, digital/online resources, printed materials, educational videos, Drop-Off Station visits, and outreach events. These efforts provide insight into the entire recycling process, including the reuse of recyclable materials and the economic benefits recycling can offer. Key messaging is focused on the core four recyclable materials – plastic, paper/cardboard, aluminum/metal, and glass.

Educational efforts are also centered around dispelling myths surrounding recycling with a focus on encouraging residents to improve their recycling behaviors. The goal is to increase the volume of clean, recyclable materials while reducing contamination.

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The largest residential waste stream in Fort Worth (by tonnage) is garbage. Many items placed in garbage (brown) carts can be recycled. Independent waste characterization studies by Burns & McDonnell in 2018 and 2023 suggest that an average of 18% of materials in garbage (brown) carts were recyclable in Fort Worth.

The Environmental Services Department is also seeking support from community partners, including schools and neighborhood associations, to raise awareness around recycling behaviors. For example, if recyclable materials, such as large cardboard boxes, are placed out for bulk collections, they will only be taken to the landfill – these items are not separated to be recycled. Only items placed in recycling (blue) carts are collected to be recycled, so it is important to break down or cut up large boxes for recycling (blue) carts or take them to Drop-Off Stations for recycling. Similarly, yard waste should not be mixed with bulk items. Yard waste should be placed in yard (green) carts, in paper lawn/leaf bags, or in a separate pile at the curb to be processed into mulch and compost.

96-Gallon Recycling Carts

To promote recycling, all new residential customers are provided with a default, 96-gallon size recycling (blue) cart, regardless of selection between 64-gallon and 96-gallon garbage (brown) cart when setting up solid waste services. Monthly solid waste (sanitation) rates are based solely on the size of garbage (brown) carts and do not change based on the size of recycling (blue) carts. City staff recommend transitioning to offering only the 96-gallon recycling (blue) carts, outlining the following benefits:

- Increased volume of recyclables – specifically cardboard boxes that can be accommodated by a larger cart.
- Fewer overflowing carts from extra capacity, which also decreases the risk of litter.
- Reduced instances of partially emptied carts, as larger items get stuck in smaller carts.
- Increased landfill diversion.

To learn more about recycling, download the Fort Worth Garbage and Recycling app, use the Waste Wizard on the app or the City's website, and access additional resources at the City's website: [fortworthtexas.gov/recycles](https://www.fortworthtexas.gov/recycles)

For questions regarding the information in this report, call Jim Keezell, Assistant Environmental Services Director, at (817) 392-5153.

Jesus "Jay" Chapa
City Manager