

# Re+ Fast Start Action Overview

## Single-Family Organics Collection

### Description

Through Re+, King County Solid Waste Division (SWD) is looking at ways to divert organics and food waste from single-family residents away from landfills and into compost. SWD is starting with strategies for single-family organics collection in unincorporated King County and cities with lower organics collection subscription rates. These strategies could include mandatory organics collection, a food waste ban, and every-other-week garbage collection with every week organics collection.

SWD will use information gathered from surveys, consultant studies, and the Re+ Community Panel to help evaluate policy options, with a focus on equity and will also engage local governments to support them in implementing similar strategies for residents in their jurisdictions.

### Background

Removing compostable material from the landfill, particularly food waste, is one of SWD's priorities for the Re+ plan. Diversion of food waste is important to SWD because:

- Food waste represents a large portion of landfilled material (nearly 16% of total disposal)
- Food waste diversion is a key part of our commitments to the Pacific Coast Collaborative and a target in the Strategic Climate Action Plan.
- There is already a robust collection and processing infrastructure for food waste and other compostable material in King County.
- There remains significant room for improvement. A 2018 residential study estimated the single-family capture rate for food waste was 18%. This means that approximately 80% of all food waste was landfilled instead of composted.

The majority of King County single-family customers who have garbage collection also subscribe to separate organics collection (around 80%). However, the organics subscription rate varies when looking closer at each city and unincorporated area. Overall, cities are close to a 90% organics subscription rate but about a third of cities are under 70%. The unincorporated area organics subscription rate is about 50%. New strategies will be focused on cities with lower subscription rates and unincorporated areas to get residents who do not currently subscribe or compost at home to add and use the service, and overall get more residents to place food scraps in their curbside food and yard waste carts for composting. Reaching non-subscribing households represents a large opportunity to divert more compostable material away from the landfill.

For multifamily residents, King County will continue to promote diversion best practices through education and outreach and ensure residents have access to services in compliance with the new state organics legislation.



## Benefits



- Diversion potential
  - Up to 22,000 tons of food waste diverted per year with a strong policy action (e.g., requiring organics service with garbage; food waste ban)
- Greenhouse gas emissions reduction: Up to 9,4000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent.
- If all curbside customers have food and yard waste service (voluntary subscription rate in unincorporated King County is around 50%), it increases efficiency for organics collection. Existing subscribers will likely see a slight reduction in the cost of service.

## Considerations

- **Residents may be already managing food waste at home outside of the curbside carts.** Policy changes should consider and support residents currently using in-home food waste management and ensure that other barriers to voluntary service subscription are reduced before putting a requirement in place. According to a 2021 survey of Waste Management customers in unincorporated King County, 27% of respondents not subscribed to food and yard waste service report composting at home as their primary method for disposal of food waste.
- **Cost of collection services.** SWD needs to better understand to what extent and where households are burdened by the cost of curbside collection services today. According to the survey noted above, 70% of respondents in unincorporated King County report cost as a reason for not subscribing to food and yard waste collection service. A July 2022 survey of residents across King County showed that 75% of respondents rated their monthly cost of garbage and recycling service as “poor” or “only fair.” There is no low-income discount program for curbside collection in unincorporated King County in the current rate structure and many cities do not provide one either.
- **Service quality and continuing to meet customer expectations.** Over half of respondents in a July 2022 survey of King County residents rated the overall quality of their garbage and recycling pick-up service as “poor” or “only fair.” Customer perceptions of curbside service need to be better understood through discussions with community members, haulers, and the Department of Local Services.
- **Addressing the needs and concerns of industry partners.** Changes in collection will be implemented by haulers. There may be factors such as supply chain, staffing availability, and



other implementation logistics that affect how quickly new requirements can be implemented for residents. SWD will also have to work to address processor concerns around contamination of collected material.

- **Continuing to promote food waste prevention in parallel.** Preventing food waste in the first place is better for climate impacts. Food waste prevention can also help mitigate some of the “ick” factors that are barriers to composting food scraps.

## ESJ Considerations

- Cost impacts and affordability of services if curbside organic collection is a requirement.
- Public process informing the food diversion action should ensure multicultural audiences, particularly in South King County (including Skyway and White Center), are included with in-language options.
- Education and outreach for any subsequent policy should be translated and transcreated into appropriate languages.

## Next Steps

- Phase One (2023):
  - Public engagement on collection services
  - Develop policy proposals for food/yard waste diversion in unincorporated King County.
  - Compile data on each city's current recycling, composting and garbage collection, diversion rates, tonnage and actions already taken towards zero-waste goals and develop score cards to make it easy to see each jurisdictions progress.
  - Engage cities to identify what actions they also may be able to take.
- Phase Two (2024-2026):
  - Following phase one public and cities engagement, seek to pass and implement code changes, with effective dates as timing allows (potentially 2025-2026).

### *Questions?*

Email  
RePlus@kingcounty.gov

