

City of Medford Waste & Recycling System Public Workshop Summary

This document summarizes the input received from community members present at the “Medford Talks Trash” public workshop hosted by the City of Medford on Zoom on Tuesday, November 29, 2022. Twelve community members attended the virtual workshop along with seven members of Medford’s Solid Waste Taskforce, two City of Medford staff and one intern (City staff), and two consultants from Strategy Zero Waste Solutions, Jeremy Drake and Gary Liss.

1. Purpose

The City of Medford is preparing for the release of a request for proposals (RFP) for new solid waste and recycling collection services. The purpose of the workshop was to present to the public and collect feedback on collection service changes being considered. The proposed changes have been developed by Medford’s Solid Waste Taskforce with assistance from City staff and consultants.

2. Workshop Structure

The workshop included a presentation on Medford’s current solid waste and recycling system. Additionally, three topic area presentations were followed by small group discussions and full group report backs. The three topic areas were: basic services, bulky items, and additional services. The consultants facilitated the discussions. Taskforce members acted as scribes and reported back on the results of the small group discussions.

3. Polls

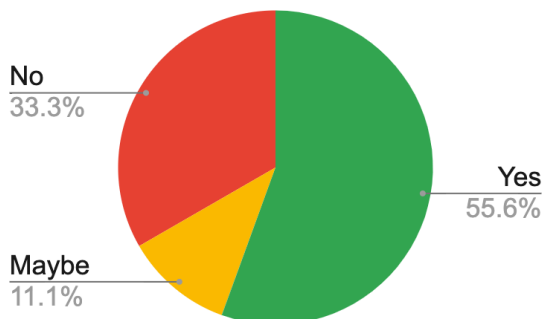
Prior to the workshop presentations and discussions, all attendees were asked to respond to two poll questions. The first poll question sought demographic information and revealed 80% of attendees (16 of 20 responding) were residents in buildings with 3 or fewer units. The second poll question asked if attendees would be interested in Every Other Week (EOW) trash collection if weekly food scraps collection were provided. Fifty-six percent of attendees (10 of 18 responding) answered “yes,” 11% (2 of 18 responding) answered “maybe,” and 33% (6 of 18 responding) answered “no.” See *Chart A: Workshop Pre-Discussion Poll Results* on page 2.

After the basic services discussion, attendees were polled again on the EOW trash question. Sixty percent of attendees (12 of 20 responding) answered “yes,” 15% (3 of 20 responding) answered “maybe,” and 25% (5 of 20 responding) answered “no.” See *Chart B: Workshop Post-Discussion Poll Results* on page 2.

The high percentage of “yes” votes in both polls suggests that a majority of the attendees may have been Medford waste reduction “true believers.” In fact, many attendees reported that they already subscribe to a compost collection service. One may come to the same conclusion when comparing both workshop poll responses to the responses to the same question in the online residential survey launched in September 2020. In the online survey, 21% percent of respondents (150 of 703 responding) answered “yes,” 19% (136 of 703 responding) answered

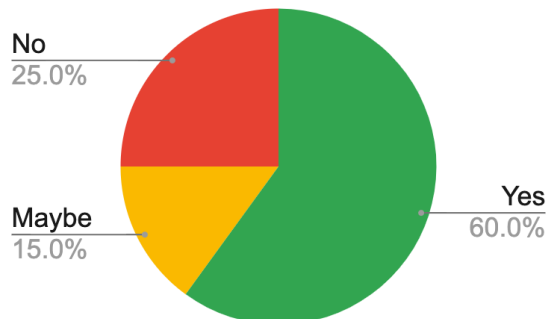
“maybe,” and 59% (417 of 703 responding) answered “no.” See *Chart C: Online Residential Survey Results – EOW Trash Collection Question*.

Chart A: Workshop Pre-Discussion Poll Results – EOW Trash Collection Question



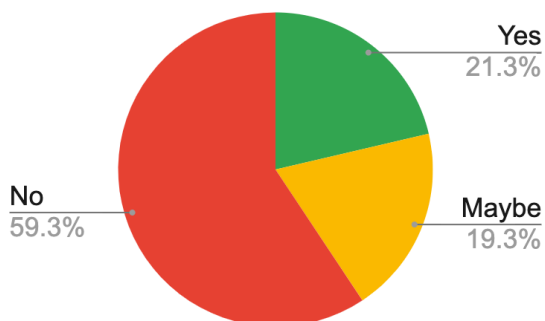
R=18

Chart B: Workshop Post-Discussion Poll Results – EOW Trash Collection Question



R=20

Chart C: Online Residential Survey Results – EOW Trash Collection Question



R=703

The slight reduction in the percentage of “no” votes in the workshop poll suggests that information about EOW trash/weekly composting and the opportunity to understand its benefits is an effective approach to building program buy-in. The poll results also support the Taskforce’s assertion that public outreach and education will play a critical role in helping residents understand the benefits of the EOW trash/weekly composting approach if the City chooses to pursue it.

4. Basic Services Discussion

All attendees were in favor of extending yard waste and leaf collection to 20 weeks.

One of the two breakout groups reported a “strong consensus” for EOW trash with food scraps weekly. A large majority of the other breakout group also supported that collection approach.

Attendees emphasized that **education about composting and recycling is necessary to change behavior**. One specific idea was to print information about what is acceptable directly

on the carts and cart lids. Attendees were overwhelmingly in favor of such “visual aids” and other educational materials. Attendees agreed that significant outreach and education would be required to help people overcome the composting “ick” factor. Key areas for education discussed were understanding acceptable materials and the public health safety of the composting process (e.g. dirty tissues can be safely collected and composted).

Overall, attendees did not take issue with the proposal to stay with EOW recycling collection. No attendees expressed a preference for weekly recycling collection. This is in stark contrast to the residential survey results where 69.5% of respondents (480 of 691 responding) indicated they needed increased recycling collection.

One attendee asked how many carts of each stream would be allowed for a residential property of 3 units under the basic level of service. This is an issue that has not yet been addressed by the Taskforce.

One attendee expressed interest in having residential properties with 4 or more units be included in the basic level of service. This topic was not discussed in depth.

Input on the specific collection program elements—Every Other Week (EOW) Trash, Weekly Compost Collection, and Every Other Week (EOW) Recycling—is summarized below.

4.1 – Every Other Week (EOW) Trash Collection

Disposable diapers: Attendees’ primary issue of concern regarding EOW trash collection was disposable diapers (adult as well as infant) and, to a lesser extent, pet poop. There was concern that households with those waste streams would need weekly collection. Were the City to opt for EOW trash as the basic level of service, providing residents with the option to pay for additional service to get weekly collection is one possible solution. Respondents to the RFP could be asked to provide a price on a per household basis for additional service.

Rodents: Rodents were also an issue of concern. Some attendees believed that trash would still attract rodents even if all food scraps were separated for collection in carts with latching lids. Attendees expressed that overflow bags may exacerbate the rodent problem as they are easy targets for rats. The Taskforce has discussed the rodent issue and understands that the Medford Health Department endorses the use of the carts with latching lids as an effective rodent deterrent.

4.2 – Weekly Compost Collection

Early adopters endorse it: Several attendees already use weekly compost collection services and others compost in backyards. Two attendees switched from backyard composting to collection service and expressed preference for collection saying it is easier, more efficient, and can include more food scraps

(e.g. meat and dairy). One participant mentioned that they share their 13-gallon cart with the house next door and that it is very rarely filled.

Kitchen caddies and bags: The question about kitchen caddies and compostable bags came up. Attendees expressed preference for the City providing kitchen caddies and at least an initial supply of compostable bags to get people started with weekly composting collection. One attendee explained that Garbage to Gardens provides a fresh compostable bag for curbside carts every week, which helps keep the carts clean.

4.3 – Every Other Week (EOW) Recycling

Dual-Stream Recycling: The question came up of whether dual-stream collection of recyclables (containers separate from paper/cardboard) would have economic benefits for Medford. The closest dual-stream Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) is located in Brockton, MA, 42 miles from Medford city center.¹ By comparison, the single-stream MRF currently processing Medford’s recyclables is located in Boston, 4 miles from Medford city center.² Information about MRFs in the New Jersey area suggests that savings can be achieved on the processing side of up to \$30-40/ton for materials collected dual-stream.³ Asking respondents to provide pricing information for both single- and dual-stream recycling collection systems is one possible approach to understanding if changing to dual-stream would have economic benefits for the City of Medford.

5. Bulky Items

All attendees supported charging residents a portion of the cost of collection and disposal for bulky items. Attendees thought that a fee of \$5-\$10 per item would be reasonable. One suggestion was for a variable rate for different sizes of items. Respondents to the RFP could be asked to provide a price list for collection and disposal of specific bulky items. If the costs are variable, the City could base its charges to residents to track with the variable costs.

The Taskforce may want to consider if it would like to include prioritizing reuse and recycling over incinerator disposal of bulky items in the RFP.

One concern that arose was around the possible link between the switch to a “resident pays” model for bulky item collection and illegal dumping. In 2021, the Mattress Recycling Council commissioned a white paper on the topic of illegal dumping. The [executive summary](#) concludes:

Drivers of illegal dumping include barriers to proper disposal (high disposal fees, lack of curbside collection services, inconvenient collection sites, etc.), as well as site-specific characteristics (poorly maintained locations, lack of “community ownership” of spaces, etc.). Also playing a role in illegal dumping are socio-economic factors (dense

¹ The Brockton MRF is owned by Republic Services

² The Boston MRF is owned by Casella.

³ Bayshore Industries, Gary Sondermeyer, VP Operations

populations, high mobility rates among residents, etc.) and attitudes about illegal dumping and the environment. Illegal dumping results from some combination of these factors.

The [full report](#) suggests “numerous potential strategies for preventing and deterring illegal dumping, including focusing on prevention versus mitigation, building awareness among residents, fostering community engagement, encouraging collaboration among stakeholders, enacting appropriate policies and legislation, and effectively enforcing illegal dumping measures.”

Education came up again as a key strategy to inform the public on the opportunities to manage bulky items appropriately.

All attendees were in favor of seasonal “Community Dump” drop-off events hosted by the City’s contracted service provider(s).

6. Additional Services

Attendees shared the opinion that current services are not sufficient. Not all attendees were fully aware of the paint shed events.

Attendees are interested in the City attempting to find a lower price for mattress collection services. Current cost for collection is \$55/item.

The following list includes ideas for additional services suggested by attendees:

1. Permanent or event-based Swap Shop for residents to drop-off or take usable items or at no cost
2. City-sponsored electronics recycling events or promote existing events at schools
3. A CHaRM (Center for Hard-to-Recycle Materials) a one-stop-shop for hard-to-recycle household items including:
 - a. Household hazardous waste
 - b. Light bulbs
 - c. Batteries
 - d. Sharps, Dtyrofoam
 - e. Non-recyclable glass and china
4. A Styrofoam Recycling Day, either collection-based or drop-off, to collect block styrofoam found in product packaging