

Recycling Advisory Committee (RAC) Meeting

November 12, 2025, 8:00am – 9:30am

Minute Taker: Dailey Brannin

Hybrid Meeting

Members present: Dailey Brannin, Dave Demme, Tracie Gordon, Sakiko Isomichi, Debby Knight, Elka Kuhlman, Emily Lee, Richard Nurse, Carlie Peters, Dawn Quirk, Diane Roseman, Meera Singh, Helen Snively, Quentin Steenhuis, Rob Vandenabeele, Stephanie Wasiuk

Members absent: Debby Galef

Staff Present: Mike Orr

Public present: Janet Domenitz, Courtney Forrester, Sarah Gleeson, Tamene Tedla, Amy Waltz

1. Housekeeping

- Vote on October 2025 Minutes passed
- Call for new RAC members. Please email Mike whether you plan to submit for reappointment by 11/30. There's two more weeks to apply. Interested applicants have to apply officially through city website.

2. City Updates & discussion

- Waste Sort discussion
 - 5+ RAC members helped with waste sort! Results aren't ready yet, but so far it seems like there's still lots of food waste in trash. Not much e-waste.
 - How to continue to promote composting with residents by using the argument that compost containers are more secure and more durable against rodents.
 - Carts can sometimes get mixed up after pickup because of how drivers empty them.
 - Textile drop-off bins can take anything except wet/moldy/oily. No need to pre-sort – give everything to Helpsy! They may say “pairs please” but even single shoes, socks, etc. are accepted.
 - There's no metal recovery once something metal is in the trash, unless it's a really large item. City can make money from dropped off scrap metal at the Recycle Center.
 - City staff and volunteers have done “oops tags” outreach before, and “thank you for composting”
 - Overall quantity of waste: trash has gone down a lot. The number of bldgs serviced has gone up – 33,000ish out of 57,000ish. Some of the data is hard to be precise with because of what qualifies as a household (lots of grad student housing).
 - If you see egregious contamination issues or other waste concerns, you can send them to Mike rather than See Click Fix.
- City collects trash from two sections of two different collection routes (i.e. Monday & Thursday trash routes).
- Sort waste into 8-10 categories. Here are the high-level results from previous sorts.

	2022	2019	2016
Recyclables	13.0%	13.2%	16.7%
Organics (food waste + non-food organics)	29.0%	26.4%	41.5%
Textiles	4.5%	3.4%	4.2%

Metal & e-waste	5.3%	1.4%	2.8%
Trash	48.2%	55.6%	34.8%
TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

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- Cart requests managed by DPW. Over last 12 months:
 - 1,100 requests for yard waste stickers, flyers, etc.
 - 2,700 properties requested cart swap/deliveries, nearly 25% of all residential buildings.
 - In 2021, we managed 60 deliveries per week. Citywide inventory was 30,000 carts
 - In 2025, we average 110 deliveries per week. Citywide inventory is 60,000 carts
 - Recycle carts: Most are now 15 years old; many will be breaking in coming years.
 - Trash carts: Still dealing with Otto trash cart defect. We swap out 10 per week. City using our warranty to get fixed carts.
 - A lot of DPW time is spent managing this kind of stuff!
 - The defect is that the “apron” is very brittle (front plate of bin). It’s stressed during collection mechanism use, can get cracked easily, and then is no longer serviceable
 - DPW recycles all the carts when they’re broken down – they take off metal, wheels and then recycle the hard plastic through Casella.
 - Cart requests can be done online.
 - Carts can be marked to hopefully help them not go missing. Marking can fade quickly. Maybe a community project to mark/paint your bin!
- MassDEP announcement on food waste:
 - Stage 1: On or after Nov. 1 2028. Commercial Organics Ban threshold reducing from 0.5 tons per week to zero. Consider exemption for businesses with incidental food waste (e.g., offices with lunch-room waste, medical offices, non-food retail, etc.). Would most likely include all schools (assuming they have a cafeteria)
 - Stage 2: On or after Nov. 1 2030. Residential Organics Ban. Municipalities with specified program would be considered compliant
 - Positive news for Cambridge. Shows alignment with state goals/projects.
 - Different possible mechanisms for implementing this.
- Pumpkins and leaves: We want as much as you can give us!
- New Recycle & YW collection contract with Casella Waste Systems (contract previously signed with Save That Stuff before Casella acquired STS).
 - 2 full EVs joining the fleet.
 - This was part of the contract
 - DPW currently has 3 EVs for daily collection and a 4th arrives in Spring 2026.
 - Whole fleet is – 4 EVs out of 17 for DPW collection. 13 are out each day.
 - Casella will collect from up to 325 small businesses, twice per week. Up from 280 currently.
- Big Belly installations this Fall: City installing 200 double stations to improve rodent control and to increase the number of stations with recycling. In 2018, there were approx 180 public area recycle bins. By end of 2025, we estimate approx 500.
 - Getting rid of the open-topped ones – almost all will be gone! This will also increase number of recycling bins. Many more trash bins now have recycling bins next to them.

- Big Belly does food waste now – Boulder had experimented with it but didn't work when compost vendor didn't want compostables, just food scraps. Northeastern has also added them – campuses can be more closed systems.

Timeline of ZWMP ordinance changes: Right now the proposed changes are still with Law Department; going to city council afterwards. Still in holding pattern. It could be helpful to lobby for the changes to city council, especially with the money-saving argument.

- Recollect (aka Zero Waste Cambridge app) metrics:

Views	Title
844	Clothes/Textiles (any condition)
347	Air conditioner
335	Couch/Sofa/Recliner
287	Mattress & Box Spring
235	Television (diagonal over 20")
210	Battery (non-alkaline)
151	Plastic bag
146	Battery (alkaline)
146	Small appliances
128	Paint - latex

- Waste:
 - 7,200 weekly reminders for waste collection
 - 300 searches per day in Get Rid of It Right on instructions on how to dispose of something. Top searches:
 - 6,600 downloads of Zero Waste Cambridge app
 - 10,000 people have played sorting game. Most misunderstood materials:
 - This is since they first published it 7 years ago.

Material	Correct Stream	Incorrect Streams
Metal hangers	Recycling Center: 2,624 (34%)	Incorrect: 5,056 (66%) Recycling: 1,805 (24%) Trash: 1,662 (22%) Yard Waste: 606 (8%) Compost: 569 (8%) Household Hazardous Waste Event: 414 (6%)
Medications	Household Hazardous Waste Event: 2,701 (44%)	Incorrect: 3,357 (56%) Trash: 1,131 (19%) Recycling: 674 (12%) Compost: 564 (10%) Recycling Center: 529 (9%) Yard Waste: 459 (8%)
Soiled pizza box	Recycling: 2,638 (44%)	Incorrect: 3,227 (56%) Trash: 1,694 (29%) Compost: 1,037 (18%) Yard Waste: 264 (5%) Recycling Center: 166 (3%) Household Hazardous Waste Event: 66 (2%)
Aerosol can (full)	Household Hazardous Waste Event: 2,588 (46%)	Incorrect: 3,016 (54%) Trash: 921 (17%) Recycling: 689 (13%) Recycling Center: 619 (12%) Yard Waste: 420 (8%) Compost: 367 (7%)
DVDs and CDs	Trash: 2,620 (48%)	Incorrect: 2,776 (52%)

		Recycling Center: 1,123 (21%) Recycling: 810 (16%) Household Hazardous Waste Event: 573 (11%) Yard Waste: 157 (3%) Compost: 113 (3%)
Cell phone	Recycling Center: 2,744 (49%)	Incorrect: 2,756 (51%) Household Hazardous Waste Event: 1,088 (20%) Trash: 646 (12%) Recycling: 565 (11%) Yard Waste: 231 (5%) Compost: 226 (5%)
Paper coffee cup <i>* This material's streams have changed so this data may appear inaccurate.</i>	Trash: 2,625 (49%)	Incorrect: 2,708 (51%) Recycling: 1,385 (26%) Compost: 912 (18%) Yard Waste: 142 (3%) Recycling Center: 138 (3%) Trash: 93 (2%) Household Hazardous Waste Event: 38 (1%)
Paper towel	Compost: 2,662 (49%)	Incorrect: 2,696 (51%) Recycling: 1,101 (21%) Trash: 1,096 (21%) Yard Waste: 228 (5%) Recycling Center: 190 (4%) Household Hazardous Waste Event: 81 (2%)
Cooking oil	Trash: 2,654 (51%)	Incorrect: 2,470 (49%) Compost: 944 (19%) Household Hazardous Waste Event: 512 (10%) Recycling Center: 416 (9%) Recycling: 382 (8%) Yard Waste: 216 (5%)
Milk cartons <i>* This material's streams have changed so this data may appear inaccurate.</i>	Trash: 2,835 (54%)	Incorrect: 2,396 (46%) Recycling: 1,560 (30%) Compost: 462 (9%) Recycling Center: 198 (4%) Yard Waste: 93 (2%) Trash: 49 (1%) Household Hazardous Waste Event: 34 (1%)
Plastic cutlery	Trash: 2,874 (58%)	Incorrect: 2,009 (42%) Recycling: 1,493 (31%) Recycling Center: 189 (4%) Compost: 170 (4%) Yard Waste: 90 (2%) Household Hazardous Waste Event: 67 (2%)
Pet fur	Trash: 2,861 (58%)	Incorrect: 1,992 (42%) Compost: 1,109 (23%) Yard Waste: 685 (15%) Recycling: 97 (2%) Household Hazardous Waste Event: 64 (2%) Recycling Center: 37 (1%)

- Short discussion around Get Rid of It Right: We can add more items, but have to keep it simple for ease of keyword search.
- Redeemables: there aren't many redemption outlets left in Cambridge. Some stores only take items that they sell – it has to be a label and flavor that's on their shelf.
- Street Cleaning:
 - 17,750 individuals receiving reminders
 - Short discussion around need for cleaner streets. Could do more promotion on “storm drain stewards” and more ways to keep existing stewards accountable.
 - Street sweeping is contracted out. Could be some creative ways to add more street sweeping without having to update signs, update resident practices, etc. (such as sweeping on streets that don't have parking on one side anyway).
 - More expensive to dispose of street sweeping waste than trash

3. Closing

Public Comment - none

- Action Plan/Decisions
 - Apply for the RAC!
 - Getting a group together to look at Get Rid of It Right
- Announcements

Upcoming Meetings

- December 10
- January 14, 2026