

Austin Environmental Leaders Support Curbside Composting for All

September 4, 2015

Mayor Adler and Council:

As leaders in Austin's efforts for a more sustainable future, we are urging you to maintain your commitment to Zero Waste and climate protection by extending curbside organics collection to all Austin Resource Recovery customers. We recognize the importance of providing this service and urge you to support it.

Organics collection should not be treated as an extra, add-on service; instead, we should see our current lack of service as a serious deficit. Organics decompose without oxygen in landfills, thus producing methane, a greenhouse gas 86 times more potent than CO₂ over a 20 year period. When composted, however, these materials break down in a different way and produce much less methane gas. Instead, they provide a valuable soil amendment which retains water more effectively and restores important nutrients to our depleted soils. Austin residents and our elected officials have repeatedly expressed support for climate protection, Zero Waste, water conservation, and local food production. Curbside composting is crucial for all of these policies.

Furthermore, a subscription-only system for composting is unsustainable. This sort of program has been tried in many other cities, and they have repeatedly failed to accomplish the basic goals of any diversion program—reducing waste sent to landfills—while still creating major costs for city services. Among the latest cities to learn this lesson is San Antonio, which is transitioning their subscription-only organics program into a universal, citywide service beginning next month. If San Antonio can do this, why can't Austin?

We understand that this program—which is not precisely a new service, but is rather an improvement of our existing yard waste program—has a cost associated with it, but this is an investment which will have significant, identifiable savings for residents. Three-quarters of Austin residents will be able to lower their overall utility bills by switching to a smaller trash container, with savings of more than \$18 a month for some residents. Once the program is widely adopted, the city will be able to pick up trash every other week, with potential savings well into the millions of dollars annually. Finally, every ton of material diverted from landfills delays the day when Austin will need new or expanded landfills. Building and permitting a new landfill costs \$30-80 million and has a tremendous negative impact on the community saddled with it. A subscription-only program will do little to avoid or delay these costs; extending this program to all residents will pay dividends to all Austin residents.

For all of these reasons, for the sake of our climate, our land, our food, our water, our affordability as a city and our sustainability as a community, we urge you to support curbside composting as a universal service for all Austin Resource Recovery customers. We look forward to seeing you lead on this issue moving forward.

Sincerely,

Save Our Springs Alliance

Sierra Club, Austin Local Group

Texas Campaign for the Environment

Texas League of Conservation Voters

George Cofer

David Foster, State Director, Clean Water Action

Beki Halpin, Faith and Energy Action Team (FEAT)

Alden Larrick, Ecology Action of Texas

Jere Locke Texas Drought Project

Joep Meijer, Founder and Chair, Climate Buddies

Courtney Meijer, Avid Composter and Zero Waste shopper

Bruce Melton, P.E., CEO Climate Change Now Initiative

Luke Metzger, Director, Environment Texas

Mary Ann Neely

Robin Rather, CEO Collective Strength

Cyrus Reed, Lone Star Chapter, Sierra Club

Ted Siff, Austin Environmental Democrats supporter

Sara E. Smith, Staff Attorney, Environment Texas

Kevin Tuerff, President, Enviro Media

Tane Ward, Equilibrio Norte

Kaiba White, Public Citizen