

## **CURBSIDE COMPOST TALKING POINTS**

### **The Pilot Program Has Worked**

Austin Resource Recovery has been operating a curbside composting pilot for 3 years now, reaching over 14,000 households.

These families have diverted an average of 9 additional pounds per family per week of material away from landfills—more than 3,000 tons per year just for the pilot program. Participation has varied over time and across the city, but the pilot shows that with solid education a solid majority of residents will use the service.

### **There is Strong Community Support for Curbside Composting**

Between petition signatures, emails, letters, phone calls, and other contacts the Austin City Council has had more than 26,000 contacts regarding this program, with supporters in all 10 council districts.

The 7,500 letters generated by constituents is larger than the margin of victory in every single Council district in 2014.

### **Curbside Composting Will Help Working Families Save Money**

Three-quarters of Austin Resource Recovery customers have one of the two largest carts, and half of what we throw away could be composted. By downsizing carts they can more than make up the cost of the new service.

Testimonials from pilot customers have indicated that even large families have been able to switch to the smallest cart by using their compost bin. That's a savings of nearly \$77 a year from the typical 64-gallon cart size, or nearly \$300 a year if they have the largest, 96-gallon cart.

### **Curbside Composting is an Environmental Justice Issue**

Area waste facilities tend to be located in lower income areas predominantly populated by people of color. Reducing the trash sent to these communities reduces negative impacts on their health and quality of life.

Organic trash is particularly harmful to these communities, source of some of the worst odors, attracting pests, and producing some of the most significant risks of landfill fires.

Low income and working class families are the least likely to have the time, space, resources, or energy to do home composting. This service gives them access to this necessary diversion strategy.

### **Curbside Composting Will Create New Good Jobs**

This program is expected to create 53 new jobs, most of them in collections—a living wage working class job open to communities with obstacles to employment. These employees will also be eligible to join a union.

### **Curbside Composting is Necessary for Austin to Reach Its Zero Waste Goals**

Nearly half of Austin's landfill trash is compostable, and despite a robust local home composting culture, most families still cannot divert this material without curbside service. It is impossible to reach our 75% diversion benchmark in 2020 or our 90% diversion goal by 2040 without this service.

Diverting our putrescible materials will give us the chance to consider switching to bi-weekly trash collection, a savings of as much as \$7 million a year.

### **Curbside Composting is Crucial for Preventing and Preparing for Climate Change**

Organic waste rots in landfills, producing methane gas. Methane can have even worse climate impacts than carbon dioxide, and so diverting food waste away from landfills is necessary for Austin to meet its climate goals.

Compost also captures carbon in our soils, sequestering it—an added benefit for our climate.

These climate benefits are why the Joint Sustainability Committee has recommended that the City implement curbside composting.

Widespread compost use—which will be easier and less expensive with curbside composting—retains more water, prevents erosion, and enables more local food production, all of which are crucial for increasing the resiliency of our community in the face of climate change.

### **Compost Conserves Water**

A full-grown Live Oak grown in compost uses 75% less water than a tree grown in normal soil.

Compost can hold 20 times its weight in water.

We have lots of water right now, but climate change could mean an ongoing “drought/deluge” cycle where dry conditions are broken up by periodic wet seasons. We will need to retain as much water as possible during dry seasons and to prevent erosion of valuable top soils during the wet—compost makes this possible.

There are few solutions for outdoor water conservation beyond “don’t water.” For folks that want green landscaping while conserving water compost is a solution.

### **Compost Strengthens Soils, Helps Food Production**

It takes 1,000 years to create 3 centimeters of topsoil and the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization reported in 2014 that at current rates of degradation all of the world’s topsoil will be lost in the next 60 years.

Compost application reduces soil loss by at least 86%. One study by the Connecticut Department of Transportation found that soil loss in rights of way not treated with compost was a full order of magnitude worse than those rights of way treated with compost.

Landfilling food waste means burying nutrients in a place where they are removed from the food cycle forever. Composting returns these crucial nutrients to the soil, making our food healthier.

Less than 1% of Austin’s food is produced locally—we need to increase that for the sake of resiliency. Compost make soil more productive and helps to produce more food in less space.

### **Subscription-Only Programs Do Not Work**

Many other communities—including San Antonio—have tried subscription-only compost collection. More or less all of these programs have eventually cancelled this system, either eliminating compost collection altogether or switching to citywide service. The costs are roughly the same for a tiny fraction of the benefit.

In our case, such a system makes even less sense in that these collection vehicles and staff will be operating at every home anyways for our existing yard waste organics service. Only collecting food waste from some homes for a significantly larger cost to those families is not sustainable—fees would need to go up and down on a nearly monthly basis as new customers were added or dropped the service, thus prompting new signups or cancellations, thus changing fees again for all customers.

Lower income families should not be denied necessary services because they can’t afford luxury pricing.

### **The City Should Accelerate Rollout of the Service by One Year**

The current proposal would phase in service over 4 years, with service reaching all ARR customers by 2020. A fairer, better solution would be to phase in over 3 years with service reaching everybody by 2019. This makes sure that we collect more materials and that residents paying for the service before it reaches them won’t have to wait as long.