

Municipal Waste Subcommittee Interim Report DRAFT

March 2021

In Laramie, [40% of carbon emissions](#) come from waste generation. To help the City of Laramie's [commitment to](#) reduce carbon emissions, the Municipal Waste Subcommittee was formed with the Environmental Advisory Committee, with the aim of identifying ways to reduce emissions from waste collection.

As a subcommittee, we propose that the City of Laramie undertakes a series of short- and long-term actions to improve the waste management system. These efforts will reduce the diversion rate (the rate at which materials are diverted into landfills) and streamline waste operations, all which could help reduce the emissions from waste generation.

Short-term actions

- 1) *Reduce contamination in curbside recycling through an education campaign.* Over the past few years, contamination in municipal recycling has exceeded 15%, which is the benchmark where the processor that takes the recycling will charge an additional fee. This fee has cost the City of Laramie thousands of dollars annually. Contamination consists of a variety of bagged recyclables, textiles such as pillows and clothes, green waste, glass, and incorrect plastics. Reducing contamination saves the City of Laramie money, helps produce a higher quality waste product that is more marketable, ensures that recyclable materials don't just end up in a landfill, and leaves more space for items that can actually be recycled.



Above: Contamination removed from a recent recycling load. Removing contamination adds to the workload of the employees in the Solid Waste Division, and plastic bags can damage the machines used to handle the recycling.
Image from JR Slingerland.

Laramie [is not alone](#) in the issue of contamination in recycling, which means that we can draw from the experiences of other cities to inform our own efforts. Other cities and

organizations recommend that educational campaigns focused on clear, consistent, and individualized messaging to substantially reduce contamination in recycling. Cities such as [Lafayette, Louisiana](#), [Grand Rapids, Michigan](#), and [Apopka, Florida](#), have embarked on “Feet on the Street” endeavors, where employees, contractors, or volunteers look in each residential recycling bin to visually assess whether the bin contains contaminants and place a tag on the bin. If the bin contains a contaminant, the viewer will mark which contaminant they found in the bin on a tag that they then attach to the bin. If the bin does not contain a contaminant, their good behavior is rewarded by receiving a tag indicating their proper recycling technique.

In addition, cities have embarked on focused, targeted campaigns focused around the biggest contaminant in their recycling. By sending out mailers, making information available in both usual (e.g., newspapers, utility bills, applications) and unusual spots (e.g., a short message while on hold, farmer’s markets), cities can increase compliance with recycling.

We recommend that the City of Laramie embark on a feet-on-the street campaign to provide individualized feedback on the source of contamination and focused communication around bagging recycling, the biggest contributor of contamination in Laramie recycling.



Above: Example materials for individualized feedback (left) and top-issue mailers (right). Images from The Recycling Partnership.

Long-term actions

- 1) *Increase diversion rate by developing additional infrastructure for single-stream drop offs and municipal composting.* Multiple apartments, multi-family homes, and businesses around Laramie do not have access to curbside recycling, even though they may be interested in recycling. A recycling drop-off facility that is in town could make recycling

more accessible to all residents of Laramie, helping to increase diversion rate to landfills. This facility could be open for only a few hours a week and monitored by a network of volunteers to ensure compliance with recycling protocols. The cost of maintaining the facility could be recovered by a small fee at the drop-off location, a fee added to a utility bill, or a tax spread out over the municipality. This drop-off point could be modified to include drop-off capacity for more specific items as programs become available, such as food scraps for farms or a municipal composting program, [denim](#), etc.

We recommend that the City of Laramie starts investigating city-owned property that could be converted into such a facility.

- 2) *Develop a waste diversion goal plan and timeline that fits within the City of Laramie's plan to reduce carbon emissions.* Making significant headway on diverting waste from the landfill requires benchmarks and evidence to assess success, as well as public and political buy-in.

We recommend that the City of Laramie develops a municipal waste diversion plan to provide a framework for guiding future action.