

Factors Affecting Staunton's Recycling Program

Why is it important to the City of Staunton to offer a recycling program?

The City offers curbside pickup of items for recycling and a recycling center to make recycling easier for residents and to encourage good environmental stewardship. Recycling helps the City reduce waste and minimize the volume of materials sent to the regional landfill.

When did the City's recycling collection begin?

The City has offered curbside recycling for residents since the early 1990s. When the curbside program first began, only newspaper, plastic #1 (water and soda bottles) and plastic #2 (milk and laundry detergent containers), glass (separated by color), and aluminum and tin cans were collected. A short time later, the City opened a community recycling site at Gypsy Hill Park, where residents of the Staunton and Augusta County and City businesses could deposit newspaper and glass. The City has since expanded its collection to include more recycled items.

How has the City's recycling collection evolved since the 1990s?

After repeated citizen requests for curbside collection of mixed paper, which include newspapers, magazines, books, white paper, cardboard, books, paperboard, etc., and mixed plastics #1 through #7, the City added these materials to its curbside collection in 2012. The City also expanded the recycling center at the park, adding mixed paper, mixed plastic, bi-metal/aluminum cans, and cardboard to the list of accepted materials.

What happens to recycled items after the City collects them?

The City has an agreement with Sonoco Recycling in Fishersville for recycling collection. All materials collected in the City are taken to Sonoco Recycling, an initial collection site where the materials are processed and readied for shipment to various states.

How many tons of recycled material does the city collect on average?

During the 2017 fiscal year – the most recent year for which figures are available – the City collected approximately 1,012 tons, 184 of which were collected at the park and approximately 828 of which were collected curbside.

What changes are occurring in the recycling market?

The recycling market is struggling. Global trade policies, leveling growth rates in foreign countries, and economics have all contributed to a dynamic change in the recycling market. Much of the domestic reclaimed waste is shipped overseas; however, new limits imposed by China have led to a steady decline in demand. Low oil prices have made it cheaper to produce new plastic bottles, so manufacturers have no incentive to use reclaimed plastic. Packaging producers have been able to make cans and bottles thinner, resulting in significantly lower need for raw materials. Circulation of print newspaper has plummeted, so the recycling industry has lost their primary customer for reclaimed paper fiber and their primary source of incoming recyclable material. The glass market has also suffered, and there is very little demand for recycled glass. All of these factors have resulted in a stressed recycling market.

How might the recycling market's struggles impact residents and businesses?

Due to the struggling recycling market, Sonoco Recycling has implemented a new rate structure. Currently, the City is not charged a rental fee, also known as a "pull" fee, for collection at the park. Beginning August 1, the five containers at the recycling center in the park will be subject to a monthly rental fee of \$75 per container per month. Additionally, the City will also be assessed a pull fee of \$100, each time a container is transported from the park to Sonoco Recycling's facility in Fishersville. On average, the City requires 13 pulls per month. Based on current usage, the new rate structure for containers will result in additional, annual costs to the City of \$20,000.

On August 1, the City will also be subject to a revised rate structure imposed by Sonoco for materials (as distinguished from charges for the use and transport of the containers). At present, it is anticipated that the City will receive payment only for collected cardboard and aluminum, and not for other collected materials. For other collected materials, the City will incur charges to Sonoco (i) for mixed paper, in the amount of \$50.00 per ton, (ii) for commingled plastic, in the amount of \$60.00 per ton, and (iii) for glass, in the amount of \$32.50 per ton.

How will rate increases for recycling collection affect the City's recycling program?

Residents will not experience a rate increase or any immediate impact as a result of the changes in fees. There will, however, be a significant cost increase to the City to continue the program. In fiscal year 2017 – the most recent year for which figures are available – charges to Sonoco totaled \$3,100. This fiscal year, the City expects the charges to increase to \$52,000. That figure includes charges for both the park facility and curbside collection. The park facility will account for \$28,000 of that total (\$20,000 for use and transport of the containers and \$8,000 for materials). All figures assume no further changes in the recycling market or increases in tonnage collected.

How will the City manage the new rates? Will recycling collection continue?

The recycling program in the City is not intended to be a revenue generator. While there is an additional burden now placed on the program, the City believes the costs can be absorbed through the spring of 2019. City staff will continue to monitor the recycling program, reviewing alternatives that are more efficient and effective with the goal of maintaining a strong program and reducing the costs to the City. The City will reevaluate the issue during the fiscal year 2020 budget process to determine whether any rate structure or program adjustments are necessary.