



Providence City Council
City of Providence

**SPECIAL COMMISSION FOR THE STUDY OF PROVIDENCE'S WASTE
MANAGEMENT SERVICES REPORT
September 25, 2024**

Introduction

On June 20, 2024, the Providence City Council passed [Resolution 45599](#), establishing the **Special Commission for the Study of Providence's Waste Management Services**. The commission was formed to evaluate the city's waste management practices and identify opportunities for improvement in efficiency, sustainability, and cost-effectiveness.

Providence stands out among Rhode Island municipalities for its **robust waste management services**, offering a broad range of collection options, including household waste, recycling, yard waste, and bulky item pick-up. This extensive service provides a level of convenience and accessibility that many other cities and towns do not offer. However, when **service interruptions** occur, they can have an impact on our residents, causing frustration. The Commission acknowledges that these interruptions, though disruptive, are **infrequent**.

As part of the city's efforts to continually improve waste management services, one of the primary tools we have is the **Request for Proposal (RFP)** issued for trash and recycling hauling contracts. This document governs how we engage with our service providers and sets the terms for trash and recycling collection. Many of the recommendations in this report focus on **updating and amending the RFP for hauling services**, which last went out to bid in 2017. Our goal is to improve communication with the service provider(s), increase efficiency, and provide clearer expectations. The City will go out to bid for trash and recycling hauling services in October 2024 for a contract to begin in July 2025.

In addition to focusing on the RFP, this report emphasizes the need for a **comprehensive education and enforcement program** led by the **Office of Sustainability**. Many of the issues the city faces, such as **recycling contamination**, stem from non-compliance with existing waste regulations. By educating the public, updating policies, and enforcing rules consistently, we can alleviate many of these challenges.

Currently, **Providence has the lowest recycling rate in the state** and truckloads from recycling collection routes are frequently diverted to the landfill because of high **contamination rates**. This causes the City to exceed the maximum trash tonnage set by the RI Resource Recovery Corporation at a cost of nearly **\$2 million per year to Providence taxpayers**.

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Moreover, the Commission has also identified opportunities for **state legislation advocacy** that will support citywide efforts, such as advocating for bottle deposit legislation and collaborating with other municipalities for better waste infrastructure. Furthermore, recommendations include **infrastructure investments**, such as updating trash and recycling carts, to improve efficiency and sustainability.

Ultimately, the report seeks to answer a central question: **How can we manage success in waste management** through realistic, actionable changes to our system?

Goals

The Commission's primary goals include:

- Reducing city costs related to waste management.
 - Improving customer service for residential waste and recycling.
 - Reducing the tonnage of waste sent to the Central Landfill.
 - Decreasing residential recycling contamination rates.
 - Mitigating the impacts of climate change through waste reduction efforts.
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Commission Members

- Councilwoman Jo-Ann Ryan Ward 5 (Chair)
 - Councilman Pedro Espinal Ward 10 (Vice-Chair)
 - Courtney Hawkins, Chief Operating Officer
 - Shomari Husband, Providence City Treasurer
 - Patricia Coyne Fague Esq., Director of the Department of Public Works
 - Sheila Dormody, Chief of Policy and Resiliency
 - Samantha Burnett, Constituent Services
 - Staff: Miguel Martinez Youngs, Deputy Director of Policy for the City Council
 - Staff: Steven Nelson, Senior Assistant City Solicitor
 - Staff: Sheri A. Petronio, First Deputy City Clerk and Tyla S. Crowder, Assistant Clerk to Deputy Clerks and City Clerk, Department of City Clerk
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Recommendations

Waste and Recycling Hauling Contract Changes

- Require haulers to ensure adequate timing for enforcement inspections before collection.
- Include performance-based incentives for reducing trash tonnage and promote an **opt-in residential composting program**.
- Explore semi-automated collection to allow drivers to inspect cart contents before collection.
- Require expanded communication strategies from the vendor to improve resident awareness and customer satisfaction.
- Mandate more detailed and accurate data from the vendor to inform decision-making.
- Extend yard waste removal periods and explore options for restructuring frequency or amount of bulky waste items for free pick up.
- Consider hiring a recycling coordinator to oversee compliance and education.

State Legislation and Advocacy

- Advocate for **bottle deposit legislation** to promote recycling.
- Partner with other municipalities to advocate for infrastructure investments at RIRRC.

Infrastructure Investment

- Replace current trash and recycling carts with **standardized, right-sized containers**, that include clear recycling instructions.

Operations, Education, and Enforcement

- Implement a **route-based approach** to education and enforcement for targeted improvements.
- Align local enforcement efforts with **RIRRC education campaigns**.
- Support opt-in residential pick-up and drop-off composting programs and **education at libraries and community centers**.
- Expand recycling infrastructure for small businesses.
- Consider setting limits on bulky item pick up frequency or amounts.
- Pilot strategies aimed at reducing illegal dumping, including enhanced enforcement and outreach.

Reducing Waste Tonnage Through Composting

- Expand composting infrastructure for large-scale food waste diversion.
- Provide technical assistance to large-scale food waste producers to comply with state law and begin composting.

- Establish more **backyard composting** programs and drop-off sites.
 - Expand food waste diversion programs in Providence Public Schools and other community based public buildings.
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Appendix

- **July 24, 2024:** [Presentation by Kristin Littlefield, Municipal Program Coordinator at Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation \(RIRRC\), on statewide data and municipal operations.](#)
 - **July 31, 2024:** [Presentation by Patricia Coyne-Fague, Director of Public Works, and her team on Providence's trash hauling services and contract considerations.](#)
 - **August 7, 2024:** [Presentations on waste reduction, composting, and recycling strategies by Priscilla De La Cruz \(Director of Sustainability\), Kevin Budris \(Just Zero\), and other experts.](#)
 - **September 11, 2024:** [Discussion on trash hauling and contract management.](#)
 - **September 18, 2024:** [Review of data and formulation of recommendations.](#)
 - **September 25, 2024:** [Review and passage of final report.](#)
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Conclusion

The Special Commission for the Study of Providence's Waste Management Services has identified several strategies aimed at **comprehensively improving the city's waste management system** through policy adjustments, educational campaigns, and infrastructure investments. By implementing these recommendations, the city can achieve its goals of reducing waste, improving recycling practices, and enhancing sustainability, all while minimizing costs. Ultimately, the commission's efforts are designed to ensure a more **efficient and effective waste management system** for the taxpayers of Providence, delivering better services and maximizing value for the community.