

**2018-2019 BUDGET QUESTION**  
***Response to Request for Information***

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**DEPARTMENT:** Austin Resource Recovery

**REQUEST NO.:** 15

**REQUESTED BY:** Alter

**DATE REQUESTED:** 4/26/18

**DATE POSTED:** 5/1/18

**REQUEST:** Please explain why Austin Resource Recovery is proposing weekly recycling.

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**RESPONSE:**

The City of Austin has a Zero Waste goal to divert 90% of materials from the landfill by the year 2040. The Austin Resource Recovery Master Plan identifies policies and programs to achieve benchmark diversion goals. Increasing recycling opportunities, in this case frequency of residential collection, will not only prevent recyclable materials from being discarded into landfill trash, but also reinforce the importance of diverting materials to a higher use.

Expansion to weekly recycling is included in Austin Resource Recovery's (ARR) forecast for fiscal year 2021. The ARR Master Plan supports, as appropriate, the implementation of weekly recycling and biweekly trash collection among ARR customers when residential diversion reaches 60%. Transitioning to every other week collection for the non-recyclable material leftover in the trash cart will require the City to petition the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to allow for every other week collection.

In 2015, ARR commissioned a City-Serviced Residential Waste Characterization study to measure the waste and diversion metrics from properties serviced directly by the Department. The study found that 44% of the materials in the trash waste stream were traditional recyclable materials (paper, plastics, metals and glass). One of the recommendations from this study was to provide weekly recycling collection:

*"Provide recycling collection service every week. With recyclables currently collected every other week, some households may fill their recycling container to capacity before their collection day or forget to place their container at the curb for collection on the proper week. Increasing the frequency of recyclables collection may increase the quantity of material segregated for recycling. ARR will need to evaluate the collection cost increase relative to the economic and environmental benefits of increased diversion of recyclables from the landfill if this recommendation is considered further."*

In anticipation of this service expansion and weekly recycling additional tonnage, the Department projected the impact on customer rates and diversion rates. The estimates in the table below show a potential increase from 4-10% on the diversion rate.

Weekly Recycling Additional Tonnage	10,000	15,000	20,000	25,000
Estimated Rate Impact (monthly per customer)	\$1.76	\$2.12	\$2.42	\$2.84
Estimated Diversion Rate Percentage Point Increase (assumes trash tonnage decreases by same amount as recycling tonnage increases)	4%	6%	8%	10%

A transition to weekly recycling and every other week collection of trash will require rebalancing routes and transferring assets and personnel from trash collection to recycling collection. Increasing the number of recycling collection routes is expected to require additional staff, vehicles and equipment. ARR is planning to pilot weekly collection for a portion of customers in early 2019. This pilot will provide additional information on operational impacts and diversion potential.

The Department is projecting an increase in the overall diversion rate upon full implementation of the curbside organics program (anticipated in 2020, pending funding approval by Council in future years). Increased recycling and continued education about both the curbside organics and recycling programs should result in lower trash generation. Additionally, ARR is in the process of updating the Master Plan, which will evaluate existing programs and services, and the anticipated impacts on the diversion rate.

In 2016, ARR staff gathered public input to help prioritize residential service expansion. At the time, the Department was considering curbside composting and weekly recycling. The input revealed that there was a large interest in both curbside composting and weekly recycling. Ultimately, ARR moved forward with the curbside composting program, which was approved for full implementation by Council with a phased-in approach over five years.