Austin Pilot Restaurant Recycling & Composting Project

Zero Waste Advisory Commission

November 14, 2012

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A CITY OF AUSTIN SERVICE

OVERVIEW

- Purpose of Pilot Project
- Timeline
- Methodology
- Observations
- Findings

Pilot Purpose

- Provide info for developing Phase 2 of URO
- Demonstrate how food establishments can support City's Zero Waste Goal
- Evaluate challenges & benefits of recycling and composting
- Work with diverse set of food establishments

Pilot Timeline

September 2011 through September 2012

- Competitively hired Ecology Action & Organics by Gosh
  - Selection Criteria: Cost, Experience, Work Samples
- Vendors implemented & managed diversion services

February 2012 – Vendors reported:

- Service levels – baseline, 6 months
- Capacity utilization – typical weeks
- Material handling systems
- Employee education

October 2012 – Contract Wrap-up

- Final lessons learned
- ARR interviewed restaurants and vendors

Pilot Project Methodology

Quantitative & Qualitative Data Collection

- First 6 months
  - Truck drivers' data
  - Vendors' reports on quantities and lessons learned
- Second 6 months
  - Truck drivers' PLUS restaurants' data
  - Vendors' reports on quantities and lessons learned
  - In-person "exit" interviews by ARR staff

Thanks to the participants!

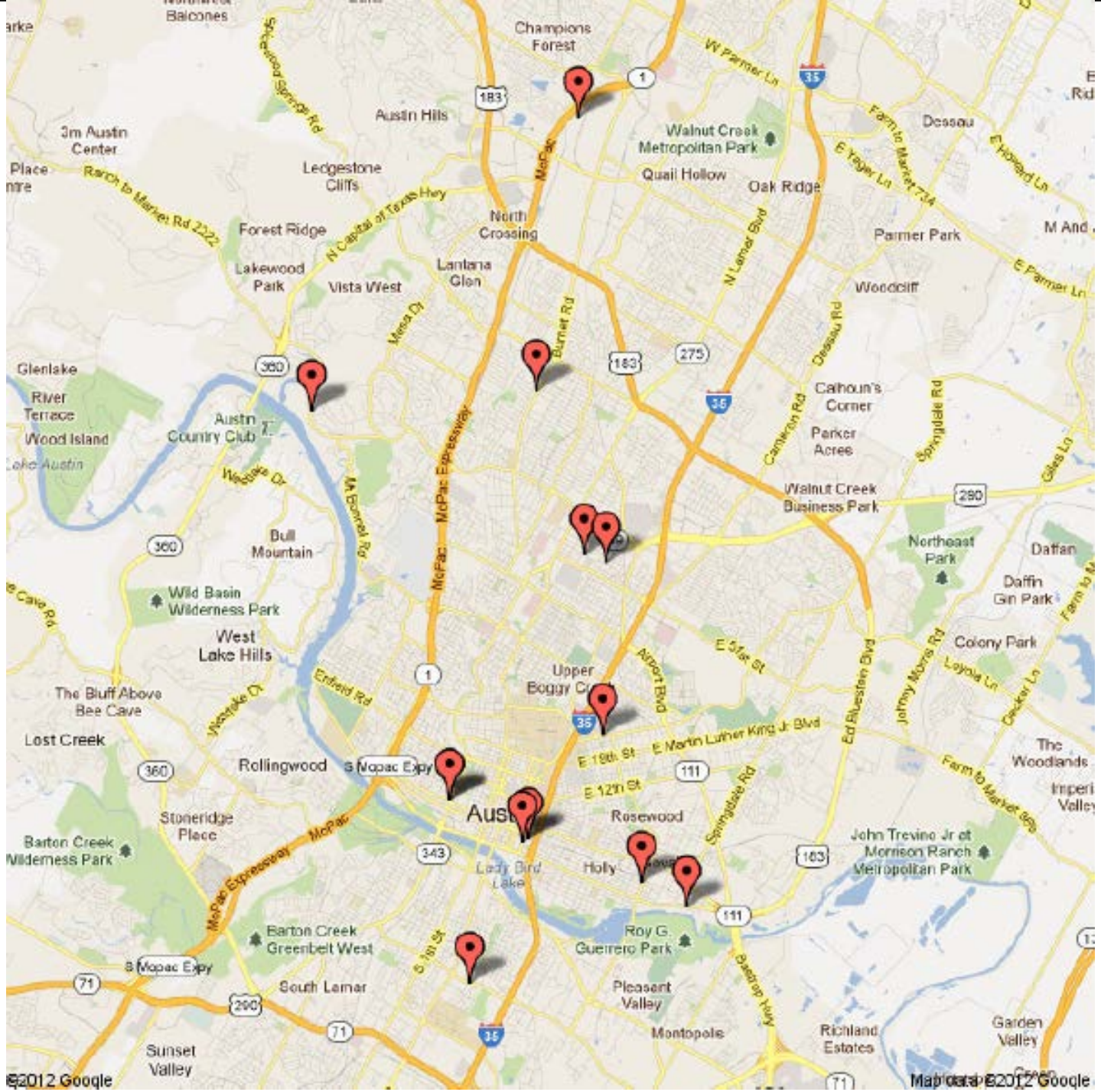
Vendors

Organics by Gosh

ecologyaction of texas

Participating Restaurants

- 24 Diner
- Arkie's Grill
- County Line on the Lake
- Curra's Grill
- Eastside Food Park
- El Mercado
- Epoch Coffee
- Fleming's Prime Steakhouse & Wine Bar
- Foreign & Domestic
- Hoover's Cooking
- Maudie's
- Moonshine Patio Bar & Grill
- Pink Avocado
- Rio's Brazilian Café



Restaurant Diversity:

- Food
- Sizes
- $ - $$$
- Locations

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Outside Containers, Signage, Decals

Inside Containers, Signage, Labeling

Pilot Project Results

- Diversion rates were 40% to 78% (by volume)
- Of 14 participating restaurants:
  - 7 will continue recycling
  - 5 will compost (one by self-hauling)
- Reasons for discontinuing
  - Cost, particularly if unable to reduce trash costs
  - Quality of service
  - Difficulty placing or accessing exterior containers
  - Business closed

Pilot Project Results

7 of 14 restaurants continuing to recycle or compost …

	Range
▪ Reduced trash capacity	25 to 75%
▪ Diverted	43 to 78%
▪ Had service fees increase	0 to 117%
▪ Had service fees increase	$0 to $700

Observation Overview

- Training & Capacity
  - Service Capacity
  - Employee Education
  - Signage
- Costs
  - Start-up & On-going
  - “Right Sizing” Services
  - Multi-Tenant Facilities
- Material Diversion
  - Material choices
  - Customer Participation
  - Sanitation

Employee Education

- Owner or manager buy-in critical
- Kick-off training by manager & vendor
- Front- and back-of-house differences
- Bilingual posters & container labels
- Continuous training needed
  - 1-2 months for front-of-house
  - 3-4 months for back-of-house
  - Periodically due to turnover

Financial Challenges

- Start-up Costs
  - Onsite Infrastructure

    dumpster corral, pad
  - Inside bins
  - Initial staff training
  - Signage, printed materials
- Ongoing Costs
  - Collection services
  - Billing
  - Bin liners
  - Pest control, sanitation
  - Ongoing training

Financial Challenges

- Recycling is more cost-effective than composting
- Composting more expensive per volume
- Expanding compost collection services and numbers of customers may lower costs (economies of scale)
- Control costs by “right-sizing” all services

Keys to Success for Universal Recycling Ordinance, Phase 2

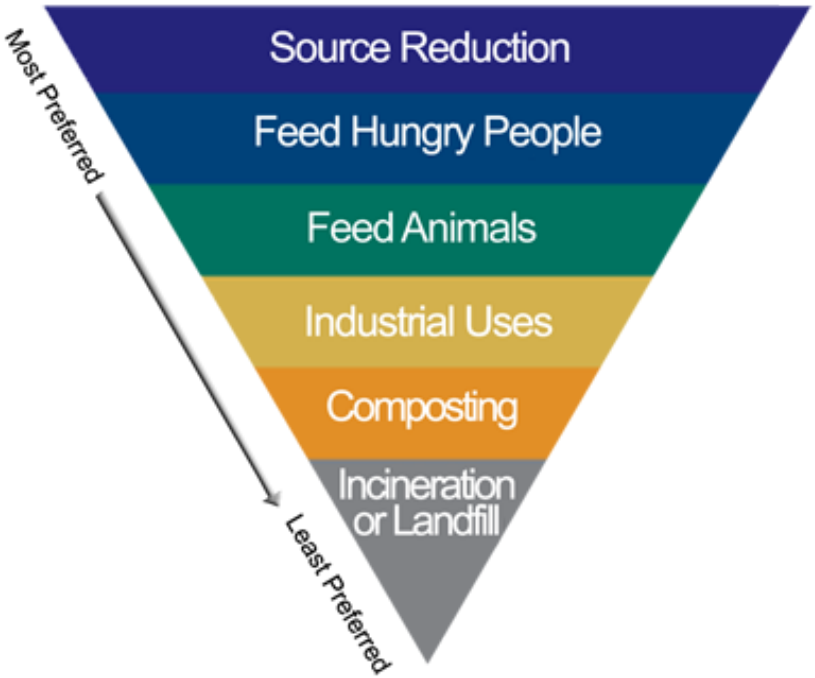
- Ensure adequate capacity for diversion services
- Provide ongoing employee education
- Provide clear signage
- Provide clearly marked containers, inside & out

URO-Related Impacts

- Recycling and composting are possible
- Most aspects of the services met the URO (service capacity, education, signage)
- Exterior container placement most challenging
  - Competition with parking
  - Impervious cover challenges
  - Fewer exterior containers serviced more often
  - Reinforces need for waivers in URO
  - Reinforces need to recommend changes to Land Development Code

Questions

Food Scrap Recovery Hierarchy



Donating surplus food:

1. Feeds hungry people
2. Saves disposal costs
3. Reduces solid waste
4. Protects the environment

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Good Samaritan Food Donation Laws

- **Federal Emerson Good Samaritan Food Act (1996)**

  National standards for food donations so interstate donors have consistent liability information

- **Texas Good Faith Donor Act (1981)**

  Persons who donate apparently wholesome food to a nonprofit organization for distribution to the needy are not subject to civil or criminal liability.

Recommendations

- Workshop for Restaurants
  - Container selection and placement
  - Educating the workforce
  - Right-sizing services
  - Waste prevention tips
  - Consider food hierarchy