



MEMORANDUM

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DATE: November 5, 2020

TO: Environmental Services Commission

FROM: Erin Hislop, Conservation and Outreach Program Administrator
Heather DeWitt, Interim Solid Waste Program Administrator

SUBJECT: 2020 Annual Solid Waste Collection Contract Performance Review Results

Action Required at this Time

No action by the Commission is required. This is an informational briefing.

Fiscal Impact

None.

Policy Issues

None.

Background

Bellevue outsources solid waste collection services, including the related customer service functions, to Republic Services. Consistent with the 2014 Comprehensive Garbage, Recyclables, and Organics Collection Contract (the Contract) between the City of Bellevue and Republic Services, the City conducts an annual review of Republic Services' performance under the Contract. This year's review consists of customer surveys about satisfaction with Republic Services' performance in specific areas and their awareness of, and practices and preferences around, recycling and organics. This memorandum summarizes results of the customer surveys.

Each year, the City also selects an area of focus for the performance review relative to Contract requirements and standards. This year's performance review was planned to focus on a continuation of the vehicle fleet requirement audit which began in 2019. Due to the impacts of Covid-19, the planned follow-up vehicle fleet audit has been postponed until Phase Three of the Washington State Safe Start Plan.

RESULTS OF CUSTOMER SURVEYS

The City hired Elway Research, Inc. to conduct two market research surveys to gauge single-family residential customers' and multifamily and commercial customers':

- A. Satisfaction with Republic Services' services and
- B. Awareness of, and practices and preferences around, recycling and organics.

Survey details are provided in the following table:

Customer sector	2020 survey dates	Sample size
Single-family	July 17-27	100 - telephone 802 - online 902 - total
Multifamily and commercial	July 13-17	201 - telephone

Part A - Customer satisfaction

To comply with the minimum satisfaction levels established in the Contract, Republic Services must score at least 80% satisfaction for each customer satisfaction question, less the relevant margin of error. Republic Services' satisfaction ratings for each question are based on the combined score of "very satisfied" and "somewhat satisfied".

Key findings

Republic Services scored well in four of six areas surveyed. Customers continue to have high overall satisfaction with Republic Services. However, Republic Services did not meet minimum satisfaction scores in response time following a missed collection. This is the sixth year in a row that Republic Services received relatively low marks in this area from single-family customers. Apartment and condominium complex managers and business owners (i.e. multifamily and commercial customers) also rated response time to missed collection below the City's minimum satisfaction requirements for the third year in a row. Additionally, Republic Services scored slightly below the minimum satisfaction requirement for helpfulness of customer service staff on the phone from single-family customers.

Question	Single-family satisfaction		Multifamily and commercial satisfaction	
	Figures appearing in red type did not meet minimum satisfaction ratings. Figures appearing in parenthesis () refer to minimum satisfaction rating within relevant margin of error			
	2019	2020	2019	2020
Over the past year, would you say you have been generally satisfied/unsatisfied with Republic Services?	83% (77.4%)	85% (77.4%)	93% (74.5%)	94% (74.5%)
How satisfied/unsatisfied have you been with the collection crew that picks up at your location?	80% (77.4%)	82% (77.4%)	90% (74.5%)	90% (74.5%)
How satisfied/unsatisfied were you with the response time following a missed collection?*	57% (75.6%)	49% (75.6%)	59% (65.4%)	68% (69.8%)
Were you satisfied/unsatisfied about the response time following a request for a new or replacement container?**	75% (73.7%)	84% (73.9%)	72% (64.3%)	78% (65%)
How satisfied/unsatisfied are you with the telephone courtesy you get from Republic Services?***	79% (75.9%)	80% (75.7%)	83% (70.1%)	71% (70.1%)
How about the helpfulness of customer service staff on the phone?***	78% (75.9%)	75.3% (75.7%)	79% (70.1%)	73% (70.1%)

*Asked only of customers that had a missed collection in the last year.

**Asked only of customers that had requested a new or replacement container in the last year.

***Asked only of customers that had reason to call Republic Services in the last year.

Next steps

Since Republic Services did not meet the minimum satisfaction ratings required by the Contract for response time following a missed collection or helpfulness of customer service staff, Republic Services is subject to a \$50,000 performance fee.

Additionally, Republic Services must develop and implement an action plan for improving customer satisfaction in these areas. The action plan, mutually agreed-upon by Republic Services and the City, must include scheduled milestones for implementing changes to meet the minimum customer satisfaction rating at the time of the next annual survey in 2021. The City will work with Republic Services to address compliance gaps.

Overall, Republic Services is achieving a high level of customer satisfaction. The City and Republic Services are working collaboratively to address the issues identified in the customer surveys.

Part B - Customer awareness of, and practices and preferences around, recycling and organics

Key findings: single-family customers

Most useful information sources on solid waste and recycling guidelines

Survey findings show single-family customers' top three sources of information for solid waste include: 1) printed brochures (57%), 2) Republic Services' website (55%), and 3) stickers on their carts (49%). These findings underscore the importance of providing annual recycling guides to customers; keeping the Republic Services' website current; and proper container labeling.

Recycling unusual items

Survey results demonstrate that the City's efforts to improve customer awareness of their recycling options for unusual items are working. The number of customers familiar with Republic Services' Recycling Drop-off Center has more than doubled since 2015, from 20% to 48%. Use of the Recycling Drop-off Center has also increased from 2015, from 6% to 22%.

Like last year, the City distributed an updated online and print version of the "Recycle More" brochure, identifying convenient recycling options across Bellevue for unusual items. The brochure included recycling options at Republic Services' Drop-off Center.

Handling of household hazardous waste

There was progress in the disposal of household hazardous waste, with fewer households appearing to have such items and fewer disposing of them in the trash. The proportion of households that put unwanted medications in the trash was more than 1/3 lower compared to last year. Despite gains in customer awareness of recycling options for unusual items, opportunities remain to improve customers' familiarity with and use of take-back programs for potentially hazardous materials, particularly fluorescent light bulbs and tubes (about 1 in six respondents still placing these in the trash).

Paint Care, a statewide latex paint recycling program created by a newly passed product stewardship legislation, goes into effect in March 2021. In the 2020 survey, participants were asked about their awareness of Paint Care and 12% reported awareness. The City has the opportunity to support the statewide program in Bellevue by assisting local collection sites with promotion, and helping educate residents on the benefits of latex paint recycling.

Key findings: multifamily and commercial customers (apartment and condominium managers and business owners)

Organics recycling

Of the commercial and multifamily participant's surveyed, 33% participate in organics recycling, compared to 39% last year.

Of the businesses' surveyed without organics collection, willingness to sign up for organics collection declined (41% last year to 28% this year), while willingness of residential property managers surveyed without organics collection increased (39% last year to 50% this year). As part of the garbage rate, commercial and multifamily customers can receive up to two 96-gallon organics cart per garbage container.

Recycling resources for tenants and employees

Demand for City resources and assistance programs was higher among property managers and lower among businesses compared to last year. Twenty-nine percent of multifamily and commercial customers named at least one City recycling resource that would be helpful to them. Among property managers, demand was higher for some items (posters, presentations, tote bags, indoor containers), but lower for others (caddies, needs assessment). Business managers' and owners' top preferences included posters and indoor containers.

Everyone who named at least one resource as helpful said they would like someone from the City to contact them to provide the item(s). The City has responded to the 72 customers in the survey who requested specific recycling assistance and resources.

Next steps

Based on the 2020 surveys' findings around customers' recycling practices and preferences, the City plans to work with Republic Services and regional partners to prioritize the following activities in the coming year:

- Continue to improve promotion of year-around options for convenient recycling of unusual items, such as at Republic Services' Recycling Drop-off Center and the Factoria Recycling and Transfer Station;
- Improve awareness and use of existing recycling "take back" programs including electronics, mercury-containing lights and paints;
- Help to promote new statewide latex paint recycling product stewardship program set to start March 2021;
- Increase customer education about proper handling of products designated as household hazardous waste and;
- Improve promotion of recycling resources available to apartments, condominiums, and businesses.