

DATE: November 4, 2021
TO: Environmental Services Commission
FROM: Jon Gire, Utilities Solid Waste Program Manager
SUBJECT: 2021 Annual Solid Waste Collection Contract Performance Review Results

ACTION REQUIRED

No action required. This is informational only.

BACKGROUND / ANALYSIS

Bellevue Utilities outsources solid waste collection services including the related customer service functions to Republic Services (Republic) under the 2014 Comprehensive Garbage, Recyclables, and Organics Contract (Contract) with the City. The Contract is valued at about \$27 million annually. As part of the City's annual review of Republic's performance, the City hired Elway Research, Inc. (Elway) to conduct customer surveys to gauge:

- A. Satisfaction with Republic's services and
- B. Awareness of, and practices around, recycling and compost services.

867 single-family residents and 180 multi-family/commercial operators participated in the survey via phone and online in Summer 2021. The number of responses is statistically representative of the customer base for each sector. This memorandum summarizes the results of the customer surveys.

Each year, the City also selects an area of focus for performance review relative to Contract requirements and standards. This year's performance review was planned to complete the vehicle fleet requirement audit which began in 2019. Due to the impacts of COVID-19, this has been postponed.

Satisfaction with Republic's Services

The City expects high levels of customer service from Republic particularly when performing core functions including providing reliable waste collection, delivering containers in a timely manner, courteously handling customer inquiries and response to missed collections. To comply with the minimum satisfaction levels established in the Contract, Republic must score at least 80 percent satisfaction for each of six customer satisfaction questions, less the relevant margin of error.

For both single-family and multi-family/commercial sectors, Republic surpassed minimum satisfaction scores for five of the six areas surveyed. The five areas with satisfactory scores were:

- General satisfaction
- Collection crew
- Response time following request for replacement container
- Telephone courtesy
- Helpfulness of customer service staff

The area Republic did not meet the minimum satisfaction score was in response time following a missed collection. This is the seventh straight year for the single-family and the fourth straight year for the multi-family/commercial sectors that Republic did not meet the minimum standard in this area. The survey results from 2021 compared to 2020 are shown below.

Area Surveyed	Single-family Satisfaction		Multifamily/Commercial Satisfaction	
	Figures appearing in red type did not meet minimum satisfaction ratings			
	2020	2021	2020	2021
General satisfaction	85%	83%	94%	86%
Collection crew	82%	83%	90%	82%
Response time following a missed collection	49%	51%	68%	63%
Response time following a request for a new or replacement container	84%	76%	78%	70%
Telephone courtesy	80%	82%	71%	85%
Helpfulness of customer service staff	75%	76%	73%	71%

Awareness of, and practices around, recycling and compost services

Survey findings show single-family customers' top three sources of information for solid waste include 1) Republic's website (55%), 2) printed brochures (53%), and 3) stickers on their carts (49%). These findings underscore the importance of keeping the Republic's website current, providing annual recycling guides to customers and proper container labeling.

The single-family survey also showed that awareness of industry and State sponsored product stewardship ("take-back") programs is on the rise. An example of such a program is PaintCare, a statewide paint recycling program created by recent product stewardship legislation. In the 2021 survey, participants were asked about their awareness of PaintCare and 20 percent reported awareness, up from 12 percent last year.

The City is supporting the statewide program in Bellevue by assisting local collection sites with promotion by educating residents on the benefits of paint recycling. Local paint retailers are currently dealing with impacts of COVID-19 including staffing shortages and paint supply chain issues. Despite these challenges many are still choosing to take on this new optional paint recycling program. To further support businesses, the City is partnering with participating local paint retailers and PaintCare (utilizing joint outreach funds offered to local jurisdictions) on an upcoming outreach pilot to increase customer understanding and participation in PaintCare. Tools will also be provided for businesses to effectively support the program during the pandemic.

The multi-family/commercial survey indicated that 85% of property managers participate in recycling, compared to 91% of those surveyed last year; this is the lowest level since 2015. When asked about participating in recycling, multi-family residential managers were much more likely than commercial property managers to say there were challenges. In previous years, both types of property managers have been equally likely to say there were challenges. This increase could be due to the difficulties in managing the increased volume of waste generated at residential properties during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For compost services, 33% of property managers surveyed participate, while 66% are aware that they can receive compost service at no additional cost. Given the level of participation versus the level of awareness, there is opportunity for Republic and the City to collaborate to further roll out this service.

Next steps

Since Republic did not meet all the minimum satisfaction ratings required by the Contract for response time following a missed collection, they are subject to a \$50,000 performance fee. Republic is also required to develop a mutually agreed upon Action Plan (Plan) with the City to improve customer satisfaction in this area. The Plan must include scheduled milestones for implementing changes to meet the minimum customer satisfaction ratings at the time of the next annual survey in 2022.

Republic collaborated with the City to develop a draft Plan with new measures that have not been previously tried. These include revising how routes are assigned to drivers to increase operational reliability and informing customers that a credit will be applied to their bill due to the inconvenience of not getting their missed pickup resolved in a timely manner after calling Republic.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the Plan, the City will analyze trends from data Republic gathers and reports from bimonthly customer surveys and on-going performance data, including total missed pickups and missed pickups subject to a performance fee.

In addition, based on the 2021 survey findings around customer recycling practices and preferences, the City will work with Republic 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 like household hazardous waste at Republic's Recycling Drop-off Center, the Factoria Recycling and Transfer Station, and the Factoria household hazardous waste drop-off site.
- Continue to increase awareness and participation in take-back programs for difficult-to-recycle items, like paint via the PaintCare program.
- Improve promotion of recycling resources available to apartments, condominiums, and businesses with a focus on offering strategies that could potentially save costs. This includes matching the size of garbage containers to the service level needs and providing tools to increase the convenience and amount of recycling such as tote bags for multi-family residents to use for sorting recyclables.

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

POLICY ISSUES

N/A

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with implementing the Plan.