



2016 Community Solid Waste Survey Results

Executive Summary

From early July through early August, 2016, the City of Evanston issued the “Community Solid Waste Survey 2016” to solicit feedback from community members on their existing solid waste service and to gauge public interest in next generation solid waste programs and initiatives. In the four weeks the survey was available, 854 complete surveys were submitted, 18 of which were from businesses or organizations in Evanston and the vast majority were from Evanston residents. Results from the survey reveal an overall positive experience with the existing solid waste programs and strong support for a variety of next generation waste management practices such as developing a zero waste plan for Evanston, reducing construction and demolition waste, making household hazardous waste disposal service more convenient, providing access to curbside composting programs and banning Styrofoam.

This report provides a summary of some of the responses to the survey. This is not an exhaustive analysis of each question but a broader report on the survey as a whole and some of the key takeaways. If you are interested in reviewing the full results from the survey, the City has published a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet version of the responses to the survey which can be found at cityofevanston.org/sustainability.

Survey Highlights

The survey was split into two separate tracks, one for businesses/organizations and one for residents. Residents who were also business owners could fill out the survey twice, once from their perspective as a resident and once as a business owner. Additionally, the survey was split into three sections, the first section focused on experience with existing solid waste services, the second section asked questions about respondents’ opinions of new programs to pursue and the third section was focused on quizzing respondents on their knowledge of how to dispose of certain items.

Demographics of Respondents

Table 1

Evanston Residents		
Age Range	Number of Responses	Percent of Total
18-24 years old	9	1%
25-34 years old	70	8%
35-44 years old	175	21%
45-54 years old	174	21%
55-64 years old	186	22%
65 or older	199	24%
Prefer not to answer	16	2%
Total	829	100%

Table 2

Evanston Businesses		
Age Range	Number of Responses	Percent of Total
18-24 years old	1	5%
25-34 years old	1	5%
35-44 years old	2	11%
45-54 years old	5	26%
55-64 years old	6	32%
65 or older	2	11%
Prefer not to answer	2	11%
Total	19	100%

Residential responses were broken down by the type of residence that respondents lived in, whereas business responses were broken down by business type.

Table 3

Evanston Residents		
Type of Residence	Number of Responses	Percent of Total
Single-Family Home	594	74%
Multi-unit Apartment Building (2-6 units)	58	7%
Multi-unit Apartment Building (7+ units)	36	4%
Condominium Building	117	15%
Student On-Campus Housing	0	0%
Total	805	100%

Table 4

Evanston Businesses		
Type of Business	Number of Responses	Percent of Total
Retail	3	16%
Food Service	4	21%
Office (tech, administrative, legal, insurance, professional services)	4	21%
Lodging (hotel, motel, etc.)	2	11%
Institution (hospital, school, etc.)	0	0%
Industry (manufacturing)	1	5%
Other (please specify)	5	26%
Total	19	100%

It is important to note that students living in on-campus housing receive separate solid waste disposal services provided through a contract managed by Northwestern University and students living off-campus may be represented in the data although there were only 9 responses from “college-aged” individuals. Another potential limitation within the survey was that there were fewer than 10 paper surveys returned, which indicated that very few people without access to the online survey provided their responses.

Response Summaries

Access to Different Solid Waste Services

Of all residential respondents who answered the question, 98.3% said they recycle Sometimes or Always at home. Ninety-seven percent of respondents said they have at least one recycling container at their home or building, yet 18.21% indicated they did not have enough recycling containers. This corresponds closely with the 20.24% who indicated their recycling container is overflowing on their pickup day. Over 93% indicated that their container is at least half full on their collection day. Eleven percent indicated they currently compost at home (4% in their backyards and 7% contract with private hauler Collective Resource, Inc.). Interestingly, 4.07% of respondents reported not having a trash container in their home or building.

Solid Waste Disposal Behavior

When a recycling container is overflowing, 5.15% of residents report they throw those recyclables in the garbage and 38.92% store the overflowing items until the next collection day; unfortunately, 13.41% reported placing those items in a neighbor’s refuse or recycling container. When residents are unsure what to do with an item, 40.60% investigate the proper disposal method, 30.54% dispose of it in their refuse and just over a quarter place those items in a recycling container.

There are numerous special items that residents had a difficult time identifying the proper disposal method for within the survey. Five particularly problematic items are still being disposed of in recycling or trash containers at rates above 10%: electronics, fluorescent light bulbs, batteries, oil-based paint and pharmaceuticals. All these items are supposed to be disposed of or recycled separately and indicate a heightened need to conduct public outreach related specifically to how to properly dispose of these items. In fact, for all five of these categories of items there is either a state or a federal ban on those items ending up in the landfill, and they are not accepted by conventional curbside recycling programs, including in Evanston. Each category requires its own special disposal method which is in part what leads to much of the confusion about how to dispose of each.

Respondents had a higher level of understanding that the above items should not be placed in a recycling container compared to some other special items as shown in table 5.

Table 5

Which of the following should NOT go into your curbside recycling or garbage container?	
Item	Percent of Total
Batteries (any size or type)	91.69%
Glass bottles	1.20%
Newspaper	0.84%
Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs (CFL)	88.55%
Fluorescent Light Bulbs	89.40%
Incandescent Light Bulbs	77.47%
Plastic film (plastic grocery bags, plastic packaging, Ziploc bags)	67.71%
Greasy food containers	84.10%
Electronics (not appliances)	91.93%
Food/drink cartons	13.25%
Corrugated cardboard	2.17%
Plastic straws	36.51%
Plastic #6 (styrofoam)	69.76%
Hoses	73.01%
Plastic or thread rope	61.81%
Furniture	90.96%

The responses in table 5 indicate that again there is generally a high level of understanding about what should and should not go into a recycling container but there are still items, particularly odd items such as hoses, plastic straws and plastic thread or rope, that seem to confuse people. At a high level these responses suggest that additional, perhaps item-specific, outreach needs to be done to help people understand what to do with special items. Additional analysis based upon the type of residence people live in could lead to more effective targeted outreach campaigns in the future.

Food Scrap Composting Service

Across the board, providing access to food scrap composting in Evanston received overwhelming support. Of resident responses, 94.98% were neutral, agreed or strongly agreed that all residents should have access to food scrap composting. Similarly, 95.80% were neutral, agreed or strongly agreed that food scrap service should be available to all businesses. The key word in this question was “access” which indicates that a vast majority of people in Evanston are in support or indifferent to providing access to food scrap composting service. Table 6 demonstrates the difference between those who believe access should be provided and those who are willing/interested in participating in a program were it offered and how much they would be willing to pay for that service.

Table 6

Residents			Businesses	
Monthly Fee for Food Scrap Service	Number of Responses	Percent of Total	Number of Responses	Percent of Total
\$0.00/Month	220	27%	2	11%
Up to \$2.00/Month	174	21%	4	21%
Up to \$5.00/Month	194	23%	3	16%
Up to \$10.00/Month	89	11%	1	5%
Up to \$15.00/Month	71	9%	6	32%
Not interested	81	10%	3	16%
Total	829	100%	19	100%

The biggest group of respondents indicated they would be interested in participating if the program had no monthly cost. Forty-three percent of residents said they would be willing to pay up to \$5.00/Month for a curbside program. The biggest single response from businesses was a willingness to pay up to \$15.00/Month for service. Responses from this question suggest that there is strong interest in a program and some are even willing to pay over \$100 annually for the service.

Next Generation Programs

Table 7 – Please describe your opinion of the following ideas

Program	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral/I don't know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Ban distribution of styrofoam in Evanston	290	193	225	91	49
Develop a zero waste strategy for Evanston	326	283	177	36	26
Increase access to curbside recycling	403	291	131	16	7
Provide access to curbside food scrap composting	328	244	202	44	30
Reduce waste from construction and demolition	399	280	142	18	9
Focus programming on waste reuse and reduction	359	366	97	20	6

Determine strategies for more convenient hazardous waste disposal	575	224	41	3	5
Explore a Pay As You Throw program to reduce consumption and encourage recycling	263	195	220	102	68

All eight of the initiatives listed above received at least 50% of respondents agreeing or strongly in agreement with the initiative. The initiative with the highest approval was “Determine strategies for more convenient hazardous waste disposal” with 94.26% in agreement or strong agreement. The lowest approval was “Explore a Pay as You Throw program to reduce consumption and encourage recycling” with 53.87% agreeing or strongly agreeing. The range of support varies, but with all initiatives above 50% approval, there is clearly a desire within the community to explore new programs and ways of thinking about waste management, waste reduction and different disposal practices.

Conclusion

As indicated at the beginning of this report, the goal was to focus on highlighting some of the more apparent trends from the survey responses. Primary takeaways include:

- There is still a need to increase access to adequate recycling services across the community
- There is overwhelming support for curbside food scrap service for both residents and businesses
- There are still a few specific items that people have difficulty determining how to dispose of properly, and renewed and periodic education needs to take place to improve understanding
- Broadly speaking, there is support for exploring “next generation” strategies to address challenges related to waste in Evanston, i.e., support for developing a zero waste strategy for Evanston, exploring a Pay as You Throw program and coming up with more convenient household hazardous waste disposal options.