

Durango Organic Waste Ordinance Analysis

Final Report

September 24, 2026

STEPS

Strategic Technical Expertise for the Public Sector



About

[Colorado Circular Communities](#) (C3) is a program focused on supporting the state's transition to a circular economy. C3 provides funding and support for organizations around the state to create a sustainable system for our waste streams. The Strategic Technical Expertise for the Public Sector (STEPS) program at C3 provides completely free consulting for communities to plan and act on their circularity goals. Local governments, tribes, and public K-12 school districts are all eligible for STEPS.

The STEPS program has different levels of support depending on what a community may need. C3 can provide resources, conduct studies, design programs, and support any community in the way that they believe makes the most sense for them. The C3 team has a list of subject matter experts to support the STEPS program, including [Resource Recycling Systems \(RRS\)](#) and [Eco-Cycle](#).



Table of Contents

About	1
Table of Contents	2
Key Terms	3
Executive Summary	7
Background	11
Current Organics Hauling and Processing Infrastructure	12
Organics Generation	12
Stakeholder Engagement Findings	14
Key Findings	15
Community Input	17
Overall Key Takeaways	17
Community Survey	19
Focus Group	21
Policy Options Reviewed	23
Requirement for Organics Collection Service	24
Organics Diversion Requirement (Paired with Other Initiatives or Policies)	26
Status Quo: Opt-in with a Recommended Hauler	28
Operational Improvements and Programmatic Expansion	28
Additional Policy Ideas	30
City Council Feedback & Policy Direction	33
Council Feedback	33
Recommendations	34
Requirement for Residential Organics Collection Service	37
Requirement for Commercial Organics Collection Service	39
Operational Improvements	42
Internal Policy Options:	45
Not recommended:	46
Next Steps	47
Implementation Timeline	51

Key Terms

Back-of-House: Back-of-house refers to the behind-the-scenes areas of a business that are not visible or accessible to customers, such as a kitchen at a restaurant.

[Colorado's Producer Responsibility Program](#) (commonly referred to as Extended Producer Responsibility or EPR): was signed into law in 2022. This was through [House Bill 22-1355](#), also called the "Producer Responsibility Program for Statewide Recycling Act." Companies that sell certain products in Colorado must pay into a system that will support recycling those products. The products included are items made of paper and items that come in packaging. The companies that sell these products are also called "producers." A [Producer Responsibility Organization \(PRO\)](#) manages the recycling system that producers fund. The PRO is an independent non-profit organization formed by major producers.

Compost: Compost is the result of decomposing organic material, such as food scraps and yard trimmings. It is usually added to soil to improve the soil's health, structure, and fertility. There are many methods to create high quality, nutrient-dense compost. The collective steps taken for producing compost are commonly referred to as "composting."

Contamination: In waste management, contamination is any material that is improperly disposed of. For example, it could be placed in the wrong waste container or too soiled to be recyclable. Contamination is found in all types of waste management, including trash, recycling, and composting.

Curbside Collection: Curbside collection is the collection of waste that is set out on the side of the street or alleyway. It is common with single family homes and townhouses that have their own curbside bins. It can include garbage, recycling, and/or compost collection.

Diversion: Diversion is the practice of keeping materials out of landfills or incinerators. It is otherwise known as waste diversion. It includes activities like recycling, compost, reuse, and repair.

Drop-off site: A drop-off site is a place for people to bring materials, such as organic materials or recyclables, to a collection point. A drop-off site may be staffed or unstaffed, and may be free or have a fee depending on how the site is managed. Sites may be permanent or seasonal.

Finished compost: A product manufactured through controlled decomposition of biodegradable materials, used as a soil amendment ([Excerpted from the US Composting Council's 2018 definition](#)).

Food scraps: Food scraps are the inedible products that come from food preparation such as carrot peelings, apple cores, meat trimmings, and bones, or food that has expired. Food scraps come from the food industry, cafes, restaurants, and homes.

Front-of-House: Front-of-house refers to the public-facing areas of a business where customers are present, such as the dining area at a restaurant.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHG): Greenhouse gas emissions are the product of greenhouse gases entering the air. Greenhouse gases are small particles found in Earth's atmosphere, such as carbon dioxide and methane. These particles reflect heat back to the planet's surface, known as the greenhouse effect. In large quantities, they trap large amounts of heat within the planet. This contributes to changing climates throughout the planet over time.

Multifamily: Multifamily properties are residential buildings containing many separate housing units. This includes apartments, condominiums, or townhomes. The number of units is what defines a building as multifamily, and that number differs based on each community. In Colorado, a multifamily property typically has more than eight units.

Municipal Solid Waste (MSW): Municipal solid waste is everyday waste generated by households, businesses, and institutions. It is more commonly referred to as trash or garbage. It does not usually include hazardous waste or industrial process waste. Additionally, it does not usually include construction or demolition debris.

Organic materials/organics: Organic materials or organic waste is any solid waste that is a biological substance of plant or animal origin, including food scraps and yard trimmings, that can be broken down through biological processes ([C.R.S. § 25-17-901 \(2024\)](#)).

Organics diversion requirement: An organics landfill diversion requirement, sometimes called a “disposal ban,” is a city-wide requirement that prohibits residents and businesses from disposing of food scraps and/or yard trimmings in the trash.

Pay-as-you-throw (PAYT): Pay-as-you-throw programs charge residents for the collection of waste based on the amount they throw away. Residents typically pay for their trash bins, and recycling and/or compost bins are free. If a resident chooses a smaller trash bin or less frequent pick-up frequency, they will pay less for the service. This creates an economic incentive to recycle more and generate less waste. These programs are also known as unit pricing or volume-based pricing.

Single Stream Recycling: Single-stream recycling is a common type of collection system. All recyclable materials are placed in the same container for collection. The materials are later sorted into separate types at a material recovery facility. ¹

Yard trimmings: Yard trimmings are organic materials that are generated from maintenance of yards, gardens and parks including grass, leaves, branches, and weeds. These do not include soil, rocks, treated wood, or construction debris. ²

¹ In Durango, single stream does not include glass because of our collection and shipping processes. Glass can be recycled separately at the Recycle Center at the free 24-hour open drop-off.

² This memo refers to “yard trimmings” rather than “yard waste” because the term “waste” implies that it does not have value. Yard trimmings have value that can be recovered, as they can be feedstocks to create nutrient-rich soil amendments.

Executive Summary

The City of Durango is exploring ways to reduce the amount of food scraps and yard trimmings that end up in the landfill, including improving or expanding organics collection and composting programs. Durango generates an estimated 3,373 tons per year (TPY) of food scraps and 987 TPY of yard trimmings. This is roughly 20.1% of Durango's total waste generation. Durango diverts an average of 1,496 tons per year (TPY) of food scraps, based on a three-year average data from Table to Farm Compost of residential and commercial food scraps combined, 2023-2025³. The City of Durango also reportedly chips approximately 50-100 TPY of branches as part of Spring and Fall Cleanup. This leaves an estimated 2,750-3,000 TPY of food scraps and yard trimmings that continue to be sent to landfill each year. [Colorado's organics management plan and diversion study](#) have shown that food scraps and yard trimmings (a.k.a. organic waste) make up about 25-35% of the material that communities like Durango send to the landfill each year. Durango's [Sustainability Plan](#), adopted in 2022, sets the objective to increase waste aversion and diversion through reducing the amount of material sent to landfill and increasing waste diversion rates.

In 2025, Durango City Council passed [Resolution R-2025-0004](#) directing the City Manager and appropriate staff to research organic waste management ordinances, including seeking engagement and feedback from the community. Through a Colorado Circular Communities (C3) Strategic Technical Expertise for the Public Sector (STEPS) project, Durango received no-cost consulting from Resource Recycling Systems (RRS) and Eco-Cycle to assess various policies and programs that could increase organics diversion in Durango.

The policies and programs STEPS assessed as part of this project and recommend Durango pursue implementing include (in order of most to least recommended):

³ Table to Farm Compost's service includes both residential and commercial customers, as well as collections outside of city limits. The exact breakdown of residential vs. commercial collection and inside vs. outside city limits for TYP data could not be determined.

- Residential requirement for organics collection service
- Commercial requirement for organics collection service
- Operational improvements and program expansion
 - Expand yard trimmings collection
 - Create food scraps drop-off sites
 - Offer expanded seasonal programs
 - Incentives for the private sector
 - Pay-as-you-throw
- Internal city policies:
 - Require organics diversion and reduce food scraps generation at City buildings
 - Buy and use local compost and mulch

The policies and programs STEPS does not recommend the City pursue include:

- Organics diversion requirement
- Status quo: Opt-in with a contracted hauler

As part of this STEPS project, a policy and program analysis, stakeholder engagement, a focus group and a community survey were conducted to gather information from the community and organics service providers on current programs/infrastructure for organics and the barriers and opportunities for increasing organics diversion. These components, outlined in this report, were compiled to inform recommendations for feasible pathways to increasing organics diversion in Durango. Recommendations consider the City's goals, costs, stakeholder input, diversion potential, feasibility, timelines, infrastructure, and community interest. [Table 1](#) shows the high level overview of the potential diversion and cost impact of each policy and program option assessed as part of this project. Estimated impacts are further described in the [recommendations](#) section. Note that this project did not include a complete cost analysis or diversion impact assessment, so impacts are based on industry expertise

and standards and may not reflect actual impacts. Further description of the rationale for each policy and program option and the scale for estimated cost ranges are located in the [Recommendations](#) section.

Table 1: Estimated Diversion and Cost Impact of Each Policy and Program Option

Policy	Estimated Diversion Impact	Estimated Cost Impact to City	Estimated Cost Impact to Residents
Requirement for residential organics collection service	High	High	Medium
Requirement for commercial organics collection service	High	Medium	Low-None
Expand yard trimmings collection	Medium	Medium	Low
Create food scraps drop-off sites	Low	Medium	Low-None
Offer more seasonal collection programs	Low	Medium	Low
Incentives for the private sector	Low	Medium-Low	Low-None
Pay-As-You-Throw	Medium	Medium	Low-None
Internal city policies	Low	Low	None

Background

Organic materials comprise approximately [37% of Colorado's overall waste stream](#). By diverting organic materials from landfills to composting facilities and turning them into useful soil amendments, municipalities can prevent greenhouse gas emissions, retain more water in soils, help grow more nutrient-dense crops, and pull carbon dioxide from the atmosphere to be stored in the ground.

The City of Durango is committed to reducing waste, increasing efficiency, and providing high quality trash and recycling services. The [City's Trash and Recycling division](#) collects trash and recycling from all residential properties (single-family and duplexes) as well as participating businesses within city limits. For composting, the City has partnered with local business [Table to Farm Compost](#) to offer optional citywide curbside compost services for residents and businesses through a public-private partnership from 2021 through summer 2026. Durango has about 8,800 total households, with 5,300 residential accounts and 600-900 commercial accounts (including multifamily) served by the City. The remaining approximately 1,000 commercial accounts (including multifamily) are served by private-sector hauling companies. Table to Farm had 850 curbside customers in 2025 and the first half of 2026, which is approximately 14% of the City's waste hauling customers.

Table to Farm also offers on-demand collection services of bagged leaves in the fall through a separate contract. Additionally, income-qualified residents are eligible to have up to 90% of their compost service costs covered through the [City's Discounted Compost Service Program](#). Eligibility requires an approved application through the Utility Refund and/or Food Tax Rebate programs. Residents may also compost at home, provided they comply with [city codes for composting](#).

Current Organics Hauling and Processing Infrastructure

At the time of this study, Table-to-Farm is the only organics hauler operating at-scale in Durango. Other haulers and processors operating in Durango shared, through direct interviews, they are either able to add organics hauling services or are in the process of adding organics hauling and processing services. These haulers could likely also offer co-collection of food scraps and yard trimmings, which is not currently available through existing programs. Table-to-Farm collects source-separated food scraps curbside for opt-in residential and commercial customers, offering a 5-gallon bucket for residential and variable cart sizes for commercial customers.

As of July 2026, Table-to-Farm Compost operates the only permitted composting facility in La Plata County. Table-to-Farm Compost is a Class III permitted facility, and is “[capable of processing 18,000 cubic yards of compost at any given time.](#)” [Phoenix Recycling](#), owned and operated by Republic Services as of July 1, 2026, secured a permit from La Plata County in Spring 2026 to construct a 15-acre composting facility. Construction of the facility will begin in 2027.

Organics Generation

[Table 2](#) below summarizes the estimated annual tons per year (TPY) of food scraps and yard trimmings generated in Durango, broken out by total, residential, and commercial sectors. Estimates for the residential sector were developed by applying [2015 Southwest Colorado Waste Study](#) waste-composition percentages to the City's tracked generation data. The five-year average of total generation, based on city-provided tonnage data, was used as the basis for calculating residential generation. Estimates for the commercial sector were developed using the 6.4 lbs/person/day of municipal solid waste (MSW) generation rate from the [2024 State of Recycling and Composting in Colorado](#), which is the most recent generation rate for Colorado at the time of this study.

This generation rate was used to extrapolate an estimate of TPY generation for the commercial sector in Durango. La Plata County composition data was used, as opposed to Durango-specific data, due to the minimal amount of samples collected and sorted for Durango only (one residential and one commercial).

Table 2: Durango's Organics Generation Estimates in TPY

Material	Residential Composition	Commercial Composition	Total (residential & commercial combined)
Food Scraps Generated (TPY)	1,504 (44.6% of total food scraps generated)	1,870 (55.4% of total food scraps generated)	3,373
Food Scraps (as a percent of sector MSW composition)	20.0%	20.2%	20.1%
Yard Trimmings (TPY)	616 (62.4% of total yard trimmings generated)	370 (37.5% of total yard trimmings generated)	987
Yard Trimmings (as a percent of sector MSW composition)	8.2%	4.0%	6.1%

Material	Residential Composition	Commercial Composition	Total (residential & commercial combined)
Total Food Scraps and Yard Trimmings Annual Generation*	2,120	2,240	4,360

* “Other organics,” which include biodegradable materials like hair, cork, and coffee filters, were not included in these generation estimates since the waste study does not consider them divertible.

Stakeholder Engagement Findings

The STEPS team completed 12 interviews with stakeholders to gain perspective on current organics diversion in Durango and future opportunities and challenges to organics diversion pathways. The set of stakeholders to be interviewed was decided through conversation with the Durango’s Sustainability Manager. Interviews were conducted in December 2025. The STEPS team interviewed the stakeholder groups listed below:

- City staff (1)
- Private haulers currently operating in Durango (3)
- Private haulers not currently operating in Durango (2)
- Local organizations (6)

Key Findings

- **Education and Outreach:** Stakeholders across all groups emphasized the importance of education and outreach to ensure willingness to participate and contamination reduction. Many stakeholders noted that Durango residents and businesses are environmentally conscious, engaged, and in support of sustainability initiatives; therefore, educating the community on the benefits and importance of composting can support enthusiasm for composting.
- **Cost Sensitivity:** Cost is a persistent barrier for both the commercial and residential sectors. Thin margins for businesses and rising utility fees drive cost sensitivity. Affordability was emphasized by interviewees, noting that subsidies or phased implementation might reduce backlash, especially if an organics program were mandated.
- **Mandatory over Voluntary:** The efficacy of mandatory programs, when compared to voluntary, is much higher. Haulers highlighted that mandatory programs with a contracted hauler create economies of scale, enabling lower service fees and potentially offering more services. Mandatory programs streamline operations, provide consistent feedstock to processors, and over time, foster community awareness through widespread participation (when paired with education and outreach).
- **Wildlife and Space Constraints:** Concerns regarding collection were focused on wildlife and space constraints, especially for storage of bins outdoors. Given increased bear activity in recent years, wildlife-resistant containers are essential for residential and commercial programs.

- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPP):** Stakeholders, including city staff, support leveraging PPPs and existing infrastructure to expand organics diversion. Existing private haulers operating in Durango have claimed they have or could expand to have sufficient hauling and processing capacity to potentially collect all food scraps and/or yard trimmings in Durango. A city-run program would require significant capital expenditure and require operational expansion. Leveraging PPPs was believed to minimize risk and cost to the City.
- **Policy Preferences:** Requirement for organics collection service with an opt-out structure is preferred over organics diversion requirements, which are widely viewed as difficult to enforce and are likely to trigger backlash. Organics diversion requirements should only be considered after well-developed and equitable services/programs are in place and education campaigns have been implemented. Phased implementation, beginning with commercial and institutional generators before residential, was recommended to maximize diversion tonnage early. This is based on an assumption that the commercial sector generates comparable amounts of food scraps as residential properties collectively in Durango.
- **Residential versus Commercial:** Stakeholders noted greater diversion potential from commercial and institutional generators, compared to residential generators. Given that residential lawns and natural spaces generate yard trimmings throughout the year, some stakeholders highlighted the diversion potential for yard trimmings. Stakeholders mentioned there are yard trimmings currently still going to landfill, and the Spring and Fall Cleanup program is often unable to divert a majority of yard trimmings collected in peak-generation months.

Community Input

In Spring 2026, two opportunities for public input were provided: an in-person focus group as well as a virtual community survey. Information on current participation and sentiments around services offered were gathered, and barriers and opportunities to increase organics diversion were discussed. Several options for policy and operational improvements were discussed in-depth during the focus group. In the survey, policy options were framed broadly to distinguish between required and voluntary programs, making them easier for respondents to interpret.

Community insights, along with other components of this project, will help inform recommendations for policy mechanisms Durango could implement to increase organic waste diversion. Conducting both a focus group and survey were important to gather quantitative and qualitative feedback, providing opportunity for a representative sample of the community to respond to the survey and a space for thoughtful discussion and feedback on the proposed options.

Overall Key Takeaways

- Both the focus group and survey respondents strongly value the environmental benefits of composting. In the survey, roughly 95% of respondents rate reducing landfill waste and greenhouse-gas emissions as important (rated 4 or 5 out of 5), and focus group participants described themselves as environmentally conscious and supportive of composting. This shared enthusiasm coexists with real hesitation about how a program is funded and whether it is required.
- The most-supported policy was composting for food scraps, especially for businesses. Survey respondents overall expressed support for requirements for food scrap collection; 94% of respondents stated they support commercial food scrap collection and 81% of respondents stated they support residential food scrap collection. When asked to rank (from 1-5, with 1 being top priority) the

services/programs residents would like to see in Durango, more regular food scraps collection was the top-ranked service priority overall (ranked #1 by 100 of 237 respondents). Focus group business owners, who already compost voluntarily through Table to Farm or local farmers, agreed a requirement could level the playing field, making a commercial organics requirement the most palatable mandate. Both the focus group and survey respondents also favor operational expansion (more drop-off sites and year-round collection) over a blanket residential requirement.

- Cost is the single biggest obstacle in both datasets. Cost of service was the top reason survey respondents opposed any requirement (13.5% of all respondents), and focus group residents pointed to Durango's cost of living crisis while businesses said they are already struggling to stay open. A new fee will likely face pushback unless the city takes clear steps to keep costs low.
- Flexible pricing and service options emerged as the most widely supported approach to secure community buy-in. In the survey, 54% would be more likely to support requirements if given more rate and cost options, and 58% would be more supportive if recycling-fee savings lowered their bill. This mirrors the focus group, where a majority favored a Pay-As-You-Throw model with smaller bins or less frequent trash pickup for households that compost or recycle.
- The survey found that 68% of residents that completed the survey already compost at home but only 19% of businesses subscribe to a composting service, and 58% of residents rely on Spring and Fall Cleanup for yard trimmings. Residents in the focus group were unsure whether the City separates yard trimmings from trash and did not know where to drop them off. Insights show that more drop-off options, year-round yard trimming collection, and clearer communication would close these gaps.

Community Survey

[Table 3](#) below summarizes survey responses by respondent type and key statistics. Of the 237 total responses, 221 responded as residents and 26 responded as business owners/managers. It should be noted that response counts are not mutually exclusive, meaning that respondents were able to respond as both a resident and business owner/employee, if applicable. Additionally, it should be noted that the survey was not issued by blind random sample, but offered openly through the City's [Engage Durango](#) website platform. Results may represent the views of community members who felt strongly about the topic of organic waste management.

Table 3: Survey Summary Table

Findings from Survey	Value
Number of total responses	237
Number of responses from residents	221 (93%)
Confidence interval for residents	95% +/-6.6%
Number of single-family respondents	180 (76%)
Number of responses business owners/managers	26 (11%)
Number of responses business employees	36 (15%)
Confidence interval for businesses	90% +/-10.3%
Residents that compost (any-level)	166 (75.1%)
Businesses that compost (any-level)	9 (34.6%)
Residents that own their home	202 (85%)
Residents that rent	30 (13%)

Composting is a common behavior for responding residents but rare as a business practice: 75% of resident respondents already compost, while only 35% of business

owners/managers report that their business composts. Of business responses, 46% say their business generates little or no organic waste, and 69% of business owners compost at home personally. Both businesses and residents identified additional curbside food scrap collection as the top service request (58% of businesses and 43% of residents), and support requiring multifamily homes to have the same services as single-family (83% and 81%, respectively). However, only 26 business owners completed the survey, so their results may not reflect all business owners in Durango.

Services desired by respondents in priority order (derived from ranking question for operational improvements):

1. More regular curbside food scraps collection
2. More regular curbside yard trimmings collection
3. Operational improvements to Spring & Fall Cleanup
4. More options/locations to drop off food scraps
5. More options/locations to drop off yard trimmings

Concerns about cost of service were listed as the greatest reason for opposing mandatory commercial collection programs for recycling or organics. However, business owners/managers are less price-sensitive than residents: 42% would support organics requirements regardless of price structure versus 31% of residents, and 0% of businesses would oppose organics requirements regardless of price versus 5% of residents. When asked if respondents support requiring various services, both residents and businesses were most supportive of general recycling, followed by food scraps, then yard trimmings. This is shown in [Figure 1](#) below. Recycling is already a mandatory service, so support for it was measured primarily as a point of comparison with other options being considered.

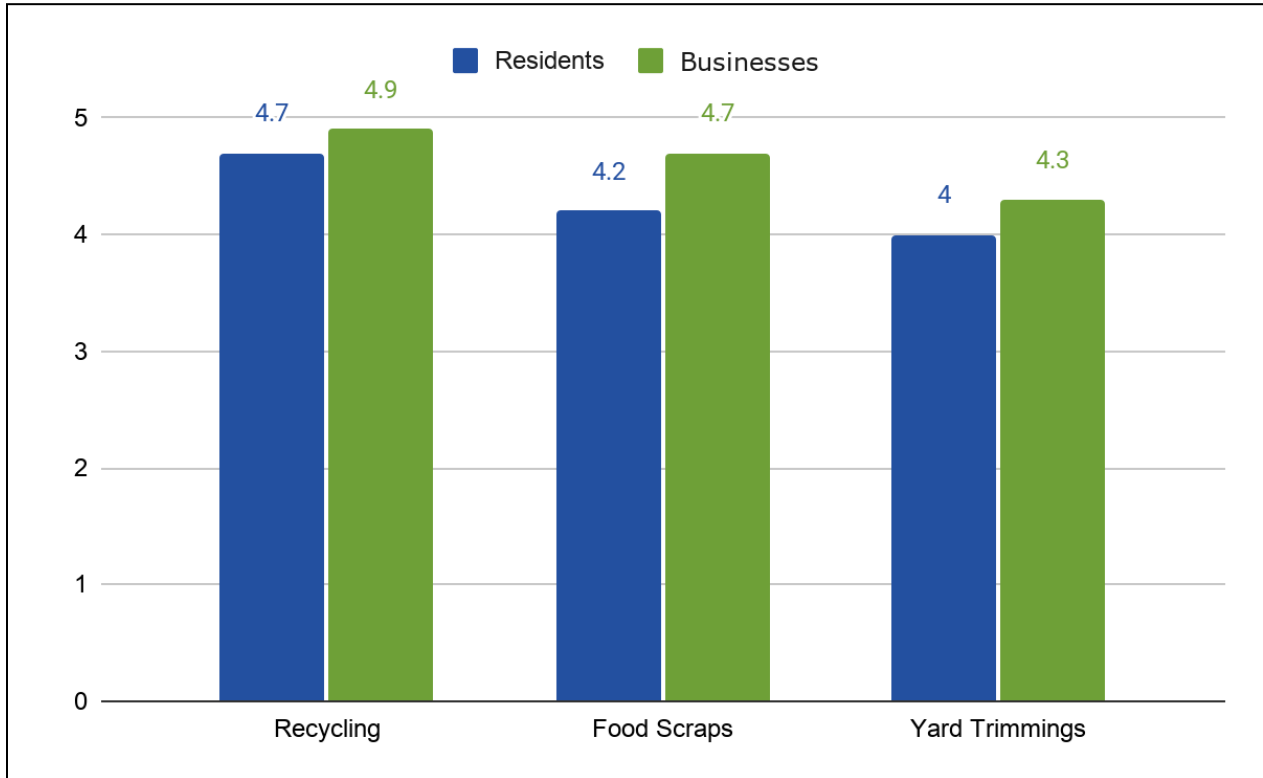


Figure 1: Support for Required Services for Different Waste Streams (average score 1-5)

Focus Group

The STEPS project team hosted one in-person focus group in March 2026 to hear from residents and business owners. The group discussed existing composting activities, barriers, and opportunities. The City used its [Engage Durango](#) platform to recruit participants. On this platform, City staff posted details about the upcoming focus groups and invited residents to apply. Then, City staff reviewed the applications and selected participants to try to get diverse perspectives.

During the session, the team asked about current composting habits, then walked through five policy options one at a time. For each option, participants shared an initial reaction through a simple thumbs up, thumbs down, or sideways thumb indicating a neutral vote.

After the group discussed all five options together, participants voted again using colored stickers, letting the team see whether any opinions had shifted.

The following are key takeaways from the focus group discussion.

Residential:

- **Environmental values:** Focus group participants are supportive of composting and are environmentally-conscious.
- **Concerns about cost:** Residents of Durango are facing a cost of living crisis. An increase in utility fees for compost would likely face opposition.
- **Few options for yard trimmings:** The Spring and Fall Cleanup events have high participation, but most residents said they don't know if the City separates yard trimmings from trash. The City collects yard trimmings alongside trash in the spring. Residents also said they don't know where to take yard trimmings, except for a few who know local farmers.
- **Pay-As-You-Throw:** A majority of participants are interested in a pay-as-you-throw system. Smaller trash bins or less frequent collection could lower costs for residents who recycle or compost.
- **Compost options:** Most participants wanted more compost options, like drop-off locations or year-round collection for yard trimmings.
- **Concerns about requirements:** Requiring compost service for all residents would increase participation and environmental benefits. Focus group participants shared concerns about costs, a larger role of government, and increased contamination.

Commercial:

- **Businesses composting:** The four businesses in the group represent some of the larger restaurants and restaurant groups in the city. They compost voluntarily, either through Table to Farm or partnerships with local farmers.
- **Wary of costs:** Several participants expressed concern that businesses in Durango are already struggling to stay open and do not want to see more requirements that could increase costs.
- **Pickup challenges:** Alleyways are narrow. Business-owning participants said that sometimes cars block their dumpsters and prevent trash and recycling pickups. Adding the third stream or bin (for composting) could increase logistical challenges.
- **Back-of-house composting:** Business owners in the focus group expressed it is easier to educate staff than customers, and therefore easier to implement back-of-house composting than front-of-house.
- **Events:** Several participants agreed that events should be part of any upcoming policies for composting, as they generate a lot of waste and are in the public domain.
- **Marketing sustainability:** Several residents wanted to know which businesses are composting, and wanted to see businesses talk about their sustainability initiatives more.

Policy Options Reviewed

The project team considered several policy and program options to increase composting, selected based on conversations with City of Durango staff. This section provides general background information on the policy options reviewed. The [“Recommendations”](#) section has the detailed recommendations related to the policy options summarized in this section. The first four options are related to increasing citywide compost collection, while the additional policies are options for internal City policies to lead by example with composting.

1. Requirement for organics collection service
2. Organics diversion requirement
3. Status Quo: Opt-in with a contracted hauler
4. Operational improvements and program expansion
5. Additional policies
 - o Require organics diversion & reduce food scraps at City buildings
 - o Buy and use local compost and mulch

Some considerations when selecting which options to pursue are the City’s goals, costs, stakeholder input, feasibility, timelines, infrastructure, and community interest.

Requirement for Organics Collection Service

Requiring organics collection service for residents and/or businesses is an effective way to expand composting across the City. This requirement could be designed to apply to the residential sector, commercial sector, or both.

Education and outreach are crucial to ensuring participation and reducing contamination in a compost program. It is important to minimize contamination in the organics stream from plastic and other non-compostable items, so that the outputs

(e.g., finished compost and mulch) are clean and usable. Additionally, education and proper equipment to mitigate wildlife conflict is crucial in order to support ongoing efforts in this area.

Residential Requirement for Organics Collection Service

A residential requirement for organics collection service which mirrors Durango's recycling requirements would require all single-family and duplex households to have compost collection service. With mandatory collection service, it is best practice to include both food scraps and yard trimmings (collected together or separately) in the requirement to maximize diversion and environmental benefits.

There are several hauling options for residential organics collection. The City can provide hauling services, the City can contract with a private hauler to provide services, or residents can choose their service provider in an open market. Organic materials would be hauled to a private processor, unless the City decides to create and operate a composting facility. Multifamily properties of eight or more units and commercial establishments would not be included in required city hauling or city contracted hauling programs. Exceptions may be allowed for residents who compost in their backyard or take organic materials to a farm or other location for composting. When considering exemption options, considerations should be made to maintain reasonable consistency with recycling requirements.

Commercial Requirement for Organics Collection Service

A policy can require commercial, government, and multifamily buildings to have organics collection service through a hauler of their choosing. This can be encouraged with education and enforced through warnings or fines for commercial properties that are not in compliance.

Best practices, such as Closed Loop Partners and Eco-Cycle's [Municipal Blueprint for Composting](#), suggest phasing in collection requirements for businesses that generate

organics such as food scraps or yard trimmings (“generators”). A phased approach may start with larger organics generators, like food stores, large restaurants, landscapers, and institutions (e.g., schools and universities).

Another strategy can be starting with a requirement for back-of-house composting in food service establishments (including the kitchen, food storage, or food prep areas) where the majority of food scraps are generated. Front-of-house, or customer-facing, compost bins are more difficult for preventing contamination, because it is harder to educate customers and enforce use when staff are busy. Front-of-house organics diversion should start as optional for businesses and ramp up over time, and should be accompanied with education, outreach, and signage.

All organics collection requirements should allow generators to comply in part by donating human-edible food for consumption.

Offering incentives, such as discounts on collection fees, rebates for an initial period of a hauling subscription, or technical assistance may help businesses to get started to comply with the ordinance.

Combined Residential and Commercial Requirement for Organics Collection Service

A community can adopt a requirement for organics service that covers all generators of organics, including residential and commercial entities. Many states and cities phase in such requirements, starting with one sector (commercial or residential) and adding additional requirements over time. This could be part of a comprehensive waste policy that requires recycling and organics collection for single-family residences, commercial entities, government buildings, multifamily complexes, and public events.

Organics Diversion Requirement (Paired with Other Initiatives or Policies)

An organics landfill diversion requirement, sometimes called a “disposal ban,” is a city-wide requirement that prohibits residents and businesses from disposing of food scraps and/or yard trimmings in the trash. This is enforceable by the City and/or haulers through fines, warnings, or refusing cart servicing during trash pickup. A diversion requirement is most effective when paired with requirements for the targeted generators to subscribe to collection services or show proof of other means of diverting organics (e.g., through composting onsite or regular participation in a drop-off program). A diversion requirement provides options for targeted generators (i.e. residents) to divert their organic material beyond hauling services or drop-off, like backyard composting or bringing organics to a farm for composting.

A diversion requirement could start with yard trimmings and later be expanded to include food scraps. Starting with yard trimmings can be more straightforward for residents and may result in less contamination than food scraps.

On its own, an organics diversion requirement is not a recommended first step for starting a new organics diversion program. Without the hauling and processing infrastructure and collection programs in place, a diversion requirement can be difficult to enforce and may be ignored by residents. However, when paired with robust programs for hauling and processing organics, as well as education about the ordinance requirements, this can be an effective policy for bringing attention to organic materials disposal and increasing participation in diversion.

These types of policies have historically been referred to as “bans,” and the negative connotation of being prohibited from doing something makes that terminology politically challenging. Framing these policies as “diversion requirements” helps emphasize the positive behavior and the desired outcome—diverting organics from the

landfill. The City of Fort Collins adopted a [cardboard landfill disposal ban](#) in 2013 to increase recycling. The city already had extensive infrastructure in place for recycling. In 2025, the [City of Glenwood Springs banned yard trimmings from the South Canyon Landfill](#). The ban has reduced yard trimmings entering the landfill which is key to expanding the landfill's lifespan and reducing methane emissions. The landfill has a brush pile and leaf pile onsite where people can drop their yard trimmings.

Status Quo: Opt-in with a Recommended Hauler

Currently, the City of Durango provides required curbside recycling and trash services for residents. Between 2021 and summer of 2026, the City promoted opt-in subscription options for food scrap collection available through Table to Farm Compost, who were selected through a request for proposals (RFP) process. This service is voluntary for both residents and businesses, and an estimated 13-14% of Durango residents currently subscribe to curbside organics collection.

Opt-in programs generate less material overall than programs that guarantee collection services for all residents. The material streams tend to be much less contaminated in opt-in programs, since they attract people who are personally motivated to divert organics to participate. The City of Durango provides an [income-qualified discount program](#) of 90% off compost services for residents who are at or below 50% of the Area Median Income (AMI).

The downsides of Durango's current program are that many residents are likely not aware of the service, the majority of residents and businesses do not opt in to organics collection, and growth in participation has been very gradual. Significant outreach and education and expanded incentives may be needed to increase participation.

Operational Improvements and Programmatic Expansion

There are many options for operational improvements or expanding existing programs if policy interventions do not succeed. Some options are listed below. These services may be offered for single family residences and/or commercial properties.

Expand Yard Trimmings Collection

Yard trimmings make up [25-35% of organic materials produced in Colorado](#). Making yard trimmings collection a key goal of the Spring and Fall cleanups, offering more frequent pickups for yard trimmings, or offering weekly collection service throughout the summer could capture a much larger volume of yard trimmings and divert them from the landfill.

Create Food Scraps Drop Off Sites

Establishing drop-off sites is a cost-effective way for residents to divert food scraps, and offers an easy entry point for people to participate in organics collection. Approaches to reduce contamination include: ensuring the site is staffed during drop-off hours; posting clear, prominent signage about the materials that are acceptable and not acceptable; or locking drop-off bins and only providing lock codes to participants who have been informed about what materials are acceptable and not acceptable.

Offer Seasonal Programs

Seasonal programs include permanent or temporary drop-off sites or collection services targeting specific seasonal organic materials, such as branches, leaves, Christmas trees, or pumpkins. Some communities will also open temporary sites in conjunction with wildfire mitigation efforts or following weather events that generate a lot of broken branches or downed trees. Durango has a [pumpkin and leaf collection](#)

[event](#) with Table to Farm and Colorado State University Extension in which pumpkins go to pig farmers as animal feed. Expanding the program to include other yard trimmings or seasonal offerings can collect a significant amount of material and offer a seasonal opportunity for bringing awareness to composting programs.

Conduct Education and Outreach

Education and outreach to reach targeted audiences can improve understanding of waste programs and increase participation in composting. Education and outreach are recommended to go along with every policy and program change to get the word out, increase participation and reduce contamination. These efforts should focus on direct engagement with the community, focusing on not only the “what” and “how,” but also the “why.” Residents are more likely to participate in circularity programs and services if they understand why these programs are important to their own lives and to their community.

Incentivize the Commercial Sector to Subscribe to Organics Collection Services

The City of Durango could create a financial incentive, rebate or grant program to encourage the commercial sector to sign up for organic collection services. Businesses could be reimbursed for infrastructure, hauling, compostable food service ware items, education, training, and signage. Another option is to offer technical assistance to help businesses figure out how to incorporate organics collection into their operations. The City could use money from the disposable bag fee fund for business incentives or assistance.

Additional Policy Ideas

Several additional policy ideas for internal City policies that could result in more organics diversion include requiring organics diversion and reducing food scraps at City buildings and events, and buying and using local compost.

Require Organics Diversion & Reduce Food Scraps at City Buildings and Events

The City of Durango could lead by example by adopting a policy that requires reducing food scraps and composting at City buildings and events. This would require all City buildings to have organics collection services in kitchens or other areas where food scraps are generated. Such a policy is most effective when integrated into event and facilities management policies and assigned responsible staff.

The City can also add composting requirements for City-permitted events. The City's special event permitting application process can require or incentivize organics collection and food scrap reduction measures. The City can require permitted events to submit a plan for waste collection that includes providing three-stream waste collection (trash, recycling, and organics) and signage. Another option is to offer an incentive or rebate for events that meet certain criteria, or require that events donate excess food by partnering with local food rescue groups. The City has piloted such efforts in recent years. Another tactic is to require a deposit from event vendors that they get back if they comply with the City's waste requirements for events.

For example, The [City and County of Denver](#) requires a waste diversion plan as part of event permit applications that includes: providing three-stream waste collection (trash, recycling, and organics) with signage, steps to increase recycling or organics diversion, waste prevention measures (such as water filling stations, reusable cups/service ware, monitoring waste stations, donating leftover food, or prohibiting vendors from using plastic bags or swag), communicating the waste management plan

with vendors, volunteers, attendees, and staff. The [City of Steamboat Springs](#) provides incentives ranging from \$200 to \$3,750 per event depending on the actions taken at the event to reduce and divert waste. The City requires a consultation with a city staff member to be eligible for an incentive. Event planners can avoid single-use water bottles, use only recyclable/reusable materials, compost food scraps, and staff zero waste stations.

Buy and Use Local Compost

A compost and mulch procurement policy specifies that a municipality shall use locally sourced compost and mulch on public projects (e.g., landscaping, construction, roads and highways, green infrastructure) wherever practicable. A strong policy would require the use of compost in municipal projects and encourage the use of compost in private landscaping projects, following the [Natural Resources Defense Council's model policy](#). It should cover the maximum number of City departments, require that soil amendments be sourced locally and delivered in bulk (not bagged), require [US Composting Council](#) (USCC) Seal of Testing Assurance (STA) Certified® or an equivalent compost certification.

This policy guarantees local end markets for compost and ensures that the community reaps the benefits of composting such as water retention, carbon sequestration, runoff minimization and filtration, and increasing soil nutrients. [Colorado communities reported](#) that using mulch from municipal mulching programs saved money, reduced labor, and reduced the spread of tree-borne pathogens by keeping mulch local.

City Council Feedback & Policy Direction

The STEPS project team presented a mid-project presentation to the City of Durango Council on June 2, 2026. This was the first presentation to the City of Durango for the STEPS Durango Organic Waste Ordinance Analysis project. The purpose of this study session was to present findings to-date from project tasks, including the policy analysis, stakeholder engagement, and resident input, and obtain feedback from Council Members on the policy options to inform recommendations.

Council Feedback

Feedback and questions from the City Council largely focused on program costs, data available, and operational feasibility. Council members asked about the potential cost savings from reducing organics sent to landfill. While a detailed financial analysis falls outside of the scope of this STEPS project, City of Durango staff were able to estimate that a community-wide organics diversion program could save approximately \$70,000 to \$100,000 per year in landfill tipping fees for municipal trash collections, based on current rates. This would translate to approximately \$1.00-\$1.50 savings on a customer's monthly trash collection bill. Council also inquired about the proportion of commercial versus residential food scraps generated. Because materials are combined during collection, a precise breakdown is not available, though reasonable estimates were made, as provided earlier in this report. Additional questions addressed whether increasing yard trimming collection frequency would improve diversion, noting that Spring & Fall Cleanup is run by the streets crew, which could not absorb regular community-wide collections without increasing funding and staffing.

Council inquired about the potential cost savings from implementation of Colorado's Producer Responsibility program, which would reimburse the city for the net costs of

recycling services. It was explained that this net cost savings could offset the costs of additional organics collection.

Overall, Council feedback reflected strong interest in expanding compost efforts, along with appreciation for the project's emphasis on affordability and a phased approach to implementation. Members stressed the importance of early education and outreach to help residents adapt to new programs. At the same time, several comments highlighted sensitivity around costs, considering recent sewer and water rate increases to utility bills.

Recommendations

This section discusses the estimated relative impact on waste diversion, costs for residents or the City, and interest from stakeholders for each option. Additional background information for each policy and program is provided in the [“Policy Options Reviewed”](#) section above.

To have the biggest impact on diversion, the STEPS team recommends that the City of Durango implement a requirement for residential curbside organics collection, followed by commercial. Following the implementation of these requirements, it is recommended that the City of Durango consider adopting some form of pay-as-you-throw pricing which allows customers to adjust their bin sizing and/or pickup frequency to match their needs.

Recommendations are described below in this section and based on findings from components of this project discussed in this report. The pros and cons across all of the policy options were reviewed, and a requirement for residential (or commercial) curbside organics collection rose to the top as most beneficial. A requirement for residential curbside collection was selected as the primary recommendation due to the diversion potential, resident and stakeholder feedback about feasibility and support, and opportunities to offset costs. A commercial requirement for curbside

organics collection has high diversion potential as well, but is recommended after residential due to potential costs added to businesses with already thin margins. Additionally, it is likely that a commercial requirement would require a higher amount of direct support and education for businesses, especially the food service industry. The City may also consider the operational improvement options below in addition to passing a citywide policy or instead of a policy. These improvements have relatively less impact on diversion but could still expand the City's offerings.

For each option, the STEPS team estimated the diversion impact (categorized as low, moderate, or high) and a cost impact range (categorized from low to high), as shown in [Table 4](#). The purpose of these estimates is to provide a broad overview of the ways to increase organics diversion in Durango. However, the scope of this project did not include a complete cost analysis or detailed diversion potential analysis. Diversion impact ranges from low (minimal increase to organics diversion) to high (significant increase in diversion). Estimated diversion and cost impacts are based on industry expertise and standards as well as a review of programs in comparable Colorado communities, but actual impacts may differ for Durango.

Table 4: Cost Impact to the City and Residents

Cost Impact of Policy/Program	Estimated Annual Cost Range for the City	Estimated Monthly Cost Range for Residents
Low	<\$25,000	< \$10
Medium	\$25,000 - <\$250,000	\$10-\$20
High	≥ \$250,000	≥ \$20

Table 5: Estimated Diversion and Cost Impact to the City and Residents for Each Policy and Program Option

Policy	Estimated Diversion Impact	Estimated Cost Impact to City	Estimated Cost Impact to Residents
Requirement for residential organics collection service (assuming the City contracts with a hauling company for carts and trucks)	High	High	Medium
Requirement for commercial organics collection service	High	Medium	Low-None
Expand yard trimmings collection	Medium	Medium	Low
Create food scraps drop-off sites	Low	Medium	Low-None
Offer more seasonal collection programs	Low	Medium	Low
Incentives for the private sector	Low	Medium-Low	Low-None
Pay-As-You-Throw	Medium	Medium	Low-None
Internal city policies	Low	Low	None

Requirement for Residential Organics Collection Service

Definition: A residential requirement for organics collection service requires all single-family households and duplexes to be offered compost collection service and pay a fee for such service (including food scraps, yard trimmings, or both).

Considerations: Requiring residents to have organics collection service would have a large impact on waste diversion. Adding an organics collection requirement would also align with Durango's commitment to recycling which was implemented over a decade ago and remains generally popular. At the same time, however, utility bills can be a sensitive topic, and the STEPS team heard hesitation from residents in the focus group and survey around adopting new requirements that could raise costs to all residents. This policy requirement would make the most sense for Durango if the City can use the reimbursements for recycling from Colorado's [Producer Responsibility program](#) (also known as Extended Producer Responsibility or EPR) to offset a portion of the cost of adding a new service. The exact monthly cost of adding compost service or the potential cost offset from EPR is not known at this time, but savings from EPR are estimated to be in the range of [\\$7-\\$21 per month per household](#) throughout the state. Other cities in Colorado provide compost services to residents, serving as a benchmark for potential service costs. The City of Longmont provides municipally-run trash and recycling services, with compost as an add-on for \$9.90 per month for either a 96 gallon or 48 gallon cart. The City of Edgewater offers opt-in compost service through a private hauler for \$17 per month. As of 2026, Table to Farm Compost offers residential curbside collection in Durango at a monthly cost of \$28 for weekly service or \$18 for every-other-week service.

Components to include:

- Any citywide requirement for organics should include both food scraps and yard trimmings to have the biggest impact on waste diversion.

- Many residents expressed interest in a smaller trash cart size or less-frequent collection frequency that would cost less. Such a system is called “Pay-As-You-Throw.” Durango could consider adding a smaller trash cart size or an every-other-week collection option for trash to give residents a way to save money while incentivizing waste diversion.
- A phased approach, where the city rolls out services over time, helps to prevent operational challenges and allows time to make changes and address customer service issues.
- An ordinance should offer exemptions for residents that compost at home, or self-haul organics (i.e. take organic materials to another location for beneficial use, such as a farm).
- Managing contamination with education and outreach and following through with a clear enforcement/penalty process can guide and correct behavior.

Table 6: Benefits and Challenges for Required Residential Organics Collection Service

Benefits	Challenges
• Potential to compost the greatest amount of materials of the policy suggestions listed • Adding yard trimmings to the collection service could vastly expand the amount of compostable material that is being collected	• May raise utility bill costs for residents (exact program costs or cost offsets from EPR are not known at this time) • Requires robust investment in education and enforcement to reduce contamination in the compost • Mandatory programs sometimes face challenges with contamination if not paired with robust education and outreach

Policy Examples

- The City of Denver's [Expanded Waste Services policy](#), passed in 2022, sets up a pay-as-you-throw system for residential waste customers that charges a single fee that covers trash, recycle, and compost collection services. The City provides waste services to around [180,000 households](#). Denver residents must opt in to have a compost cart, but they are not charged an additional amount to opt in. About 75,000 households had signed up for compost services by September 2025, [increasing organics diversion by 55%](#).
- The [City of Boulder's Universal Zero Waste Ordinance](#) requires all property owners, both residential and commercial, to subscribe to waste services that provide separated compost, recycling and trash. The City does not provide hauling services or a contracted hauler, so all hauling is done through an open market. The City has a [list of exemptions](#) that include composting on-site, sharing collection services with a neighboring property, self-hauling, and more.

Requirement for Commercial Organics Collection Service

Definition: This policy requires commercial, government, and multifamily buildings (with more than eight units) to have organics collection service through a hauler of their choosing. This can be encouraged with education and enforced through warnings or fines for commercial properties that are not in compliance.

Considerations: Requiring commercial entities to have organics collection service would also have a large impact on the amount of waste diverted from the landfill, since the commercial sector generates an estimated 1,870 tons per year of food scraps. The survey showed 94% of respondents supported requiring commercial food-scrap collection. While this requirement would have lower cost impacts to the City, and little-to-no cost impact to residents, there would be additional costs for businesses.

Components to include:

- A commercial requirement should be phased in over time, starting with businesses that generate the largest amounts of organic materials, such as restaurants or grocery stores. Alternatively, exemptions could be allowed for commercial businesses that generate small quantities of organic waste.
- Offering incentives, such as discounts on collection fees, rebates for an initial period of a hauling subscription, and technical assistance, may help businesses to get started and improve compliance. However, funding for such incentives would have to be clearly identified in the City's budget.
- Start with requiring back-of-house (BOH) organic diversion only in food service businesses. Front-of-house (FOH) organics diversion should begin as encouraged for businesses and ramp up over time, and should be accompanied with education, outreach, and signage.
- An organics collection requirement should encourage businesses to donate edible food in addition to having compost collection service. Exemptions may also be allowed for diversion directly to farms for composting or animal feed.

Table 7: Benefits and Challenges of a Requirement for Commercial Organics Collection Service

Benefits	Challenges
• Potential to compost a large amount of materials, estimated to be slightly less than a residential requirement • Levels the playing field for businesses that are already opting to pay for compost services	• Will likely raise hauling costs for businesses • Requires investment in education and enforcement to reduce contamination in the compost and ensure businesses are participating

Benefits	Challenges
Fewer total locations that require education, coordination, or monitoring/enforcement compared to residential	Proper equipment and training is more complex for businesses (particularly restaurants) as compared to residential

Policy Examples

- Phase one of the [City of Aspen’s Organic Waste Ordinance](#), passed in 2023, requires food establishments to have an organics hauler. This resulted in a [350% increase](#) in organic materials composted in the first year of implementation. The second phase, started January 2026, requires all multifamily buildings and commercial properties to provide access to organics diversion. The next phase in 2028 will require citywide residential organics diversion. The City has supported the roll-out of this ordinance by offering compost bins and wildlife-resistant outdoor bins, providing centralized drop-off locations, and creating educational materials.
- The [City of Fort Collins’ Community Recycling Ordinance](#) requires food stores that dispose of more than 96 gallons of food scraps per week to subscribe to a service for the collection of food scraps. Fort Collins’ definition of “food stores” covers grocery stores but excludes restaurants, farmers’ markets, and retail stores where food comprises less than 2% of sales.

Operational Improvements

The following operational improvements represent relatively small steps the City can take without requiring a policy change. While these measures are less likely to increase organics diversion as significantly as a new policy requiring residential or commercial compost collection, they may be easier to implement because they do not require City Council consensus. Some options would require City funding but would result in minimal or no additional costs for residents and businesses. These operational improvements can also be implemented alongside new policies to support implementation and further increase organics diversion. The effectiveness of all these measures can be strengthened through complementary education and outreach efforts.

Table 8: Benefits and Challenges of Operational Improvements

Benefits	Challenges
• Potential to compost more materials and keep them out of the landfill • Does not require a new ordinance, only budget approval by Council • Could pursue multiple operational improvements on their own or in addition to citywide policy change	• May increase costs for City to add these additional or expanded programs • Not as much potential to divert waste as a Citywide policy

- **Expand yard trimmings collection:** The Spring and Fall Cleanups are a big opportunity for the City to collect and divert yard trimmings. Composting yard trimmings could become a central goal of the cleanup events if the City communicates with residents about separating yard trimmings from other trash and about the importance of composting. The City could enter a contract with a local organics hauler, or the City could do the hauling during the cleanup events. This program could eventually expand to include other pickup times in the summer or late fall.
- **Create food scraps drop-off sites:** Establishing drop-off sites can be a less expensive option for residents to divert food scraps. Drop-off sites can offer a cheaper way for people to participate in organics collection programs. To avoid contamination, best practices include: ensuring the site is staffed during drop-off hours; posting clear, prominent signage about the materials that are acceptable and not acceptable; and locking drop-off bins and only providing lock codes or keys to participants who have been informed about what materials are acceptable and not acceptable. Scraps Mile High and Elements Mountain Compost both report very little contamination at their drop-off sites. Both companies offer a subscription-based model for their drop-off sites. They send an email to new subscribers with information about composting, and they can communicate to members through email about seasonal questions or addressing contamination they find. Municipalities can partially subsidize subscriptions or offer a subscription free for the first few months to incentivize people to sign up. For example, the City of Lakewood has a [food scraps drop off program](#) launched in January 2026 in partnership with Compost Colorado. Residents can sign up for \$5 per month and bring food scraps to any of the five City-owned drop sites or the four Compost Colorado locations in Lakewood.

- **Offer expanded seasonal programs:** Seasonal programs target specific seasonal organic materials, such as branches, leaves, Christmas trees, or pumpkins. Some communities also open temporary sites in conjunction with wildfire mitigation efforts or following weather events that generate a lot of broken branches or downed trees. For example, the City of Louisville hosts a tree branch drop off site where residents can drop off branches and pick up mulch. The City of Steamboat Springs partnered with the Routt County Wildfire Mitigation Council in 2025 to host two branch collection and chipping events to avoid sending branches to the landfill.
- **Education and outreach:** Providing education and outreach is recommended alongside any of these policy and program changes to increase participation and communicate about the benefits of composting. Efforts should target the groups most affected by policy changes.
- **Incentives for the private sector:** The City of Durango could create a financial incentive, rebate or grant program to encourage the private sector to sign up for organic collection services. This could also include technical assistance from the City to help businesses educate staff or set up source separation bins. Such incentives are usually not controversial and may be funded through bag fees that are already collected by the City. These programs require capacity and funding from the City. For example, the Town of Vail offers [business rebates for subscribing to compost hauling](#). The Town of Breckenridge offers grants of up to \$10,000 for businesses to comply with materials management requirements, which may cover capital improvements, purchase of new bins/containers, updated signage, durable (reusable) dishware programs, energy efficient dishwashers, and water refill stations.

- **Pay-as-you-throw (PAYT):** Many residents, through the survey and focus group, expressed interest in a smaller trash cart size that would cost less. A system that charges less for a smaller trash cart, thus incentivizing recycling and composting, is called “Pay-As-You-Throw.” Durango could consider adding a smaller trash cart size or an every-other-week collection option to give residents a way to save money while incentivizing waste diversion. Deploying this type of program would require a review of the City’s current trash and recycling services and fees, and then could add composting as an optional or required service.

Internal Policy Options:

Compared to the other recommendations, internal city policy changes will not have as big of an impact on waste diversion. However, these policies can be a good starting point if there is resistance to larger policy shifts. The policies we recommend are leading by example by requiring city buildings to have compost collection, composting at city events, and a policy to codify buying and using local compost and mulch on City projects like parks, landscaping, and open space.

For example, [King County, Washington, requires compost procurement](#) and application in landscaping projects, construction and post-construction soil amendments, erosion prevention applications, and stormwater runoff filtration systems. Utility provider [Denver Water](#) requires all new residential, commercial, governmental, and industrial properties in their service area to amend their soil with compost. Denver’s planning and permitting department enforces this policy before granting a certificate of occupancy. Proof of compliance depends on contractors showing a receipt for the required amount of STA-certified compost. Denver Water uses this requirement as a tool to increase the use of compost and retain more water in Colorado’s otherwise dry and clay-heavy soils, thereby reducing the need for watering.

Not recommended:

- **Status Quo:** While the status quo does allow interested residents and businesses to compost, the program is only reaching about 15% of Durango residents and has not seen a lot of growth in the past few years. Current year-round programs are also limited to only food scraps and leaves, with there being no year-round curbside option for yard trimmings. Voluntary programs, like the current program in Durango, will often plateau in participation. This plateau limits cost effectiveness, since larger, guaranteed volumes for haulers and processors often result in [lower program costs](#) for residents.
- **Organics Diversion Requirement:** A diversion requirement was not well-received during stakeholder interviews and community engagement. Participants shared they were not in support of a requirement to divert certain materials from the landfill, especially given the potential for a diversion requirement to be unstructured and unenforced. However, this type of policy often provides residents and businesses with optionality for how they choose to divert their organics, given many currently bring their organics to a nearby farm or backyard compost, as reported in the survey and focus group.

Next Steps

STEPS recommends implementing mandatory curbside organics collection, for residential, commercial, or both sectors. While diversion potential is projected to be higher for residential, based on generation estimates, STEPS recognizes the nuance in implementing requirements for each sector. The next steps for implementing requirements for curbside collection the City should take are outlined in this section.

Immediate Next Steps

1. Direction to proceed. City of Durango staff present a resolution to City Council outlining actions and timeline for implementing recommended policies. City Council deliberates and votes on providing this formal direction.
2. Baseline data collection. Ensure tonnage, diversion, and participation data is up-to-date to establish metrics for program development and evaluation.

Steps for Implementation

3. Develop basic program structure details. Program structure should detail items such as program roll-out process, exemption policies and processes, alignment with existing City collection services, and preliminary educational information.
4. Determine which, if any, aspects the city wants to control or conduct. The City should consider how much control or ownership it wants to have over the program. Elements that the city could either own or contract out could include:
 - a. Bin/cart procurement
 - b. Education and outreach
 - c. Customer service
 - d. Hauling
 - e. Processing

5. Develop procurement strategy. Determine whether to procure collection and processing as a bundled contract or separately; draft request for proposal (RFP) scope, evaluation criteria, and contract term structure.
 - a. STEPS recommends a longer contract (5-10 years) to support amortization of necessary equipment purchases for the contracted hauler (i.e. fleet for collection, bin procurement, etc.).
6. Develop cost structure. Rate impacts should be considered under multiple service scenarios (weekly vs. every-other-week collection, co-collection with adjusted trash frequency, cart sizes offered) and identify options to offset costs (e.g., reduced trash service levels, PAYT restructuring).
 - a. City of Durango staff indicated that a rate study for municipal trash and recycling collection service is slated for 2027. This rate study should incorporate the recycling costs covered by the Producer Responsibility program and the process for implementing new organics collection service.
7. Draft ordinance language. Prepare the mandatory collection ordinance.
8. Initiate early public engagement. Continue and promote engagement conducted in this STEPS project to increase community buy-in by ensuring those impacted by this ordinance are supported in the transition and included in the decision-making process.

Decision Points Requiring Council Action

Staff will develop recommendations for Council to consider and vote to adopt.

1. Ordinance adoption: mandatory subscription/participation requirement, covered generators, effective dates, and enforcement mechanisms.
2. Program scope decisions: accepted materials list (food scraps only vs. food scraps + yard trimmings), service frequency, and whether multifamily is included in initial program onset or deferred.

3. Rate structure approval: adoption of new rates or rate methodology reflecting collection of organics.
4. Budget appropriation: outreach/education funding, cart or kitchen pail purchases (if City-funded), and staffing for program administration and compliance.

Table 9: Recommended Ordinance Elements

Ordinance Component	Description	Additional Considerations
Mandatory service requirement	Requires all accounts for targeted generators to have organics collection service	Define effective date; consider exemptions
Covered generators	Defines which sector(s) are subject to the requirement (residential, commercial, or both)	A phased approach can be used to ramp up operations through a trigger date or contingencies for service (e.g. once “X” is in place, “Y” sector will have service)

Ordinance Component	Description	Additional Considerations
Accepted/prohibited materials	Establishes what may be placed in organics carts	Coordinate with contracted processor before finalizing; allow updates by administrative rule rather than code amendment
Contamination standards and enforcement	Defines contamination thresholds, tagging/rejection procedures, and escalating penalties	Start with an education-first "oops tag" approach; reserve fines for repeat offenders
Container requirements	Establishes cart specifications, ownership, set-out rules	Specify in contract whether hauler or City owns carts
Self-haul/backyard composting exemption (optional)	Allows opt-out for generators already managing organics	Require verification from generator; the city should consider if this is desired

Ordinance Component	Description	Additional Considerations
Reporting requirements	Requires hauler/processor to report tonnage, participation, and contamination	Specify format and frequency (monthly/quarterly) in both code and contract
Rate authority	Establishes or references authority to set organics rates	Coordinate with rate structure assessment

Implementation Timeline

Phase 1: Planning and Ordinance Development (Months 1-6)

- Determine potential cost impacts and establish sustainable rate structures
- Draft the ordinance, defining affected customers, service requirements, and enforcement provisions
- If necessary, hold additional stakeholder meetings to gather input from residents, businesses, and haulers before adoption
- Responsible: City staff, consultant, City Attorney

Phase 2: Council Adoption and Procurement (Months 6-12)

- Present the ordinance to Council for adoption through the ordinance process.

- Develop and release the RFP for organics service providers (if using contracted services), evaluate proposals, and award the collection contract
- Responsible: Council, City staff, evaluation committee

Phase 3: Contract Execution and Mobilization (Months 6-18)

- Negotiate and execute the contract(s), finalizing service terms and performance standards
- Procure collection trucks and carts, accounting for equipment lead times
- Design collection routes to optimize efficiency and service coverage
- Responsible: City staff, contracted hauler/processor

Phase 4: Outreach and Education (Months 12-ongoing)

- Launch a citywide education campaign to build awareness and explain what belongs in the cart
- Deliver carts and any start-up kits (i.e. kitchen caddies, BPI-certified compostable liners, etc.) with instructional materials attached so guidance reaches every household at setout
- Responsible: City staff, hauler, community partners\

Phase 5: Service Launch (Months 18-24)

- Roll out service on a phased or citywide basis, depending on the selected implementation approach
- Increase customer service staffing to handle the surge in resident questions during launch
- Monitor contamination using education-first cart tagging to correct behavior without penalizing early adopters
- Responsible: Hauler, City staff

Phase 6: Evaluation and Optimization (Months 24+)

- Track participation and tonnage to measure program performance against diversion goals
- Conduct contamination audits to identify problem materials and target follow-up education
- Prepare an annual report to Council summarizing outcomes and recommendations
- Adjust routes and rates as needed based on operational data and cost experience
- Implement complementary ordinances to support increased diversion and aversion, such as Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT)
- Responsible: City staff, hauler, processor