

Date: November 8, 2018

To: Councilmember Herbold

From: Socorro Medina & Angela Wallis – SPU, Solid Waste Line of Business

Re: Composting and Recycling Access for Multifamily Residents

Following is an overview of existing and new strategies to improve access for multifamily residents to properly dispose of food waste and recyclables. This memorandum is a follow-up to the April 10, 2018 CRUEDA Committee hearing on the proposed 2019-2029 solid waste collection contracts (CB 119231), and provides a summary of the issues, an update on staff actions to date, and proposed plans for 2019.

BACKGROUND – SPU MULTIFAMILY POLICIES & ASSISTANCE

1. Solid Waste Codes & Policies

- Seattle Solid Waste Code requires multifamily buildings to provide composting services (since 2012). Nearly all buildings now have services.
- Seattle Solid Waste Code prohibits disposal of compostable materials in garbage (since 2015; recyclables since 2005). SPU field staff randomly monitor properties for compliance.
- Most multifamily buildings comply partially, but few are fully successful.
- Overall, multifamily properties composted or recycled 37% of their waste in 2017, substantially less than SPU's multifamily sector target of 54% by 2022. The multifamily sector is important to Seattle's city-wide goal to divert 70% of waste by 2022.

2. SPU Service Assistance to Established Buildings

- SPU staff provide robust on-site assistance to multifamily property managers to improve solid waste collection and distribute free tools, such as signs and compost containers for on-floor collection whenever feasible.
- SPU staff or partners have visited 90% of all 300 buildings in Seattle that have 100 or more units (some of them more than once) and visited many smaller buildings on request.
- A multilingual team provides culturally-competent composting and recycling resident training in 10+ languages and provides free tools such as kitchen food scraps containers.
- Solid waste compliance staff inspect multifamily garbage dumpsters and tag those that have >10% of compostable/recyclable materials. Follow-up letters are sent, and follow-up inspections are conducted. A fee can be applied if diversion does not improve.

3. Land Use Code for New Buildings

- Seattle's Land Use Code requires new buildings to incorporate space for container storage and staging of all waste containers (i.e., containers for compost, recycle and garbage).
- The Code provides for safe access by solid waste collectors.
- However, the code provisions do not include requirements for universal and convenient tenant access to composting, recycling and garbage.

4. SPU Current Guidance and Permit Review

- As part of Department of Construction & Inspections (DCI) permit review, SPU reviews solid waste storage and access plans for most proposed multifamily and mixed-use developments in Seattle.
- SPU works directly with architects and developers to ensure, at a minimum, relevant code compliance and solid waste collection safety requirements.
- In addition, SPU provides best practices guidance for composting and recycling diversion success, which includes tenant access to composting, recycling and garbage containers or chutes on each floor in larger buildings.
- SPU provides outreach on best practices to architects and developers through speaking engagements at American Institute for Architects (AIA) seminars, attending joint meetings between City Departments and the Master Builders Association (MBA), and speaking at Seattle Design Review Boards meetings.

5. Industry Research

- SPU consultants completed a review earlier this year of solid waste building codes in other metropolitan districts that have advanced food waste composting and recycling programs.
- The research included a recent nationwide review of internal chute systems for potential food waste conveyance. *(This review had only 16 apartment buildings but indicated that a three chute system – for separate collection of compost, recycle and garbage - is highly effective for waste diversion and minimizing property staff time and floor collection space.)*
- SPU completed a review of extensive solid waste infrastructure data obtained during on-site visits to large buildings, including container locations and building diversion performance.
- All research findings above have confirmed that providing residents the opportunity to discard of their compost, recycle and garbage in separate containers or chutes all located on the same floor as their dwelling unit provides the most robust participation and diversion (and most closely matches the convenience that single-family residents enjoy).

POTENTIAL NEXT STEP

1. **Proposed Code Amendment** – SPU is evaluating new land use code provisions that would formalize current guidance provided to developers of new buildings:

- **Universal Containers** - All solid waste collection areas for multifamily residents would be required to include all three containers (compost, recycle and garbage).
- **Convenient Containers** - Multifamily buildings with three or more floors would be required to provide collection areas on each floor.
- **Adequate Space & Container Capacity** – SPU would update formulas for minimum storage space and waste container requirement to reflect current needs for successful composting and recycling.

Timeline

- **Proposed Code Language (December-January 2018)** – SPU is working with DCI to develop updated code language that would be most effective for designers and reviewers.
- **Stakeholder Input (January-February 2019)** - SPU and DCI intend to present proposed code revisions at a regular joint City/Master Builder Association meeting and convene an ad hoc committee of architects from Seattle AIA Chapter to review and provide feedback.
- **Legislation (March-April 2019)** - SPU and DCI will work through the appropriate Council Committee channels to move proposed code revisions forward.