

What Type of Recycling Is Right for College Park?

Ambrose Clay 10/4/2024

Trash recycling is a perennial topic of discussion in College Park. It came up several times while I was Ward 1 Councilman and it is coming up again. I believe that **most people think that it is the right thing to do for the environment - but for many, not necessarily the thing that they personally are willing to expend the time, effort, money, and discipline to do, or do effectively.**

The goal is simple. Unfortunately **the process to accomplish it is not.** **The City currently facilitates some recycling:** In April College Park has an annual "drive-up" recycling day for electronics and hazardous waste. During the month of April, you can dispose of appliances and tires at no charge by leaving them on the curb. 365 days a year you can leave **accepted** recyclable waste (e.g., paper, cardboard, aluminum & metal cans, glass bottles) at our two recycling locations (Although twice a week the City picks up garbage and trash at ones home, it is all combined in the truck, goes to the landfill, and **does not get recycled.**). Of course, a homeowner also can **personally** compost most of their organic waste, for the benefit of their yard and garden.

So where is citizen effort required? Citizens currently need to sort and store their recyclables until taking them (as appropriate) to one of the two City recycling locations, or until putting them on the curb in April, or until taking them to the annual recycling "drive-up" location on the designated April Saturday.

So where does this process go wrong? Sometimes the bins at the two recycling centers are not clearly labeled for proper content, which causes the introduction of an **acceptable** item into the wrong bin. Sometimes residents (**or non residents?**) dump **unacceptable** items (e.g. furniture, wood or scrap metal), or put different kinds of acceptable items all in the same bin. As I recall, **the introduction of enough of the wrong item into a bin "poisons" the whole bin and causes it all to go to the landfill instead of being recycled.** (I often see "poisoning" when I go to the Harvard recycling location.). Public Works should know the percent of bins that are "poisoned", and thus not recyclable (I.e., a few thoughtless people can undo the good deeds of many.).

Over the years I have heard citizens compliment our sanitation workers on the great twice-weekly service we enjoy. Unfortunately, since everything is mixed together, none of it is recyclable - it all goes to the landfill - a lost recycling opportunity. Over the years previous Council has discussed **several suggestions for home curbside recycling, for example: Citizens allowed to contract with an external organization to pick up their recyclables**, say, once a week - the pickup firm would sort them after-the-fact. **Or the City designates one of the two weekly pickups for recyclables** (for all citizens) - having City workers do the sorting after-the-fact eliminates the load "poisoning" problem, and saves homeowners effort. None of these solutions have been adopted, for different reasons at different times: **1. The Chinese market for recyclables diminished** (Is there now a viable market for recyclables? Is our current effort actually resulting in recycling?). **2. Doubt that there are enough recycling households** to attract a private company to pick-up city-wide. **3. Doubt whether citizens can tolerate only one non-recyclable pickup a week.** **4. Doubt whether the combined services will cost too much per week.**

Note that if the City were to designate one pickup per week for recyclables only, and dedicate an area for sorting, we could provide more entry-level jobs in Public Works to employ more of our residents - a win-win, if there is a market!

My wife and I compost almost all our organic food waste (e.g., not bones). Weekly we take all our **accepted** recyclable waste to the CP recycling center on Harvard. Annually we take outdated or inoperable electronics to the City recycling event in April, or return them to the manufacturer (e.g., Apple).