



Massachusetts Municipal Association

## **MMA BEST PRACTICES SERIES**

*Recommendations for Effective Local Government Administration and Management from MMA Policy Committees*

2025 • Volume 7 • Number 4

### **MMA Policy Committee on Energy and the Environment**

#### **Best Practice Recommendation: Municipal Solid Waste Diversion and Recycling Programs**

**BEST PRACTICE:** Explore opportunities to reduce solid waste tonnage and promote sustainable alternatives to waste disposal.

Municipalities providing municipal solid waste (MSW) disposal services face many challenges. The combination of several factors — limited landfill capacity, limited number of Municipal Waste Combustors (MWCs), reliance on out-of-state MSW transfers, and the lack of climate resilient infrastructure — leaves Massachusetts communities vulnerable to backups, delays and disruption.

Cities and towns have seen the costs for hauling, disposal, labor, and equipment rise sharply over the past several years. Increasingly, municipal officials must work independently and in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) to explore alternatives to reduce solid waste tonnage in their communities and lower costs, while ensuring compliance with rules and regulations.

Municipalities have undertaken several new and growing responsibilities to manage solid waste, maintain health and sanitation standards, and financially support investments in waste management. These responsibilities include compliance with MassDEP's waste disposal bans. In November of 2022, MassDEP enacted new waste bans on mattresses and textiles, and placed stricter limits on food waste. By helping to divert these materials from the waste stream — in addition to materials previously covered by waste bans — through reuse, composting or recycling, municipalities can realize positive benefits both for the environment and their bottom line.

The following best practices are recommended:

- Ensure local practices are in compliance with MassDEP's waste bans, including the new bans for mattresses and textiles.

(continued, next page)

- Consider adding options for residents to divert food waste from the trash, including encouraging backyard composting with subsidized compost bins, accepting food waste at a municipal drop-off site, and gradually implementing a curbside program.

- See more information about the City of New Bedford's [Food Waste Drop-off Program](#) and the Town of Lexington's [composting efforts](#), including a [free curbside composting pilot program](#).

- Pursue opportunities to support food waste diversion in municipal buildings and within local schools.

- See [this report from Franklin](#) for information on local school food waste diversion programs, with more recent results indicating the diversion of food waste has led to a 38% reduction of school waste going to compactors in one fiscal year.

- Frequently communicate rules and expectations for waste and recycling to the public, and keep need-to-know information in an easily accessible format and in the languages spoken by residents.

- Municipal examples include the town of Egremont's [Recycling Rules webpage](#) and [Transfer Station & Recycling Center webpage](#), as well as the city of Newburyport's [2024-2025 Environmental Health, Recycling, and Trash Information Guide](#).

- Use free resources, including RecycleSmart's [Smart Recycling Guide](#) (translated in several languages) and [Recyclopedia widget](#), which can be embedded into municipal websites.

- Engage with local and state partners to prepare for future municipal solid waste contract negotiations:

- Create a cross-functional team within municipal government to better understand the challenges and opportunities that could be addressed through a stronger contract and to enable information sharing within departments, boards and commissions.

- Employ the help of MassDEP's Municipal Assistance Coordinators (MACs) to prepare for upcoming contract opportunities and become better informed on region-specific developments regarding trash and recycling services.

- Evaluate opportunities for progress toward local and state waste reduction and climate goals in each review of MSW contracts, such as:

- Implement trash limits by adjusting or reducing trash and recycling barrel sizes.

- Consider implementing a Pay-As-You-Throw program to draw attention to the amount of waste individual households contribute and to better represent the costs of waste management by volume and weight.

- Consider what outreach and educational efforts will be necessary to strengthen community acceptance and understanding, and whether such a program fits your municipality's needs.

(continued, next page)

- Don't forget about Chapter 30B: Though contracts for the collection, transportation, receipt, processing or disposal of solid waste, recyclables or compostable materials are exempt from the Uniform Procurement Act, a formal, competitive bidding process may be in the best interest of the municipality and allow for potential cost savings or service improvements.

## Resources

- From the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection:
  - [Recycling & Waste Reduction Help for Cities & Towns website](#)
  - [Municipal Assistance Coordinators](#) (including districts and contact information)
  - [Solid Waste Management Contracts & Contracting website](#) and [Best Practices Checklist](#)
  - [Waste Disposal Bans webpage](#), [Mattress Recycling website](#) and [Clothing and Textile Recovery website](#), and [Accompanying Communications Toolkit](#)
  - [Pay-As-You-Throw \(PAYT\)/Save-Money-And-Reduce-Trash \(SMART\) website](#)
- RecycleSmart's [Smart Recycling Guide](#) and [Recyclopedia widget](#)
- [Tackling Trash: A Comprehensive Overview of Municipal Solid Waste Issues and Recommendations for Massachusetts Communities](#), with additional materials provided through [Attachment A](#) and [Attachment B](#)