



Green Cincinnati Plan  
2023

FOCUS AREA

# Zero Waste





## FOCUS AREA

# Zero Waste

Protecting human health and the environment by diverting waste from landfills.

### Vision

Cincinnati will achieve 50% diversion city-wide by 2030, and city-wide zero waste (90% diversion) by 2040 through conservation of resources by responsible production, consumption, reuse, and recovery of materials without threat to human health and the environment.

## A Word from Michelle Balz, Zero Waste Focus Area Chair

The Zero Waste section focuses on materials we touch every day—your aluminum can, paper coffee cup, plastic water bottle, and even the leaves in your backyard. By reducing, reusing, and recycling these ordinary materials, we conserve the resources used to create and transport the products to us. These materials can become feedstock for regional industry or a valuable amendment to replenish depleted soils.



A typical curbside set-out in Cincinnati includes recycling carts, trash carts, and containers or bags for yard waste. Photo courtesy of OES.

Cincinnati residents currently divert 20% of our “waste” from the landfill. Recycling these materials into new products reduces greenhouse gases and conserves resources. It’s equivalent to removing 7,400 cars from the road per year and safeguarding 102,980 trees and 1,200 tons of

limestone, iron ore, and coal. Although current recycling and composting efforts have a major environmental impact, Cincinnati has the potential to double or even triple that impact with improved programs and participation.

Hundreds of Cincinnati residents provided input to create the goals and action steps outlined in this section. After multiple community input sessions as well as virtual engagement, the Zero Waste team narrowed down the focus and goals to those that would have the most impact in reducing climate change and improving equity and inclusion for all Cincinnati residents.

I am most excited about the potential to improve recycling accessibility for Cincinnati residents living in multi-family housing. This plan sets the impressive goal of increasing recycling by 50% among multi-family dwellings, public events, and emerging waste streams.



Organics, including food waste, can be used in neighborhood composting and are an important way to reduce waste going to the landfill, and building healthy soil. Photo courtesy of The Common Orchard Project.

The Zero Waste goals for Cincinnati align with the [Hamilton County Solid Waste Plan Update 2024-2038](#) strategies of increasing outreach for residential recycling, expanding yard and food waste composting, and improving infrastructure for multi-family access.

This section presents ambitious goals and actions to reduce materials going to the landfill and use those resources to decrease our carbon footprint. However, achieving these goals will require all Cincinnati residents and businesses to engage and take action. We hope you will help us make the vision of a Zero Waste Cincinnati a reality.

FOCUS AREA CHAIR



**ZERO WASTE  
FOCUS AREA CHAIR**

Michelle Balz

**ORGANIZATION**

Solid Waste Manager  
Hamilton County R3Source

EQUITY LIAISON



My time with the GCP has been a unique and eye-opening experience. I have been allowed to peek into the machinations of administrative planning and I can assure you that we are in good hands.

**EQUITY LIAISON**

Darryl Franklin

**NEIGHBORHOOD**

North Fairmount





# Recycling

## Goal

Increase waste diversion  
10% by 2028.

**BASELINE YEAR(S)**

2023

**DATA SOURCE(S)**

Hamilton County Solid Waste District

## Strategy 1

Increase access to recycling for  
multi-family building residents.

Cincinnati has the oldest curbside recycling program in Ohio, established in 1989. Single family homes have fewer barriers to recycling, so the City has focused much of its efforts there. However, over 50% of Cincinnati residents live in multi-family dwellings. These individuals, typically in priority communities, do not have the same easy access to recycling. Instead, they need to own a car and transport recyclables to a drop-off location. The effort, time, and resources necessary to do this creates a significant barrier for most people. Furthermore, illegal dumping threatens the existence of these drop-offs. In this pilot we propose placing recycling dumpsters directly on site at multi-family residences—so residents have easy access—and piloting a valet and education service to help property managers control for contamination.



An example of a recycling container which could be utilized by multi-family building residents. Photo courtesy of City of Cincinnati.

### Priority Actions

	GCP PILLARS			ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES			
	Sustainability	Equity	Resilience	Jobs	Investment	Health	Feasibility
Increase the number of multi-family dwellings with recycling infrastructure	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Minimize recycling contamination through culturally appropriate education, partnerships, workforce champions, and resident feedback	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

● strong alignment   ● moderate alignment   ● weak alignment

# Recycling



Community members participate in recycling at Avondale Day. Increasing participation at public events can help create positive recycling habits and improve the recycling culture. Photo courtesy of OES.

## Strategy 2

### Improve public event and neighborhood business district recycling infrastructure.

To create recycling habits, we need to provide easy access to recycling at home, work, and play via environmental design. A best practice is to provide paired recycling and garbage receptacles, clear simple signage as well as monitoring and collection. Recycling at public events—such as Taste of Cincinnati, Reds Opening Day, Blink, or watching the World Cup in the DORA District—signals to our residents and visitors that Cincinnati embodies a culture of sustainability. Workforce development is also essential so that event producers can hire skilled professionals to do this work.



Some neighborhoods have paired recycling cans and garbage cans, like this one in Downtown. Increasing the availability of recycling containers in Neighborhood Business Districts supports landfill diversion and make it simple for people to easily dispose of their waste in the appropriate place. Photo courtesy of OES.

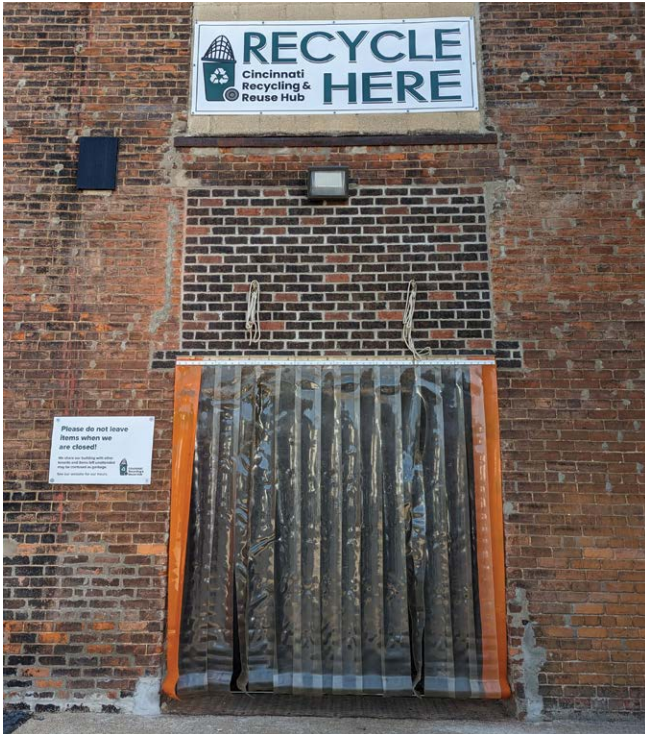
### Priority Actions

	GCP PILLARS			ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES			
	Sustainability	Equity	Resilience	Jobs	Investment	Health	Feasibility
Require permitted public events and events held on city property to use best available recycling practices and include recycling service costs in the permit fee	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Provide alternatives to single-use plastic items at permitted public events and events held on city property	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Pair garbage cans with recycling containers in all Neighborhood Business Districts and DORA districts and provide necessary services, including collection and monitoring	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

● strong alignment   ● moderate alignment   ● weak alignment



# Recycling



Alternative recycling and reuse outlets, like the Cincinnati Recycling and Reuse Hub, provide options by offering a one-stop drop-off for hard-to-recycle items and diverting them from the landfill. Photo courtesy of CRRH.



The Cincinnati Recycling and Reuse Hub collects items traditionally difficult to recycle from businesses and residents. Connecting these materials to commercial recyclers creates new products. Photo courtesy of CRRH.

## Strategy 3

Increase use of alternative recycling and reuse outlets for residential metals, textiles, e-waste, and other emerging recyclable waste streams.

Despite keeping waste out of the landfill, recycling does require the input of resources and energy. In contrast, waste reduction, reuse, and repair all conserve energy and save natural resources, making them, in many ways, better options than recycling in the waste hierarchy. Reusable take-out containers are preferable to single-use containers even if they do require washing. Similarly, donating or selling household items and furniture extends the “life” of these items, keeping them out of the landfill. Unfortunately, it’s usually easier and cheaper to buy new, rather than fix or find something a new home. This strategy aims to level the playing field so it’s just as easy to reuse as it is to replace.



### Priority Actions

	GCP PILLARS			ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES			
	Sustainability	Equity	Resilience	Jobs	Investment	Health	Feasibility
Support and expand neighborhood pick-up locations that connect commercial recyclers to dropped-off recyclable materials, like the Cincinnati Recycling and Reuse Hub	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Create a program that incentivizes commercial recyclers to collect household e-waste, textiles, and reusable items not otherwise collected curbside	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Incentivize recycling and diversion innovation by increasing the cost of waste generation and disposal	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

● strong alignment   ● moderate alignment   ● weak alignment

# Recycling



Recycling Ambassadors engage with residents during educational campaigns to build knowledge for residents and capacity of the recycling and reuse workforce. Photo courtesy of Butch Gibson.

## Strategy 4

---

### Build capacity of the recycling and reuse workforce.

In addition to improving the recycling infrastructure at public events, the City must also build the appropriate workforce capacity. Currently, property managers and event producers are unable to hire skilled services, stalling any progress made in public-event recycling. We have also learned that we can increase the capacity of residents in priority communities to embrace recycling if we combine it with an employment opportunity. By training and employing residents in priority communities to provide these services, the City can both provide jobs and expand the reach of residential recycling.

## Priority Actions

Create “Recycling Valets”: workforce and small business development to provide recycling collection, monitoring, and education to multi-family dwellings, special events, and business districts with an emphasis on employing residents from priority neighborhoods

	GCP PILLARS			ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES			
	Sustainability	Equity	Resilience	Jobs	Investment	Health	Feasibility
Create “Recycling Valets”: workforce and small business development to provide recycling collection, monitoring, and education to multi-family dwellings, special events, and business districts with an emphasis on employing residents from priority neighborhoods	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

● strong alignment   ● moderate alignment   ● weak alignment



# Organics

## Goal

Sustainably divert 50% of organics (including yard trimmings and food waste) from the landfill by 2028.

**BASELINE YEAR(S)**

2018

**DATA SOURCE(S)**

Hamilton County Waste Characterization Study 2018



Allowing mown leaves or grass clippings to remain on the lawn is good for soil health and reduces the need to have separate collection.

## Strategy 1

Improve current yard-trimmings collection program and use of biochar.

The City's yard trimmings program—designed to divert organics from the landfill—has sputtered over the years due to budget cuts. Therefore, compliance with the source-separated yard trimmings program has declined, and landfill diversion has stalled. Education and outreach will help the City get this vital program back on track. Additionally, we need to ensure each household has the appropriate carts for recycling, yard trimmings, and garbage. Lastly, the City will explore using biochar—a charcoal-like substance created from the burning of wood and similar biomass—as a kind of mulch and fertilizer for trees and gardens.



Biochar is a charcoal-like substance created from the burning of wood or similar biomass and can be used as a mulch or fertilizer for trees and gardens. It is a promising option for diverting organic materials from the landfill. Photo courtesy of Sam Dunlap.



### Priority Actions

	GCP PILLARS			ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES			
	Sustainability	Equity	Resilience	Jobs	Investment	Health	Feasibility
Conduct education and outreach on residential mulching (Just Mow It) to reduce grass clippings and source-separated yard trimmings for collection and composting	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Support the development of local biochar processing, and the use of activated biochar for farming, tree plantings, storm water retention, etc.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

● strong alignment   ● moderate alignment   ● weak alignment



# Organics



Homeadow Song Farm in Spring Grove Village utilizes small scale composting to recycle their organic material, minimizing transportation costs and helping to create quality soil amendments for backyard gardens. Photo courtesy of Homeadow Farm.



The Civic Garden Center hosts a Master Composting Class, teaching the ins and outs of composting and going beyond the basics. Photo courtesy of Civic Garden Center.

## Strategy 2

### Improve multi-scale composting infrastructure.

Composting is the process of recycling organic material—such as vegetative food scraps, leaves, and yard trimmings—into soil amendment for plants and soil. One of the biggest challenges the City faces in implementing a large-scale composting operation is the high cost of transportation. To process organic material efficiently, the city’s composting infrastructure needs to have several tiers:

#### Tier 1

The best way to minimize transportation cost is to incentivize and encourage home composting of food waste and yard trimmings.

#### Tier 2

Transporting compostable organics to small-scale urban agriculture operations that grow food helps farmers and communities and lowers costs for the City.

#### Tier 3

This tier consists of large-scale, industrial Class II composting for organics that do not readily degrade in the first two tiers. In addition to food waste and yard trimmings, the Class II facility can process food waste and compostable paper and take-out containers not acceptable in the other tiers.

### Priority Actions

	GCP PILLARS			ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES			
	Sustainability	Equity	Resilience	Jobs	Investment	Health	Feasibility
Pilot and support small-scale community composting under 500 square feet	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ensure all organic material collected, including yard trimmings and food waste, is composted in a sustainable manner	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Support funding, siting, and development of a regional, large-scale Class II compost facility	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

● strong alignment   ● moderate alignment   ● weak alignment



# Organics



Diversion of organic materials like food waste can be completed through vegetative food waste drop off sites, like this one hosted by the Common Orchard Project in Camp Washington. Photo courtesy of The Common Orchard project.



The Common Orchard Project utilizes medium-scale (less than 500 sq. ft.) sites at a neighborhood level to divert organic waste from the landfill and create compost. Photo courtesy of The Common Orchard Project.

## Strategy 3

### Divert food waste through prevention, reuse/recovery, and composting.

In 2021 Cincinnati sent 74,953 tons of household waste to the landfill, approximately 16.8% (12,592 tons) of which was food waste. Food waste is the biggest contributor to methane, a greenhouse gas that is up to 86 times more powerful than carbon dioxide. In the United States up to 40% of food is never eaten, resulting in a massive resource drain from the growing, processing, transporting and eventual disposal of all that unused food. Nationwide, households lose approximately \$1800 per year in wasted groceries, while here in Cincinnati 33% of families are food insecure. This data speaks to an alarming gap between what is wasted and what is needed.

Cincinnati has worked to support the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Recovery Hierarchy, using prevention, reuse/recovery, and composting. However, to move forward, the City must more robustly use these tools to eliminate wasted food and divert food waste from the landfill. Additionally, the City needs to create pathways for the proper storage and timely transport of excess food for donation.



## Priority Actions

	GCP PILLARS			ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES			
	Sustainability	Equity	Resilience	Jobs	Investment	Health	Feasibility
Support the development of anaerobic digesters to divert organics from the waste stream	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Support the creation of food waste collection programs and/or establish food waste drop-off locations in city facilities, communities, and schools	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

● strong alignment ● moderate alignment ● weak alignment

See Food Focus Area for Goals, Strategies & Priority Actions related to Food Waste Prevention & Recovery.



# Litter

## Goal

Decrease litter and illegal dumping by 10% annually through 2028.

**BASELINE YEAR(S)**

2022

**DATA SOURCE(S)**

Keep Cincinnati Beautiful Community Appearance Index

## Strategy

Increase programming and outreach for litter and illegal dumping prevention.

Litter is a problem in Cincinnati. Seventy percent of the complaints the City receives deal with litter and illegal dumping, reflecting both quality of life and environmental issues. In addition to creating blight and pollution, illegal dumping can present a health and safety issue depending on the type of material being dumped. These activities often occur in many accessible but unsecured locations like vacant lots, wooded areas, drainageways, alleys, and roadways—areas often found in communities with fewer resources for tackling such challenges. Cincinnati needs to adopt a comprehensive strategy, one that takes an inter-departmental approach, leveraging community stakeholders, organizations, and volunteers to assist priority communities in putting a stop to this chronic problem. Single-use plastics add to the problem as they contribute to unsightly litter and wasted resources, clogging drainage and waterways, and ultimately breaking down into environmentally pervasive micro-plastics.



Children participate in a neighborhood clean-up in Northside to remove litter. Photo courtesy of OES.

## Priority Actions

	GCP PILLARS			ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES			
	Sustainability	Equity	Resilience	Jobs	Investment	Health	Feasibility
Use policy and fees to discourage the use of single-use plastics, including plastic bags	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Reduce litter and illegal dumping through public communications strategy and stronger enforcement	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Conduct routine neighborhood litter clean-ups and partnering with programs like Adopt-A-Spot	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

● strong alignment ● moderate alignment ● weak alignment



Reduction of single-use plastics like water bottles can have a large impact on neighborhood litter.



No Dumping signs are present throughout the city. 70% of complaints received by the City are related to litter and illegal dumping.

ZERO WASTE EQUITY LIAISON



**ZERO WASTE EQUITY LIAISON**

Darryl Franklin

**NEIGHBORHOOD**

North Fairmount

## A Word from Darryl Franklin, Zero Waste Equity Liaison

I am Darryl Franklin, Community Liaison with the Green Cincinnati Plan (GCP) on the Zero Waste Focus Group. My time with the GCP has been a unique and eye-opening experience. I have been allowed to peek into the machinations of administrative planning and I can assure you that we are in good hands.

As community liaison I was at first overwhelmed by the new terminology, new faces, and the overall planning environment. It was difficult to relay ideas and proposals to my community due to my elementary understanding of the system and its processes. After attending more focus group meetings than I can count, I realized that GCP had gathered a diverse group of committed people dedicated to addressing our climate and environmental challenges.

My interaction with the Office of Environment and Sustainability (OES) was enjoyable and educational. I met highly efficient and effective public servants who were knowledgeable and professional, but also likeable and friendly. Through these meetings I have encountered many kindred spirits working toward climate resiliency. The data gathering, analyzing, and organizing of information into coherent, and sensible talking points, made for some lively discussions and some consensus.

The emphasis on equity in the process gives the GCP the chance to redefine the equitable distribution of resources to reflect their ability to improve the environmental climate of neighborhoods previously neglected and in the most need of remediation. This is an opportunity to include all the diverse citizenry of our region in this epic challenge.

The “plan,” containing ambitious goals and strategies, can be accomplished using the systematic approach of OES and the GCP. They are gathering and developing the people, tools, and technology necessary to create an inclusive, forward-thinking, motivated workforce, inspired by the many possibilities that lie ahead. Environmental resiliency is more than just an aspirational pursuit. There are measurable steps we can take to help create a clean, livable planet. This is an opportunity for everyone to work together to make the world a better place.

Looking forward,

Darryl Franklin