

Recycling, Food-scrap, and Waste Program at Woodbury, CT Transfer Station

Frequently Asked Questions.

Summary

Everyone should already be recycling everything that is recyclable, but let's be honest – not everyone does, at least not all the time. We know this from statistical data across the state and the nation. Similarly, food-scrap that could be composted but aren't, currently make up 22% of trash.

The cost of disposing of trash per ton is rising rapidly and is projected to continue to rise. In contrast, disposing of recyclables is much less expensive.

So, what should the town do? Continue to pay the higher trash disposal costs from the tax dollars of all town residents? Charge a higher flat Transfer Station fee to users? Or incentivize Transfer Station users to maximize their recycling and provide an alternative solution for food scraps?

The town has chosen the last option. The price charged for each bag incentivizes Transfer Station users to minimize their trash by maximizing recycling (which is free to users) and maximizing their food-scrap diversion (which is free, or almost free, to users). Not only does this bag cost incentivize recycling, it covers the rising cost of waste disposal for the town. If the town does nothing, all town residents will bear the burden of rising disposal fees.

Based on the experience at other similar towns in CT and MA, **this program is projected to reduce the amount of trash collected by 50%, and the revenue generated from the sale of bags will pay for the disposal of the remaining 50%.** So, the per bag price serves two purposes, reducing the total amount of trash, and paying for the disposal of the bag and its contents.

Finances: Where Does The Money Go?

1. **It was presented that our cost to run the dump comes in at 600k, it looks like that number is significantly higher than what's currently in our budget, is that because of the program?**

No. The cost of the pilot study to the town has been zero due to a grant funded by DEEP. Additionally, there was no cost to the town for COG assistance – COG assistance to Woodbury is also funded by DEEP during the pilot.

2. **If the people who use the new system pay for the transfer station. Does that mean that the town's tax money will no longer go to pay for any portion of the transfer station?**

No. The cost of the whole Transfer Station in the '23-24 budget was \$ 661,000. The program is only targeted at reducing the hauling/tipping costs (currently approximately \$ 145,000) for the waste). The remainder will still come from tax money in future budgets.

3. **If the town saves money because of the program where will that money go, will it decrease my taxes?**

The town projects it will save approximately \$ 130,000 in the first year ('24-25) through reduced hauling/tipping fees. This is money that will not need to be provided from taxes. However, this sum is only a small portion of the resident's taxes (\$ 26,735,000 or 62% of which goes to BOE) and a small portion of the remaining \$ 16,447,000 town budget.

4. **How were the prices of the waste bags chosen?**

The price of town-designated waste bags is set to cover only two things: (i) the cost of manufacturing the bags AND (ii) the average cost of disposing of the waste contained within the bag. Revenue from bags is NOT intended to cover all of the other costs of running the Transfer Station.

5. **How were the prices of the food-scrap bags chosen?** [OBJ]

The price of town-designated food-scrap bags is set to cover only the cost of providing the bag. Note, the intent is to maximize food-scrap diversion. Also, residents can dump food-scrap directly into the dumpster from your own container/bucket.

6. **If the town buys 50k in bags, only sells 25k that means we are in the red and still costing taxpayers additional monies right?**

No. The merchants selling the town-designated bags will order them on an as-needed basis from the supplier. The town will receive direct pass-through payments from the merchants periodically. Note, the merchants will not be allowed to mark up the prices.

Pilot Program

Note – the pilot program that has been running for the previous year was voluntary.

7. **Has the town incurred costs for additional dumpsters, bags etc. so far?**

No. All the costs to date have been covered by a grant from the state.

8. **Any raw data about how much less trash was generated during the pilot program?**

Yes. The amount of trash was 14% less than the equivalent period the previous year, or 1,040 tons annualized. Based on this number for a voluntary and no-charge program and the experience of other towns, we predict a 50% reduction when the program becomes mandatory, and bags are charged for.

9. **Does anybody know where the food scraps went/would go?**

During the pilot the food-scraps went to an anaerobic digester in Southington (Quantum Biopower). The plan calls for that to continue, but other options are also being evaluated on an on-going basis. Note - this digester will accept food items such as bones that normally cannot be composted at home.

10. **Just to be clear, everyone involved is saying all of the food waste is being composted and not being disposed of by incineration or, other methods?**

The anaerobic digester converts the food-scraps into biogas, which contains methane, carbon dioxide, and sulfur. The energy in biogas can be used like natural gas to provide heat, generate electricity, and power cooling systems, among other uses. In addition, some residual compost material (called digestate) is generated. There are other options that may be considered for future food scrap disposal, such as on-site composting with aerated static piles, on-site composting inside an enclosed unit, or off-site composting with New Milford Farms.

11. **According to the minutes of the Waste Management Ad Hoc Committee, there are 7 pallets of bags remaining. Were those part of the initial 18 pallet shipment the town received through the grant? So, conceivably, they could be provided to the residents at no charge?**

Yes, the remaining bags were part of the initial shipment. Under the new program they will be available, through the town government for people experiencing real economic need of assistance.

12. **How do we know that people didn't just switch to private haulers in the towns where this has been implemented, so the waste goes somewhere else rather than being reduced?**

Firstly, towns that did not have a private-hauler option saw the same average trash reduction amounts as those that did. Secondly, in both towns with and without private-hauler options the reduction of trash was accompanied by a matching increase in

recycling and food diversion (which are less expensive to dispose of). Based on our calculation, it will be about 3-4 times as expensive to use a private hauler for the average household. While it is certainly possible that people may switch over, we do not foresee this happening in large numbers. Also, private haulers do not accept all waste items that the transfer station does. Even after the program starts, transfer station users will have many benefits to continue using the facility to dispose of their waste.

13. Who is NVCOG and what is their role?

NVCOG stands for the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments. NVCOG is **the regional government** serving 19 towns in west-central CT including Woodbury. **NVCOG has provided outreach and education at the request of Woodbury during the pilot**, such as organizing in-person and virtual events, tabling at the Transfer Station, writing press releases, and running a Facebook page. With the pilot program having reached its end, NVCOG will be stepping back from these responsibilities as the Town and its Waste Advisory Committee transition into the permanent program.

The Permanent Program

1. **How is this program with its fees, penalties etc. going to reduce the amount of food people eat (which creates the garbage)? I hardly believe that people will change shopping and eating habits. The claims and justification appear to be based on a lot of innuendo and opinion.**

The “claims and justifications” are based on data from other towns that have put programs like this in place. The goal and expectation are not to change what people eat, but to incentivize them to do more thorough recycling, and perhaps make other minimal changes, such as using reusable grocery bags.

2. **How does Spring clean-up or bulky waste work?**

Spring clean-up and bulky waste will work as it does now. Leaves, light brush and bulky waste fees will remain unchanged. See the Residential Guidelines flyer on the Transfer Station website for details.

3. **How many exactly AVERAGE households in town use only one 33 gallon trash bag a week? Does this include households with children, pets, activities, etc?**

Yes, this average includes families of all types in a sample of towns across New England performing diligent recycling. For context, the typical kitchen garbage pail is 13 gallons – so the average family fills a kitchen garbage pail (minus food scraps, which account for about 22% of the waste stream) once every three or four days.

Financial Projections

Item	Old Program Unchanged	New Program
Cost of disposing of waste	\$ 151,812	\$ 75,906
Cost of disposing of food-scrap	\$ 0	\$ 15,000
Revenue from TS permits/stickers	(\$ 30,000)	\$ 0
Revenue from bags	\$ 0	(\$ 73,213)
Net Cost	\$ 121,812	\$ 17,693
Savings		\$ 104,119

Note:

- Budget line items that do not change between the old and new program are not included in the table.
- The table shows **projected** figure for the next budget year based on experience in towns similar to Woodbury.

Narrative Version:

The total cost of running the Transfer Station is \$ 601,000 (excluding one-time costs), however the new program is only targeted at the waste disposal portion of this.

If nothing changes, the waste disposal (hauling and tipping) costs are expected to be \$ 150, 812 or more next year, offset by an anticipated \$ 30,000 in Transfer Station permit fees.

Under the new program, due to increased recycling and food-scrap diversion, we expect to reduce the waste disposal costs to \$ 75,906 plus an additional \$ 15,000 to dispose of food-scrap. In addition, although the permit fees will be reduced to \$ 0, we project \$ 73,213 will be raised in revenue from the sale of town-designated bags.

This revenue from bag sales will be used to pay for almost all of the waste disposal costs, resulting in a net savings of \$ 104,119 in the first year.