

September 28, 2023

Councilmember Alex Pedersen
Chair, Transportation and Seattle Public Utilities Committee
PO Box 34025
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

Dear Councilmember Pedersen and Committee Members,

In September 2023, the Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) had the opportunity to review a draft of SPU's 2022 Annual Waste Prevention & Recycling (WP&R) Report.

The City of Seattle continues to grow in population as the community returns to "life as usual" post-pandemic. In 2022, municipal solid waste (MSW) increased in all sectors except the single-family sector. With the "new norms" settling in post-pandemic, we see new opportunities to work with the community to reduce overall MSW generation and focus more on reuse.

Throughout the report, we see increases in waste generation for all sectors. We encourage the City of Seattle to continue to look for opportunities to increase access to composting and recycling for all customers and look for additional methods of outreach to educate residents on "What Goes Where". Based on the overall waste composition data on recoverable MSW, we see the biggest opportunity to reduce waste with curbside recyclables and food waste. SWAC sees this as an opportunity to increase SPU's waste diversion and keep more materials out of the landfill.

We noted that the 2022 WP&R report does not include details on legislative, Community Engagement, Extended Producer Reporting (ERP), and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) activities as have been outlined in previous years. This information could help to align strategies and decisions based on the community's involvement with MSW. We look forward to hearing more from SPU on these initiatives in the years to come.

The SWAC reviewed the 2022 WP&R report as a group, and our comments and recommendations can be found below.

Commercial MSW

With more residents spending time in Seattle and spending time away from home post-pandemic, there was another increase in the commercial MSW generation of 6.3% from last year. Although there was an increase in MSW generated and disposed in this sector, there was a drastic 40% increase in commercial composted tonnage. The overall tonnage generated and disposed of by businesses remains below pre-pandemic levels.

To sustain these lower levels of generation and disposal, SWAC sees an opportunity for SPU to conduct a study on how commercial sector customers can sustain reduced levels of generation and develop programs and support for these best practices. We also recommend further analyzing commercial sector data based on business type. This may provide a better understanding of the generation of each sub-sector and help inform tailored outreach solutions.

Single-Family MSW

Single-family households reduced overall MSW generated in 2022 by 1% from the previous year. This sector saw a slight increase in the MSW disposed in the landfill while recycled and composted MSW decreased.

With more Seattle residents working from home or in hybrid positions, SWAC sees the single-family household as an area of opportunity for continued education and outreach. In the Estimated Disposed MSW Tons by Recoverability Category data, we see opportunities for further education focused on keeping curbside recyclables and food waste out of garbage containers. Providing targeted outreach for these items and additional resources for single-family residents to help identify recyclable items could support a reduction in overall landfill disposal.

Self-Haul MSW

MSW generated by the self-haul sector continues to increase year over year. In 2022, there was an increase of disposed and composted tonnage, however, the recycled tonnage decreased. SWAC strongly supports SPU's initiative to complete a waste composition study of self-hauled materials to better understand how the transfer station is being used by the community and the types of materials that are being disposed of. We hope that this study will generate findings that will allow SPU to offer additional recycling and reuse options. SWAC looks forward to reviewing the findings of this report in 2024.

Multifamily MSW

In 2022, the multifamily sector increased overall waste generation by roughly 84,000 tons from the prior year. The main contributors to this increase were landfill disposal and compost, which grew 4.8% and 5.2% respectively. Even with the overall increases in MSW generated in 2022, this sector continues to generate the lowest level of waste compared to the single-family and commercial sectors. We continue to see the recycling tonnage decline in 2022 by 5.5% from last year's generation.

With more residents moving to Seattle, it is expected to see an increase in the overall waste generated in the multifamily sector. SWAC encourages SPU to continue to offer programs that increase access to compost and recycling at multifamily sites in an effort to increase waste diversion within this sector. We also encourage SPU to continue to work with new buildings to develop accessible waste solutions for all residents and seek additional opportunities to offer this same level of access for existing buildings.

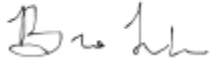
Construction & Demolition Debris (C&D)

Tonnage within the Construction & Demolition sector decreased significantly from 2021 to 2022. With many C&D recycling companies closing or being bought out, it is concluded that the reduction in tonnage reported is likely due to these businesses not submitting reports prior to closing their operation.

SWAC encourages SPU to develop reporting standards in support of obtaining access to real-time data on materials that are disposed of at these facilities. We also encourage SPU to continue to strengthen the Salvage Assessment requirement to encourage reuse and salvaging over disposal.

Thank you for considering our comments and recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Brie Kuhn".

Brie Kuhn, Chair, SWAC

SWAC is one of Seattle Public Utilities' Community Advisory Committees. Its members are appointed by the SPU CEO/General Manager. It is administered and staffed by SPU. This letter reflects the opinions of Committee Members, independent of SPU.

Cc:

Andrew Lee, General Manager/CEO, Seattle Public Utilities
Jeff Fowler, Deputy Director, Solid Waste Line of Business
Bob Hennessey, SPU City Council Liaison

Stephanie Schwenger, Solid & Hazardous Waste Lead Planner
Quinn Apuzzo, SWAC Coordinator