

March 2016

Organics Recycling Pilot Program to Expand With Additional Funds

The de Blasio Administration’s preliminary budget adds more than \$14 million over the next five years to expand the city’s organics curbside collection and continue the school organics program at its current level in future years. The additional funds follow another recent expansion of the curbside program announced last fall. The new funds bring the total amount budgeted for the pilot program to nearly \$17 million in 2016, rising to \$23 million in 2020. (All years refer to fiscal years.)

With the new funding, the program is expected to serve a total of 600,000 households by the end of 2017 and continue to provide organics pickup at more than 40 percent of the city’s public schools. The expansion of the organics program is part of the Department of Sanitation’s (DSNY) effort to meet the de Blasio Administration’s goal of offering curbside organics collection or convenient neighborhood drop-off to all residents by the end of 2018 and sending zero waste to landfills by 2030.

Organic waste comprises the largest share of New York City’s total waste stream, at 1.3 million tons per year, or 44 percent of annual waste, according to the city’s 2013 Waste Characterization Study. It is by far the largest category of

waste that is currently ineligible for curbside recycling in much of the city. Other large material categories, such as paper, glass, and plastic, are partially diverted from landfills by existing recycling programs. In fact, organic waste currently comprises over half the refuse stream, which is entirely exported to landfills or waste-to-energy plants.

Household & School Composting Increases. In order to increase the city’s diversion rates, in May 2013 the Department of Sanitation initiated a voluntary, residential curbside organics program in certain sanitation districts to collect and compost the two largest components of organic waste, food and yard waste, which together make up about 24 percent of the city’s total waste stream. The residential collection pilot program began with 3,500 households in Staten Island and expanded to approximately 150,000 households in neighborhoods in all boroughs except Manhattan by the end of 2015.

This fall, DSNY further expanded the program, adding more than 50,000 new households from Brooklyn Community District 6 and Queens Community District 10, bringing the total number of households in the program to over 200,000. With the funds added in the preliminary budget, DSNY plans to reach an additional 380,000 households by the end of 2017, making the program available to over 600,000 households or about 1 million New Yorkers. It is not yet clear to which districts the program will expand, but the program will continue to be voluntary and will build on education and outreach initiatives from previous expansions.

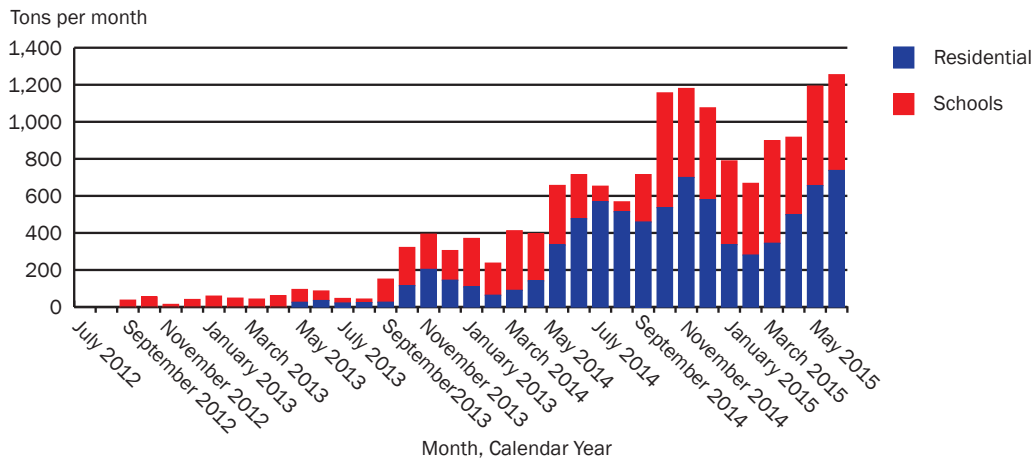
In addition to the residential collection program, in 2011 and 2012 parent/teacher associations started organics recycling programs in four public schools, which expanded to 90 in 2013. Following their lead, DSNY partnered with the Department of Education to expand schools organics

Increase in Funding for Organics Program							
<i>Dollars in millions</i>							
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Funds Added in Preliminary Budget	n.a.	n.a.	\$7.5	\$3.4	\$1.2	\$1.0	\$1.0
Total Organics Program	\$6.0	\$13.1	\$16.9	\$17.7	\$17.2	\$22.6	\$23.0

SOURCE: Fiscal Year 2017 Preliminary Budget
 NOTES: Actual spending for 2014 and 2015, other years are projected.
 New York City Independent Budget Office



Growth of the New York City Organics Collection Program, Fiscal Years 2013-2015



SOURCES: IBO analysis of Department of Sanitation data

New York City Independent Budget Office

collection. The schools program now serves 40 percent of the city’s traditional public schools, plus 28 charter schools and 69 private schools, with the goal of making organics recycling standard at all schools across the city. Included in the funds added to the preliminary budget are allocations to continue additional truck shifts to pick up school organic waste: \$351,000 in 2017, rising to \$478,000 in 2020. Additional shifts had previously been budgeted for 2016, but had not yet been added in the out-years of the financial plan.

The tonnage of organic waste collected has grown significantly over the past two years as the program has expanded. In 2014, the first full year of operation, DSNY collected a total of 4,046 tons of organic waste (1,750 tons residential and 2,296 tons school waste), which grew to a total of 11,066 tons in 2015 (6,212 tons of residential and 4,854 tons of school waste). In general, tonnage collected has increased steadily since the program launched; but there is some seasonality in the data with dips in residential curbside collection in the winter months when there is less yard waste, and declines in school collection in the summer months.

Contamination Rates & Processing Capacity. Despite the growth of the pilot organics program, DSNY still faces challenges before a mandatory program can be rolled out citywide. Because the program is currently operating on a voluntary basis and only households that want to

recycle participate, contamination rates—the extent to which non-organics such as plastic bags are included in the collections—have been quite low, at around 5 percent, according to DSNY. If all households in the city were required to participate, the contamination rate would likely be higher, making it difficult to efficiently process the organic material.

As part of the pilot, DSNY plans to continue to work on educating residents and schools on properly separating organics and is studying alternatives such as compostable bags to hold the waste. Additionally, processing capacity will need to be significantly expanded to handle the waste organic material that a mandatory, citywide program could potentially generate. Currently, there is insufficient processing capacity near New York City, but DSNY has proposed expanding its Staten Island Compost Facility and is cooperating with the city’s Department of Environmental Protection on a pilot program at the Newtown Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant in Brooklyn to add food waste to the plant’s anaerobic digesters. The program currently accepts a few tons of food waste per day, but the Department of Environmental Protection plans to expand the program with a goal of accepting 250 tons per day by 2018.

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