

2023 Solid Waste Services Annual Report

The Solid Waste Services (SWS) Division’s goal is to provide a safe, convenient and cost-effective waste services that meet the needs of County of Wellington residents. Protecting the air, water and land through environmentally sound practices guides decisions on solid waste management services and delivery. Guiding principles of SWS focus on:

- Excellent customer service
- Effective and efficient financial management
- Environmental stewardship

In 2020, SWS staff and County Council completed a long-term strategy which provides a framework for decisions regarding solid waste services in the County. SWS operations, services and programmes are continuously evaluated to identify and implement efficiencies and improvements wherever possible. This report provides a few highlights and information on the services provided over the past year and an update on the work completed to date on the long-term strategy.



Mount Forest Green Team planting trees at a closed landfill site

Customer Service

Programmes and Services

- Partnered with the Township of Centre Wellington and BIA’s to implement weekly collection of user pay garbage in downtown areas of Fergus and Elora.
- Purchased a plow blade for an SWS pickup truck to improve winter maintenance at waste facilities.

Key Customer Service Statistics	2022	2023	% change
number of calls and emails	4,592	5,311	15.7%
number of customers at waste facilities	230,617	219,853	-4.7%
number of garbage curbside stops	471,683	389,100	-6.8%
number of garbage bags picked up at curbside	661,846	674,076	1.8%
number of blue box curbside stops	950,870	1,046,788	10.1%
number of green bin curbside stops	522,386	521,928	-0.1%

Quick Fact:

While the number of garbage bags collected at curbside increased by 1.8%, overall tonnes of material landfilled decreased by 6.7%!

Promotion and Education

- SWS staff made presentations to various community groups and schools, and attended many environmental events. For the first time, SWS staff attended the Waterloo-Wellington Groundwater Festival and taught schoolchildren from Grades 2 – 5 about “garbage juice” (leachate).
- SWS staff worked with the County Communications staff to develop three animated short videos “Day in the Life...” to promote and educate residents of all ages on the benefits of using the County’s waste diversion programmes, and winning the Silver Promotion and Education Award from the Municipal Waste Association for “Social Media & Online Strategy”.



Canny the SWS “Spokescan”

County Website – SWS Pages (unique visitors)	2022	2023	% change
most visited in 2023 – hours and locations	60,825	49,824	-18.1%
second most visited in 2023 – SWS home page	21,186	29,086	37.3%
third most visited in 2023 – leaf and yard waste	34,172	24,511	-28.3%
Recycle Coach			
number of new subscribers	2,112	2,299	9.5%
number of material searches	12,744	13,834	8.6%
number of interactions	1,846,410	1,990,678	7.8%

Financial

- The Riverstown compactor was due for replacement in 2023. Rather than trading the used compactor in, SWS chose to keep it as a backup piece of equipment to avoid future heavy equipment rental costs due to maintenance needs and ensure there would be no interruption to the compaction of waste at the landfill.
- Reduced equipment maintenance costs by moving fleet maintenance of SWS on-road vehicles to the County’s Roads Division.

Quick Fact:

“Food items” was the most searched term in Recycle Coach in 2023, followed closely by plastic take-out containers and Styrofoam packaging inserts.

Environmental Stewardship

As part of the County’s commitment to protect and enhance the natural environment, the SWS Division looks to our “Green Strategy” and the County’s “Climate Change Mitigation Plan”. Staff and Council endeavour to incorporate “Green Principles” into all areas of waste management decisions and actions.

The core green principles are:

- To protect and enhance the natural environment.
- To reduce the carbon footprint of our operations.
- To practice a “Life Cycle” approach.

All operations are assessed and tracked over time with an aim of:

- Reducing negative environmental impacts created in providing services.
- Reducing the carbon footprint created in providing services.
- Improving life cycle performance through reduction, reuse and recycling practices.
- Enhancing environmental health.



Garbage Juice Activity - Waterloo Wellington Children's Groundwater Festival

Tonnes of Waste Landfilled	2022	2023	% change
total tonnes disposed	18,431.96	17,200.14	-6.7%

County Diversion Programmes	2022	2023	% change
blue box recyclables	6,174.16	6,174.63	0.0%
wood, brush, Christmas trees	3,447.71	3,389.81	-1.7%
green bin organics	2,755.53	2,821.59	2.4%
leaf and yard waste	1,933.76	2,140.55	10.7%
scrap metal	374.88	367.58	-1.9%
electronics	93.05	88.00	-5.4%
tires	62.62	51.96	-17.0%
household hazardous waste	259.87	251.13	-3.4%
clothing and textiles	19.80	25.35	28.0%
reuse centres (reopened March 2022)	8.09	13.66	68.8%
backyard composting (estimate)	1,517.90	1,525.50	0.5%
total tonnes diverted from landfill	16,647.37	16,849.76	1.2%

total diversion rate	47.5%	49.5%	4.2%
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- Initiated a new partnership with a local plastics recycler to divert bulky plastic items from landfill.
- Piloted the provision of green bin services at a festival. This first attempt was a success and will hopefully lead to more food waste from festivals being diverted from landfill.
- Partnered with the Mount Forest Green Team who volunteered to plant 170 trees including Red Pine, Norway Spruce, and White Spruce around the periphery of the closed Martin Street Landfill in Mount Forest. Trees were sourced from the County's Green Legacy Programme.
- The Engineering Services Department adopted a section of Wellington Road 18 and held a roadside clean-up event during National Public Works Week. 44 staff members from various County departments participated in the event and collected 140 kg of litter.

Quick Fact:

The Mobile Household Hazardous Waste Depot received and safely managed 148,531 kg of hazardous materials in 2023.

Other Achievements and Activities

- For the third year in a row, the County of Wellington was selected as a Leader in Sustainability by Call2Recycle Canada, Inc. This award recognizes the County's residents' exceptional commitment to responsible battery recycling. A total of 11,173 kilograms (11.2 tonnes) of household batteries was collected through the County's extensive battery collection programme in 2023. This represents an increase of 10.8% over 2022 (10,081 kg).
- The County's Mobile Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Depot won another prestigious award, this one from the North American Hazardous Materials Management Association (NAHMMA). The Depot was nominated by a resident of the County and won the "Programme Innovation" award which recognizes "unique and effective innovations" "including best recycling/reuse strategies, best documented educational strategies resulting in positive behavior change, and/or best documented hazard reduction."



NAHMMA award presentation at County Council

SWS Strategy

At the request of the local municipalities, the County of Wellington accepted responsibility for all waste management services from its seven member municipalities in 2001. Over the intervening years, many changes have been made to the waste services and programmes provided to County residents.

In 2015, County Council directed SWS staff to undertake a review of waste services to help focus the planning of the future of waste management and diversion services in the County. The goal of this project was to provide the County with a long term strategy for all its waste operations and services, and how they are provided.

Staff and Committee developed the framework and broad outline of the Strategy. Guiding principles, goals and priorities were established to provide direction for the Strategy. These principles reflect a balance of customer service, economic considerations, and environmental stewardship.

The SWS Strategy was completed in 2020 and a final report was submitted to County Council in January 2021. The following table provides a summary of the decisions made, actions taken, and plans moving forward. Projects are continually re-evaluated and modified depending upon the County and Division priorities and will be implemented as time and resources allow. For more information, the Strategy Report Summary is available on the County's website at www.wellington.ca/sws-strategy.




Topic	Task	Direction/Action	Status - Complete	Status - Ongoing
Group A - Provision of Curbside Services Topics				
Rural curbside collection	Evaluate feasibility, options and desire for expansion of rural curbside collection of garbage and recyclables.	Expanded rural curbside collection to all seven member municipalities.	✓	
Curbside user fee	Evaluate the appropriate fee(s) for curbside garbage collection.	Standardized user fees for garbage bags collected at curbside and dropped off at waste facilities at \$2 each.	✓	
Single stream vs. two stream recycling	Cost-benefit analysis of the two collection and processing methods.	Maintain two-stream recycling for blue box materials.	✓	
Cart collection	Seek opportunities to increase diversion through multi-residential and Industrial, Commercial and Institutional (ICI) sectors. Also consider carts for household use.	Maintain current containers for waste and recyclables collection. Continue to look for opportunities for additional diversion in multi-residential and ICI sectors such as the Circular Innovation Council pilot programme.	✓	

Topic	Task	Direction/Action	Status - Complete	Status - Ongoing
Bulky item collection	Determine if bulky collection at curbside is desirable and in what circumstances it could be appropriate.	Maintain bulky item drop-off at waste facilities.	✓	
Organics collection	Evaluate feasibility of an organics programme and/or leaf and yard waste collection.	Established organics green bin collection and leaf and yard waste collection in new curbside collection contract. Implemented July 2020.	✓	
User Pay bag improvement	Assess opportunities to improve User Pay bags or whether to switch to a tag based system. Consider container system including use of garbage boxes.	Continue using stamped user pay bags for curbside garbage collection.	✓	
Additional recyclable materials added to programme	Research whether markets exist to expand the number of acceptable items in the blue box programme.	Deferred until Waste-Free Ontario Act determines which recyclable materials are to be included in the future Blue Box Programme Plan.	✓	
Collections and processing contracts – timing, length, best practices	Research how to best craft the curbside collections contracts in order to achieve maximum cost-effectiveness and flexibility.	After extending the curbside collection contract for three years, a new contract was tendered and awarded in June 2019, and began in July 2020.	✓	
Group B - Future of Waste Disposal Topics				
Riverstown expansion (i.e. Phase III)	Feasibility analysis of a Phase III expansion on Riverstown lands.	The expansion of the Riverstown landfill site is the current preferred option for meeting Wellington County's future waste management needs.	✓	

Topic	Task	Direction/Action	Status - Complete	Status - Ongoing
Other landfill siting	Pending results of above, the County may need to consider siting a new landfill in the future.	No new landfill site search required at this time as the expansion of the Riverstown landfill site is the current preferred option for meeting Wellington County's future waste management needs.	✓	
Landfill mining	Cost-benefit analysis of landfill mining. Weigh cost of mining against estimated increase in landfill capacity.	Landfill mining operations will not be undertaken at this time and may be revisited at a future date.	✓	
Buffer land acquisition	Evaluate if there is a need to consider acquiring buffer lands around active or closed landfills. Determine if the County should have a policy on the subject.	That the current policy be unchanged allowing County staff to explore opportunities to acquire buffer property where appropriate.	✓	
Landfill operations	Evaluate closure and leachate treatment options for Phase I and Phase II, respectively, of the Riverstown landfill.	The Riverstown landfill's Phase I will be at capacity in 2022. The County is undertaking an Environmental Assessment to determine leachate treatment method.		➡
Use of closed landfill properties	Develop a long-term plan for use of closed landfill sites. Explore naturalization or educational opportunities.	Naturalization of closed landfills continues, and pollinator food sources will be planted where possible. Pollinator friendly plantings have been established at five of the 16 closed sites, with more sites in the plans in coming years.		➡
Explore technologies for managing waste	Assess alternative and emerging technologies (i.e. Energy from Waste, gasification, "Dirty MRFs") in order to determine if any are viable options for the County.	The expansion of the Riverstown landfill site is the current preferred option for meeting Wellington County's future waste management needs and alternative technologies may be revisited at a future date.	✓	

Topic	Task	Direction/Action	Status - Complete	Status - Ongoing
Mandatory recycling	Determine the usefulness and desirability of material specific landfill bans or graduated fees in order to increase diversion.	No mandatory recycling policies will be established, and they may be revisited at a future date.	✓	
Group C - Waste Facility Optimization Topics				
Optimal number and location of waste facilities	Analyze site trends and usage and determine number and location of waste facilities, in order to balance operating costs, customer service and meeting diversion targets.	The current complement of six waste facilities will continue at the current locations.	✓	
Vision of how to use waste facilities	Assess the best use of existing waste facilities. To be utilized as they are now, or re-oriented to be "Diversion Centres"?	Waste facilities will be re-oriented as diversion centres to fully maximize landfill diversion opportunities.		🔄
Explore additional materials that can be managed at sites	Cost-benefit analysis of collecting and diverting various materials such as leaf and yard waste, shingles, drywall, plastic bags, mattresses, carpets, etc.	Leaf and yard waste is now collected at all six waste facilities from April through November. Additional diversion opportunities will continue to be explored as space and markets allow.		🔄
Hours and days of operation	Determine the preferred hours and days of operation, in order to balance operating costs, customer service and operational considerations.	A survey was conducted in August 2018 of site customers. Decision to maintain current hours and days of operation at all waste facilities.	✓	
User fee for bagged waste at sites	Evaluate the appropriate fee for bagged waste at waste facilities.	Standardized user fees for garbage bags collected at curbside and dropped off at waste facilities at \$2 each.	✓	

Topic	Task	Direction/Action	Status - Complete	Status - Ongoing
Fee options	Evaluate fee structures; minimum fees, surcharges for unsorted loads, cost per tonne, removing tipping fees on diversion materials (brush, scrap metal, etc.)	The current fee structure of charging a tipping fee on all materials that do not fall under a provincial diversion funding programme will continue, with no minimum fee applied at this time. The waste tipping fee has been increased to the average of neighbouring municipalities and will continue to increase towards full cost recovery.	✓	
Industrial, Commercial and Institutional (ICI) site diversion programmes	Investigate opportunities to support the ICI sector in increasing diversion.	SWS staff will work with the ICI sector to assist in identifying opportunities to increase diversion, and have partnered with the Circular Innovation Council on a unique pilot project which is providing businesses and institutions with expanded organics composting opportunities.		➡
Group D - Independent Topics				
Involvement in regional waste management systems	Consider opportunities to realize efficiencies through partnerships (e.g., Energy from Waste, Material Recovery Facilities, landfills, collections).	SWS staff have and will continue to work with neighbouring municipalities to identify opportunities for partnerships and collaboration to increase efficiencies and diversion.		➡
Co-operative contract procurement	Assess benefits of maximizing buying power through collaborative purchasing practices.	SWS staff work with the County's Purchasing staff to identify opportunities for collaborative purchasing. For example, in 2020 the County piggy-backed on the Region of Waterloo's green bin supply contract.		➡

Topic	Task	Direction/Action	Status - Complete	Status - Ongoing
Master Composter programme	Examine how the programme can be enhanced in order to increase composting by Wellington residents.	A Food Waste Management Strategy has been implemented and a green bin programme established to divert more organics from landfill in addition to continuing the backyard composter subsidization programme. Additional efforts may include demonstration gardens at waste facilities and recruiting volunteers to assist residents with at-home composting.		
Education on reducing food waste	Devise a plan to initiate a promotions and education campaign on reducing food waste.	A baseline residential food waste survey has been completed and work is ongoing to further enhance food waste reduction and diversion through interventions and education.		
Partnering with various groups	Develop a plan to partner with community groups (i.e. Universities, horticultural groups, other County departments) to improve organics management practices.	The County partnered with the City of Guelph on the Smart Cities Our Food Future project which is continuing at the County, and includes the Circular Innovation Council institutional, commercial and industrial (IC&I) food rescue and organic waste diversion pilot.		
Tours and presentations	Explore opportunities to expand outreach to schools and community groups.	A Programmes Coordinator position was filled in November 2019 and is now working on promotion, education, and engagement with County residents and schools.	✓	

Topic	Task	Direction/Action	Status - Complete	Status - Ongoing
Meeting outreach Green Strategy initiatives	Review the Green Strategy outreach initiatives and revise as necessary. Plan to achieve objectives.	SWS staff will continue to fulfill engagement commitments and the new Programmes Coordinator will assist with this work.	✓	
Partnerships	Seek out partnerships with schools and Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations to expand awareness and achieve objectives.	SWS staff will continue to explore partnership opportunities and expand on current partnerships (for example with the Erin Environment and Sustainability Advisory Committee).		➡
New outreach tools	Develop new tools and/or technologies to engage the public on waste reduction and diversion.	The Recycle Coach waste app was launched in early 2020. Two animated YouTube videos were released in 2020, and three more were released in 2023. Additional outreach tools will continue to be explored.		➡
Spring clean-up support	Consider how the County can further support municipal spring clean-up days.	Each year the County sends a reminder to its member municipalities advising that municipally organized spring clean-up events can be supported with rolloff bins, waived tipping fees and promotional support.	✓	
Earth Day or other event days	Consider if there are event days to hold that would be beneficial and desirable in the communities.	SWS will enhance promotion and support of official environmental event days.		➡

Topic	Task	Direction/Action	Status - Complete	Status - Ongoing
Special Event recycling	Consider options for providing recycling support to special events held in the County.	SWS will take a more active approach and seek out special event organizers to provide information on recycling services available and will consider developing waste diversion and reduction standards for all special events in the future. Organics diversion pilots began in 2023 and will continue in 2024.		↻
Setting goals or targets	Consider setting diversion targets or long term goals (i.e. "Zero Waste") for the County to work towards.	The County recommitted its goal to meet the capture rate target of 85% of all acceptable blue box materials and will strive for continual improvements in performance for all waste management programmes and services.	✓	



Adopt-a-Road Clean-up Crew 2023