

2025 Solid Waste Services Annual Report

The Solid Waste Services (SWS) Division’s goal is to provide safe, convenient and cost-effective waste services that meet the needs of County of Wellington residents and businesses. 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 provided 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 by the SWS Division over the past year and an update on the work completed to date on the long-term strategy.



Elora Waste Facility under construction

Customer Service

Programmes and Services

- The residential blue box programme was transitioned to full extended producer responsibility on July 1, 2025. The County continues to accept blue box recyclables at all waste facilities.
- SWS staff visited the majority of businesses in the County to explain the new recycling programme. Downtown businesses were offered curbside cart collection, and all businesses were offered a minimum fee exemption card if they were delivering blue box materials to a County waste facility.

Key Customer Service Statistics	2024	2025	% change
number of calls and emails	7,259	8,801	21.2%
number of customers at waste facilities	217,671	107,754	-50.5%
number of garbage curbside stops	392,546	360,633	-8.1%
number of garbage bags picked up at curbside	602,037	589,060	-2.2%
number of blue box curbside stops ^	1,102,037	563,773	-48.8%
number of green bin curbside stops	451,255	556,647	23.4%

^ Blue box programme transitioned to Circular Materials July 1, 2025

Quick Fact:

Residents set out an average of 1.63 bags of garbage on their collection day.

Promotion and Education

- SWS staff, along with County Communications staff, were pleased to be recognized by the Municipal Waste Association, winning two Silver awards for Promotion and Education (P&E) materials. Awards were received for the 2024 Spring/Summer Newsletter (Print Category) and the campaign to educate County residents and businesses regarding the implementation of the Minimum Waste Fee (Campaign Category).
- SWS staff participated in the Waterloo Wellington Children’s Groundwater Festival and made a total of 121 presentations over five days to hundreds of students from Grade 2 to Grade 5.
- SWS is active on social media, engaging with residents by posting 169 messages in 2025.



Garbage Juice presentation

County Website – SWS Pages (unique visitors)	2024	2025	% change
most visited in 2025 – collection schedule	58,411	78,559	34.5%
second most visited in 2025 – SWS home page	30,806	33,169	7.7%
third most visited in 2025 – waste facilities	38,201	32,140	-15.9%
Recycle Coach			
number of new subscribers	2,630	3,007	14.3%
number of material searches	14,815	16,624	12.2%
number of interactions	1,943,831	2,079,313	7.0%

Financial

- Implemented \$10 minimum fee at all County waste facilities on January 1, 2025, adopting a similar fee system to most comparable communities. This change helped facilitate the strategic direction of expanding and enhancing landfill diversion opportunities at waste facilities.
- * Launched electronic scale software and installed license plate cameras at all sites. This change provides more efficient customer processing at sites and reduces the number of weigh bills required to be manually entered into tracking software.

Quick Fact:

SWS staff visited 1,849 businesses to explain the new recycling programme. A total of 479 recycling carts and 453 exemption cards were distributed to businesses in 2025.

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.



Giant Swallowtail butterfly

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.

Tonnes of Waste Landfilled	2024	2025	% change
total tonnes disposed	17,028.66	14,347.80	-15.7%

County Diversion Programmes	2024	2025	% change
blue box recyclables ^	6,232.79	3,453.50	-44.6%
wood, brush, Christmas trees	1,970.01	1,803.99	-8.4%
green bin organics	2,603.69	2,603.16	0.0%
leaf and yard waste	2,076.85	2,143.03	3.2%
scrap metal	405.72	324.82	-19.9%
electronics	85.54	84.03	-1.8%
mattresses, drywall, shingles	n/a	483.74	--
tires **	21.07	239.46	360.9%
construction and demolition for reuse	0.00	68.38	--
household hazardous waste	252.95	233.48	-7.7%
clothing and textiles	21.15	13.38	-36.8%
reuse centres	13.89	18.50	33.2%
backyard composting (estimate)	1,527.40	1,529.90	0.2%
total tonnes diverted from landfill	15,211.05	12,999.35	-14.5%
total tonnes managed	32,239.71	27,347.15	-15.2%

total diversion rate	49.3%	47.5%	-1.8%
-----------------------------	--------------	--------------	--------------

^ Blue box programme transitioned to Circular Materials July 1, 2025

** Change in tire diversion reports available from producers in 2025

- Established diversion programmes to capture and divert mattresses, shingles, and drywall at all County waste facilities.
- These expanded diversion opportunities are expected to add an additional 4 years of landfill life to the County's sole landfill site.
- SWS staff continue to work with the Township of Wellington North, Conservation Authorities, and the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks to establish an efficient and cost-effective leachate treatment system for Phase II of the Riverstown Landfill site.
- Continued our partnership with the Mount Forest Green Team volunteers who planted 78 additional trees at the closed Martin Street Landfill in Mount Forest and provided maintenance and care for trees planted in previous years. Tree species included choke cherries, bladdernut, cedar, and hop trees. The hop trees are a native species at risk in Ontario. These trees are one of only two host plants which support the larvae of the Giant Swallowtail Butterfly and the flowers attract other pollinators and birds.
- Continuing a project that has been underway for a number of years, pollinator habitat and food sources were established at the Arthur closed landfill site.

Quick Fact:

152 tonnes of mattresses were diverted from landfill in 2025. Mattresses are delivered to Try Recycling in London Ontario for deconstruction. 85% of the mattress components are diverted.

Other Achievements and Activities

- Launched electronic scale software and installed license plate cameras. Provides more efficient customer processing at sites and reduces the number of weigh bills required to be manually entered into tracking software.
- The Elora Waste Facility was closed in April 2025 for site improvements, including expanding the drop-off area, building a new scalehouse, installing dual scales, replacing the retaining wall, and constructing a new household hazardous waste building. The Belwood Waste Facility was opened five days a week to provide continuous drop-off services to residents and businesses who typically used the Elora Waste Facility. The Elora Waste Facility reopened in the spring of 2026.



Mount Forest Green Team planting trees at Mount Forest closed landfill site

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. Update: single-stream recycling will be introduced through the producer-led system in 2026.	✓	

Topic	Task	Direction/Action	Status - Complete	Status - Ongoing
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.	✓	
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. Planning to expand organics programme in 2028	✓	
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. Update: Circular Materials, the organization responsible for Ontario's blue box programme announced new materials will be added to the programme in January 2026.	✓	

Topic	Task	Direction/Action	Status - Complete	Status - Ongoing
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.	✓	
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 reached capacity in 2022 and is closed in an interim manner. The County is pursuing leachate treatment via a local municipal wastewater treatment plant.		➡

Topic	Task	Direction/Action	Status - Complete	Status - Ongoing
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 are being 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.	✓	
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. Minimum fee implemented and added mattresses, drywall, and shingles to the list of accepted materials for diversion.	✓	

Topic	Task	Direction/Action	Status - Complete	Status - Ongoing
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 collected at all six waste facilities from April through November. Mattresses, shingles, and drywall are being diverted from landfill as of May 2025. Additional diversion opportunities will continue to be explored.	✓	
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 in 2016.	✓	
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. NOTE: a minimum waste fee was implemented January 1, 2025. The waste tipping fee has been increased to the average of neighbouring municipalities and will continue to be monitored and compared against industry trends on an annual basis.	✓	

Topic	Task	Direction/Action	Status - Complete	Status - Ongoing
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 and external partners to assist in identifying additional opportunities to increase diversion. The County continues to promote a service which provides businesses and institutions with expanded organics composting opportunities. In addition, businesses continue to receive recycling services by the County, post-transition.		➡
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; the Circular Innovation Council to pilot institutional, commercial and industrial (IC&I) food rescue and organic waste diversion; and organizers of public events.		➡
Tours and presentations	Explore opportunities to expand outreach to schools and community groups.	A Programmes Coordinator position was filled in November 2019 and is working on promotion, education, and engagement with County residents, schools, and organizations.	✓	

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 are continuing.		↻
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.	✓	



Social Media Post – Blue Box Transition