



Commitment to Zero Waste / Circular Economy: Information Sheet

A part of the Zero Waste and the Circular Economy Handbook

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Introduction

This Initiative is a resolution to make a commitment to zero waste and the circular economy for the community which can change municipal systems for solid waste and economic development. Our intention is to provide local government staff with a clear mandate and framework principles for managing materials and waste that support the goal of Zero Waste and the development of a circular economy.

Benefits

Canadian local governments are often under a lot of pressure to take action in addressing the waste crisis since solid waste management is partially a local government responsibility. Local politicians are faced with tough decisions around landfilling, incineration, and costly export of waste. A growing number of local governments are recognizing the importance of setting ambitious waste reduction targets, implementing solid waste management plans to reduce waste, and advocating for the provincial and federal governments to create regulations and programs that provide real systemic solutions.

Many local governments that have adopted these policy frameworks are experiencing success in their waste reduction efforts and are adding to the strength of

Councillor Story

“In 2004, when our regional district decided to commit to Zero Waste, we had under a decade left of capacity in our landfill and the politicians at the time were really under the gun to figure out where to put a new one, or find an alternative. The siting of the new landfill and discussion of incineration was hugely unpopular. Luckily, with the commitment to strong waste reduction policy, strong interim targets and the stepwise process of diverting organics, recyclables, education and banning certain materials, our same old landfill is still open today and has another 23 years of life left in it and that date keeps being pushed further and further out the better and better we get at diverting.”

-Ben Geselbracht, Regional District of Nanaimo Director

[Two guiding frameworks that are being adopted by local governments nationally and internationally](#) to help organize action to address the waste crises are Zero Waste and the Circular Economy.



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the growing call for senior levels of government to adopt the enabling policies to further the systemic changes necessary to transform our wasteful economic system.

Basics

- Commit to the goal of Zero Waste
- Adopt the [internationally recognized Zero Waste Definition](#): “Zero Waste: The conservation of all resources by means of responsible production, consumption, reuse, and recovery of products, packaging, and materials without burning and with no discharges to land, water, or air that threaten the environment or human health.”
- Adopt the [Circular Economy principles](#) for managing materials and waste in local government planning:
 - Eliminate waste and pollution
 - Circulate products and materials
 - Regenerate nature
- Commit to developing a plan:
 - Direct staff or have a committee outline possible options for adopting Zero Waste/Circular economy initiatives in your community,
 - Integrate this policy framework in all aspects of government action, develop a plan to reach zero waste goal with ambitious interim targets.
- Advocate to senior levels of government for enabling policies to support Zero Waste and a Circular Economy.

Examples

- [Regional District of Nanaimo](#), BC
 - One of the first to adopt Zero Waste as a goal in 2004 and went from 50% diversion to 68%.
- The [City of Nanaimo](#), BC
 - Planning using the Doughnut Economic principles
- [Toronto Circular Economy Plan](#), ON
- [Zero Waste 2040, City of Vancouver](#), BC
- [Resort Municipality of Whistler](#), BC
- [City of Victoria Planning for Zero Waste](#), BC
- [City of Montreal](#), QC
- [Regional Municipality of York](#), ON
- [Zero Waste Action Plan](#), Banff, AB
 - Banff adopted its zero waste target and interim target in 2018



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Sample Briefing Note, Resolutions

- [Local Government Commitment to Zero Waste and Circular Economy Resolution, Motions and Briefing Note](#)
- [Resolution and Motions Only](#)

Metrics for Evaluation

This list shows possible metrics that could be evaluated but the actual ones selected to measure should be based on the actions a community is taking

- Total waste to landfill or incineration (waste to energy)
- Total materials recycled (including through EPR programs)
- Total materials collected to compost
- Total materials consumed (garbage + recycling + organics)
- Amount of hazardous waste available to collect and collected and where it flowed
- Amount of materials escaping system (such as illegal dumping, waste to fuel, cement kilns and litter)
- Contamination rates of waste, recycling and organics
- Rate and frequency of fines for contaminated loads
- Waste composition by materials and opportunity to reuse, reduce, recycle or compost (such as percentage of materials that were edible food waste or could have been reused)
- Rates of waste generation and recycling/composting by sector (residential -single and multifamily; Institutional, Commercial and Industrial (ICI); Construction and Demolition (C&D))
- Percent of solid waste diverted from landfill/incinerator
- Waste per capita (plus additional factors like visitors numbers)
- Reuse measurements (number of reuses, number of individuals participating, number of businesses, amount of material reused, etc. as may be specific to the system being measured)
- Costs of waste management program (per tonne and per capita)
- Costs borne by local government versus producers
- Consumption-based climate emissions
- Economic flow of materials in and out of the region (local purchasing, local production, etc.)
- Interim targets and progress towards them
- Wildlife problems related to waste



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- Qualitative measure -progress on Zero Waste actions (for example, committee established, bylaws enacted, repair cafes held, percentage of procurement using sustainable procurement measures, percentage of buildings with multiple collection streams available, partners engaged, etc.).

Challenges and Solutions:

CHALLENGES	SOLUTIONS
Working in silos/ Lack of capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with other municipalities, share best practices and tools and even plan out which municipality might best pilot solutions to different issues. • Look for ways to transfer the knowledge and share capacity. • Note that smaller communities may have less staff, but there are also closer networks to the business owners, schools and community groups that make the ability to make changes easier for some things.
Some do not see waste reduction as a local government function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local governments provide many core utilities (such as water and sewer) and waste management is one of them. Waste minimization helps to reduce the infrastructure required to provide this service and can align with other roles such as addressing climate change and economic development. Look for opportunities for cost savings and re-evaluating systems when other projects like asset renewals or replacements are being considered. Piggy back on those if possible by looking at the system more broadly. • Work with the groups in the community who value Zero Waste and Circular Economy systems.
Some do not see waste or materials as a climate change issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage plans to use consumption-based emissions inventories to more fully account for the upstream and downstream emissions of materials use.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use supportive documents on building circularity into climate plans like Circular Economy: the missing piece in city climate action plans
Possible cost increases to taxpayers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● May result in higher utility bills but also look for cost savings from reduced frequency of pick up, reduced employee injuries, changes to insurance if changing practices, etc. ● Consider “pay as you throw” fees as a tool to drive down waste so those who waste more pay more and vice versa. Address concerns that low-income families have less access to lower waste products through advocacy for lower waste items for everyone, programs like access to food at farmers market for low income households and others to address this. ● Usually not a significant impact ● Return the costs back to producers through Extended Producer Responsibility programs ● Can save money if reduce waste enough

