



Strategic planning for sustainable and stakeholder-supported waste systems

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Solid waste management is one of the few public services that residents use every week and these services often receive high customer approval ratings. However, customer perception of solid waste services can quickly plummet if conditions unexpectedly change. These changes could include dramatically increasing billing rates, closing solid waste facilities, or creating or changing policies without sufficient outreach. Avoiding unexpected changes is especially important if the solid waste department or authority operates as an enterprise fund and rate increases require approval by elected officials.

An enterprise fund system places all solid waste system revenues in a fund dedicated to covering solid waste system costs. Revenues may come from a variety of sources including user fees, grants, the sale of recovered materials and bonds, but the money is not a transfer from the government's general fund.

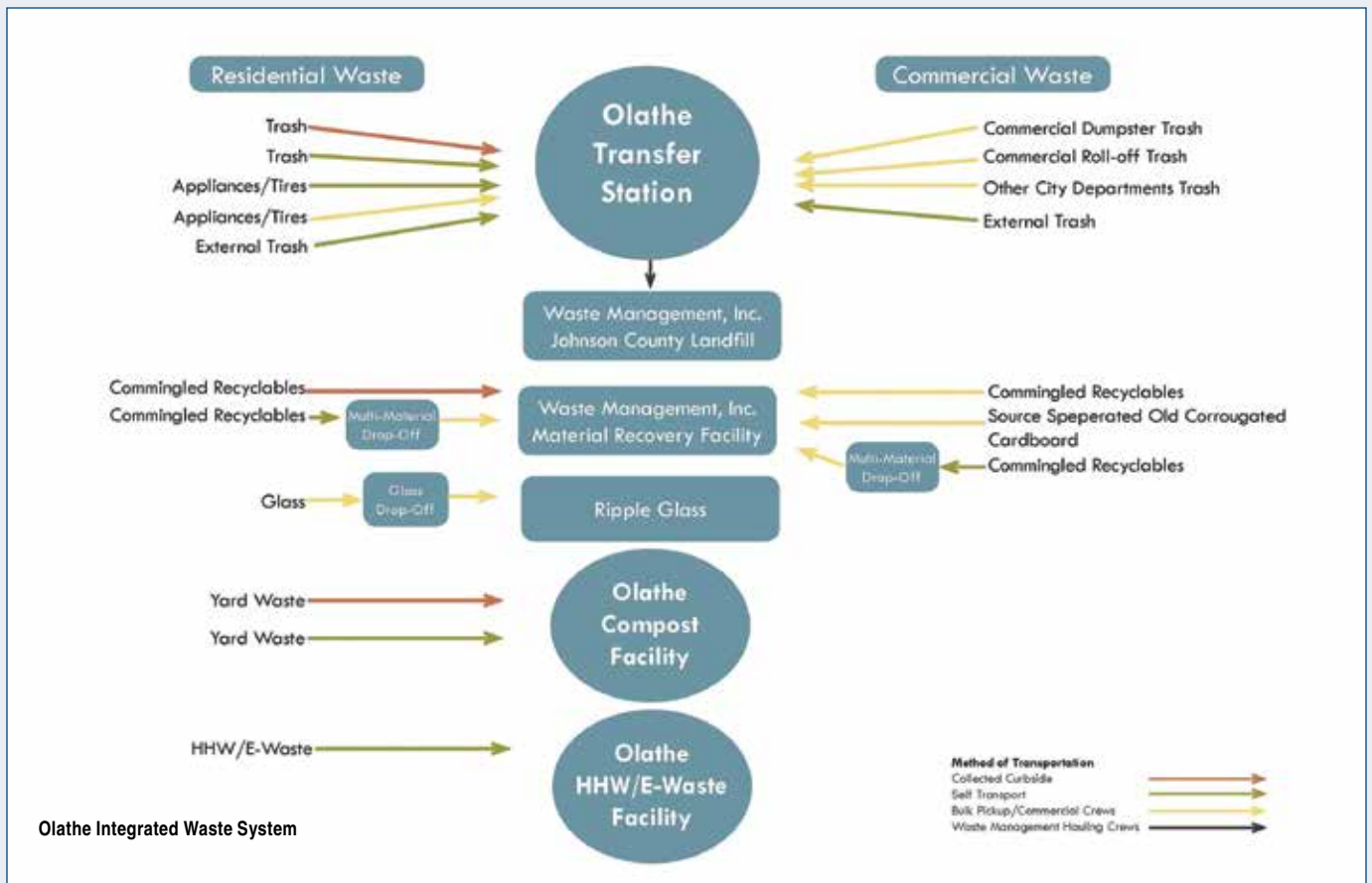
The Olathe, Kansas, Solid Waste Division (Division) operates as an enterprise fund and provides the following services to their customers:

- Residential Trash and Bulk Waste Collection
- Residential Curbside and Drop-Off Recycling
- Commercial Dumpster and Roll-Off Services
- Commercial Recycling
- Residential Yard Waste Curbside Collection

Additionally, the City also operates the following facilities:

- Yard Waste Composting Facility
- Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) and electronic waste (E-Waste) Recycling and Reuse Center
- Transfer Station

The Division does not own or operate a landfill; instead, they contract with the Johnson County Landfill (owned by Waste Management, Inc.) for waste disposal. Similar to



disposal, the Division contracts with private companies for the processing of recyclables, HHW, and E-Waste. Because the Division operates as an enterprise fund, they need to plan for financing all operating, maintenance, and capital improvement expenditures associated with providing these services and operating these facilities.

As with many other municipalities, the quality of Olathe's solid waste services is highly regarded with 93% of Olathe residents being satisfied or very satisfied and the vast majority of commercial customers consider the Division's services a good value. Also, the City has a 40% landfill diversion rate, which exceeds the national average of 34% and is the highest diversion rate in Johnson County, Kansas.

The City of Olathe is the fastest growing municipality in the Kansas City metro area, and Division Manager, Kent Seyfried, recognized that increasing population; new, single and multi-family home developments; and growth in commercial establishments would require additional services, resources, and infrastructure to continue the same excellent level of service. Therefore, Mr. Seyfried pursued the development of a long-term, solid waste management plan (Plan) to address future waste management needs of the city, as well as optimize the performance and efficiency of existing waste management services and facilities.

Mr. Seyfried also saw the value of an independent third party to make sure the Plan was technically and financially sustainable, and to foster an environment where Plan recommendations receive public and political support. After a competitive procurement process, the Division contracted with SCS Engineers, EESI and Shockey Consulting Services (Consulting Team) to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the existing solid waste system, develop strategies that could be successfully implemented in the City of Olathe, and determine when incoming material would exceed processing capacity at existing facilities.

Understanding existing facility capacity was of particular importance in Olathe. Because of projected population growth and commercial development, the Division would need to identify areas to site a new transfer station or composting facility years before the facility reached processing capacity. Both facilities play a vital role in the Olathe solid waste system.

Yard waste composting consistently accounts for at least 65% of the total waste diversion efforts in the city and is an extremely effective program. The Division's yard waste program captures more than 90% of the city's yard waste for processing and reuse, which exceeds the national average of 60%. Additionally, other City departments use the finished compost and mulch in City projects, saving an estimated \$130,000 per year.

When initiating the planning process, the initial concern was that a new compost facility might be necessary to accommodate the Olathe population growth. However, after the Consulting Team reviewed engineering studies, conducted site visits, and put pen to paper, it was concluded that the existing site could sufficiently process projected Olathe yard waste generation for at least 50 years by implementing a site reconfiguration, new equipment, and modified operations.

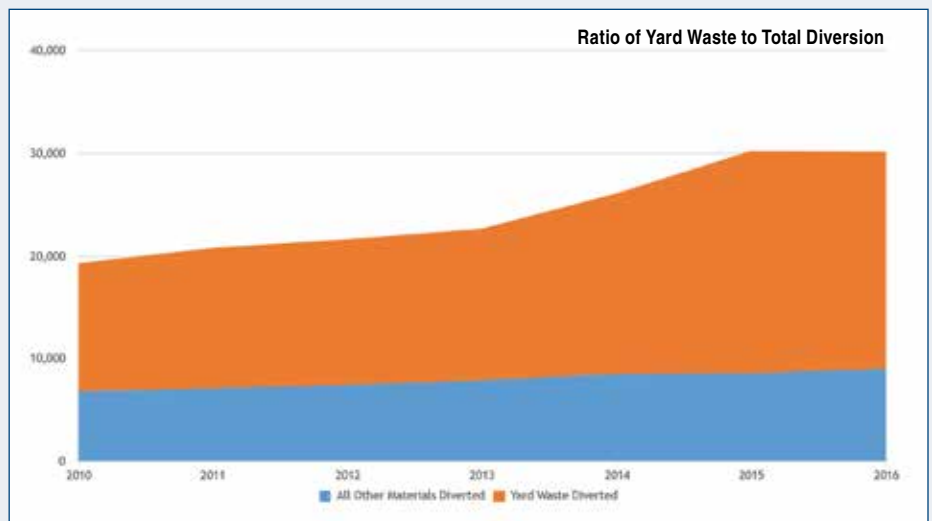
The Olathe Transfer Station provides the Division with flexibility when it comes to disposal options because once consolidated at the Transfer Station, the Division can dispose waste at any landfill in the region. The Olathe Transfer Station also reduces vehicle maintenance and travel time since a round trip from Olathe to the Johnson County Landfill requires approximately one hour. Finally, the Olathe Transfer Station provides a local public service to Olathe residents and businesses. Many residents use the Transfer Station because it is convenient to dispose of waste on their schedules, and they prefer to drive on paved surfaces, which are not common at landfills.

Based on waste stream forecasting and an assessment of the composition of the waste delivery to the facility, the Consulting Team projected the Transfer Station facility would reach processing capacity at approximately 114,000 tons per year, anticipated to occur in 2027. The Consulting Team also prepared a conceptual design showing that an onsite expansion of the Transfer Station could yield enough capacity to process waste beyond 2064. The Division and Consulting Team collaborated to develop a schedule to fund, design, permit, and construct the expansion.

In addition to scheduling facility expansions, developing a Plan that would be a call to action rather than a report on a shelf was critical to the Division. Based on their previous planning experience, the Consulting Team knew that stakeholder engagement is essential for securing support for the Plan's recommendations, especially those involving rate increases or service delivery changes.

Stakeholder engagement was of particular importance when developing recommendations impacting the Division's commercial collection program. The Division competes with private haulers for commercial waste customers, and expenditures were exceeding revenues. Because of this financial situation, some City Council members questioned whether the Division should stay in the commercial waste collection business.

To assess the situation, the Consulting Team accompanied Division drivers to observe commercial route conditions



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and operations that could be increasing costs and to ascertain drivers' perspectives on how to increase efficiency and reduce expenditures. The Division and Consulting Team then met with internal stakeholders, such as the Public Works Director and City Manager, to develop strategies to optimize performance and decrease costs. However, even with these improvements, the Division would need to increase rates and City Council would need to approve them. Therefore, the Consulting Team conducted focus groups with Division commercial customers to assess their perception of the Division's service and willingness to accept a fee increase.

While never a popular decision, the Division was able to present the process used for making this recommendation and the strategies to improve efficiency and minimize expenditures. Also, the focus group participants indicated they valued the service and were likely willing to tolerate the proposed increase in fees. City Council approved the rate increase, and the Division did not lose a single customer.

The long-term solid waste plan was a first for the City of Olathe. Because of the planning process, the Division has a strategic approach and schedule for adding collection routes, increasing recycling, purchasing equipment, and expanding facilities. In addition, the Division has tangible pathways to environmental and financial sustainability for the next several decades that are supported by their customers and elected officials.

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