

Darien first in area to begin recycling food scraps in effort to divert refuse from landfills

By Lynandro Simmons Updated 12:16 pm EDT, Friday, August 24, 2018



IMAGE 1 OF 5

The bins that will be available for members participating in the program.

DARIEN — A new food scraps program is coming soon to Darien.

The program will allow residents to completely recycle all of their food scraps at the recycling center.

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"The benefits are tremendous," said Carolyn Bayne, a member of the energy and recycling advisory committee. "Approximately 21 percent of trash is food scraps."

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...ing food scraps is better than the efficiency of the incineration process," she said. "They do different things to try to minimize the pollutants that come out of the plant but it adds to the pollution."

Earlier this year during the Darien sidewalk sales, members of the community were able to sign up if they were interested in the new food scraps bins.

"We got the names and emails of around 70 people," said Bayne. "We'll contact them to let them know when they're available."

Bayne said they will also sell the bins to members of the community who have access to the recycling center. The kits will cost \$25 and include a countertop pail, storage bin and a roll of compostable bags.

She said the program was based largely on similar programs in Westchester County, New York that have been successful. She said composting food scraps was more efficient and even provide some benefits.

"When it's broken down into compost it's very nutrient rich," said Bayne. "It can even be used in your gardens."

Members of the public will be able to take the bins home to place their food waste in. Once full they can drive them to the recycling center at their convenience. There they will empty their bins into a larger bin where it will be hauled off to the composting facility.

Around Earth Day, the town will purchase a quantity of compost from the composting facility and residents will have the opportunity to bring a bucket and take some home, said Bayne.

To get funding for the program the energy and recycling advisory committee applied for the innovation grant from the Recycle CT foundation. The grant funds new and innovative processes or programs in the areas of waste reduction, reuse, recycling and composting in Connecticut.

"We were awarded roughly \$8,000," said Bayne.

Craig Flaherty, chair of the energy and recycling advisory committee, said originally there wasn't an ability to do it at the recycling center because there wasn't enough room.

"Composting our food scrap recycling has been something on the minds of folks for a while," said Flaherty.

The success of other recycling programs in Darien has helped to reduce waste at the recycling center significantly and increased the amount of recycling, said Flaherty.

The combination of recycling and stewardship initiatives implemented at the recycling center over the last five years has also helped to save Darien \$100,000 per year, he said.

The food scraps could help to reduce the costs to burn the trash at Wheelabrator in Bridgeport. Food waste is often leftover in the trash which is also a significant part of the tonnage, he said.

According to a waste characterization study done last year for the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's new Comprehensive Materials Management Strategy — a plan that would overhaul trash management in Connecticut, food waste increased from about 321,500 tons in 2010 to about 520,000 tons in 2015 — a more than 60 percent jump. It also increased from 13.5 percent of non-recycled municipal waste destined for landfills or trash-to-energy facilities to 22.3 percent.

Flaherty said helping to reduce the food waste could also help to save more money in the town.

"We also would like to think about our trash as a part of a circular economy," he said. "It's not one way anymore, just use and throw away. It's something that can be reused and repurposed."

Residents will bring their food scraps to the recycling center in totes designed for the program. These totes will then be picked up once or twice a week. The program is expected to start later this fall, but no official date has been set yet.

"We think it's generally good all around to find more ways to be sustainable in our practices," said Flaherty. "Turning our food waste into compost is one them. We're very excited about the program."

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