



# BOULDER, CO

City Leadership, Community Partners & Environmental Ethic Overcome Economic Challenges

Nestled against the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, Boulder, Colorado is known for its deep-rooted commitment to the natural environment and healthy living. But landfilling in this region is really cheap—less than half the national average. Achieving higher recycling rates here takes more than just a population that cares. It takes strong city government leadership, combined with strategic community partners, to build a successful Zero Waste model. Together, Boulder is making it easy for every resident and business to recycle and compost, and developing the innovative infrastructure to reach a Zero Waste future.

POPULATION	MEDIAN INCOME	LARGEST PRIVATE SECTOR EMPLOYER	LOCATION	TRASH/RECYCLING SERVICE
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## GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY EFFORT



The story of recycling in Boulder begins in 1976 with [Eco-Cycle](#), a local non-profit that used community volunteers and old school buses to start one of the first curbside recycling programs in the U.S. In 1989, the City of Boulder adopted weekly curbside recycling for all residents through a three-way contract between the City, local hauler Western Disposal to collect the materials, and Eco-Cycle for processing. Currently, recyclables are processed locally at the Boulder County Recycling Center, operated by Eco-Cycle and owned by Boulder County.

In 2001, Boulder moved to a free market approach for residential recycling. The city required all residential trash haulers to charge residents by the volume of trash produced, known as Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT) billing. As a result, today nearly 60 percent of Boulder households choose to use the smallest trash cart (32 gallons) available. In 2008, curbside composting began for all residents, the first program of its kind in Colorado.

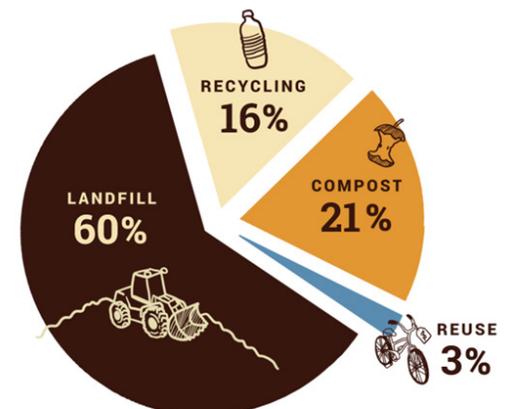
One of Boulder's biggest achievements came in 1994 when voters approved a "trash tax" to fund waste-reduction programs and infrastructure. The tax is now \$3.50/month for households and \$0.85/yard<sup>3</sup> of trash service for businesses and multi-family properties. This funding has been integral to supporting Boulder's continuous investment in recycling—and now, Zero Waste.

In 2006, Boulder's City Council passed a Zero Waste goal and committed to 85 percent diversion by 2025. The City developed a Master Plan for Waste Reduction and later updated the plan in 2015 to a Zero Waste Strategic Plan.

## CITY OF BOULDER'S TIMELINE TO ZERO WASTE



## BOULDER'S 2016 DIVERSION RATES





## FROM VOLUNTARY TO MANDATORY: UNIVERSAL ZERO WASTE ORDINANCE

Thanks to convenient curbside recycling and composting programs, Boulder's single-family homes were diverting more than 55 percent in 2014. Yet citywide, Boulder wasn't seeing strong progress toward its recovery goals: The city-wide diversion rate only inched up from 30 to 34 percent between 2004 and 2014.

It was clear that the commercial sector, including multi-family complexes, was lagging behind. Businesses were only diverting about 25 percent of their waste and multi-family residences were diverting just 14 percent. Despite years of voluntary efforts, education campaigns, and financial incentives to help businesses start recycling, there was still too much going to waste. To make faster progress toward Zero Waste, the City would have to regulate recycling in the commercial sector.

In 2015, the City made a powerful commitment to make sure everyone in the community participates equally in waste diversion: Through its Universal Zero Waste Ordinance (UZWO), Boulder became just the third city in the nation to require that every home, business and apartment have recycling and composting services. Events are required to provide recycling and composting as well. The City is now actively enforcing this policy and provides clear [action steps, videos and tools](#) to help everyone comply.

### THE PIVOTAL ROLE OF THE CITY

Trash and recycling services in Boulder are provided entirely by the private sector. The landfill is also privately run and located outside of the county. This means the City has limited control over how services are provided. In its Zero Waste Strategic Plan, Boulder recognized its unique role in furthering change under these circumstances, which are the norm in much of the Rocky Mountain region.

*"In contrast to communities with municipal control over waste hauling, state mandates or high landfill tip fees that encourage zero waste investments, Boulder relies on a strong network of nonprofit, for-profit, governmental and community partnerships to invest resources in the success of our zero waste systems. In this dynamic environment, the City of Boulder has a role to: facilitate a community vision around zero waste; "set the rules" so everyone can play on an even field; and work with each community partner to collaboratively build facilities and deliver strategic programs and services."*

## RECYCLE ROW: COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND ZERO WASTE INFRASTRUCTURE

An important piece of Boulder's Zero Waste Strategic Plan was the creation of Recycle Row, a 1.2 mile stretch of Zero Waste facilities designed to come "darn near" to replacing the need for a landfill. Locating these facilities nearby each other makes it more convenient for residents and businesses to recycle. The facilities are run by a mix of non-profit and for-profit partners, including:

### ECO-CYCLE/CITY OF BOULDER CENTER FOR HARD-TO-RECYCLE MATERIALS (CHARM)

Recycle electronics, appliances, white block foam, plastic bags, yoga mats and more—over 24 types of materials accepted. Run by non-profit partner, Eco-Cycle.

### RESOURCE YARD

Drop off or pick up salvaged building materials, such as wood, doors, windows, sinks and more. Run by non-profit partner, ReSource Central.

### BOULDER COUNTY HAZARDOUS MATERIALS MANAGEMENT FACILITY (HMMF)

Properly dispose of hazardous items such as batteries, motor oil, paint and cleaning agents. Run by Boulder County.

### BOULDER COUNTY YARD WASTE AND WOOD WASTE DROP-OFF CENTER

Drop-off site for recycling yard debris and clean wood scraps. Reduced rates for residents and businesses subsidized by the City. Run by for-profit partner and hauler, Western Disposal.

### BOULDER COUNTY RECYCLING DROP-OFF CENTER

Recycle single-stream materials. Owned by Boulder County, run by Eco-Cycle.

## BOULDER'S KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Strong community partnerships between the City, the County, local trash haulers and non-profits that enable a comprehensive approach to waste reduction.
- Dedicated funding source through the Trash Tax for education, Recycle Row infrastructure, incentives for business recycling, composting pilots and more.
- Convenient access to services: The Universal Zero Waste Ordinance ensures everyone has convenient and standardized access to recycling and composting—at home, at work, at school and on the go.
- Commitment to recycling education and outreach, through both City and partner efforts.

## NEXT STEPS

In the short term, the City will focus on enforcing the UZWO to increase diversion rates, especially at businesses and multi-family properties. Both the City and Boulder County are also focused on two remaining infrastructure needs: a local composting facility and a regional construction and demolition recycling facility.

Track Boulder's Zero Waste efforts at [zerowasteboulder.com](http://zerowasteboulder.com).



Ready to launch a program like this in your community? Find the tools, inspiration and support you need at [ecocyclesolutionshub.org](http://ecocyclesolutionshub.org).



Thanks to our founding partner for support.