

Organized Collection FAQ  
(last updated 5/4/21)

**What is organized collection?**

Organized collection is a waste collection system in which existing haulers each get a number of households to serve that's equal to their market share, and located in the same area of the city, which helps coordinate collection more easily and efficiently.

**Why is the City doing this? Why should I participate?**

There are a variety of benefits to an organized system – some specific to a consortium/multi-hauler approach (which is what the city is required to pursue at this time). In general, organized collection would reduce the number of garbage trucks traveling on roads in Richfield; reduce air, noise, and other forms of pollution; and save many households money. You can find more benefits to this system [here](#) as well as some below.

Some environmental benefits include:

- Organizing collection makes education easier to share with residents throughout the city, which has been proven to increase participation and accurate separation of more materials with less contamination.
- With less recyclables and organics landfilled or incinerated, fewer new resources are needed to make various products, which also means less energy and fuel used in manufacturing and transportation processes.
- Fewer trucks and more condensed routes reduce fuel consumption, increases safety, and reduces the number of trucks on the roads.
- Environmental benefits of collecting organics are more significant since organics make up the biggest part of trash that can be separated and processed in a better manner.
- Food waste that breaks down in landfills (or before it even gets there!) releases methane, a very potent and harmful greenhouse gas. It also doesn't produce much energy when burned due to high water content.
- Compost (the product made from separating and processing organics) retains more water, which is important as precipitation levels increase every year. It also prevents runoff more than only using regular soil, prevents erosion, reduces the need for fertilizers, and much more.

Some economic benefits include:

- Separating materials from your garbage to be properly disposed of in other ways will cut down on the amount of trash you produce and ideally, the amount you pay for that service.
  - Numerous participants of Richfield's current organics drop-off program have shared that this has already happened for them. As county taxes on garbage disposal continue to increase (on top of state taxes), this is a great way to help your finances.

- Additionally, an organized system means more efficient routes which cuts costs for haulers, therefore cutting costs for customers too.
- Fewer trucks means less opportunities for issues like hydraulic lines bursting and leaking fluid, which damages roads and increases the need and costs related to road repair projects. This is also an environmental benefit.

**What is the timeline for this?**

The City officially passed a resolution on 11/10/2020 to consider organizing collection. Licensed haulers have been notified of the city’s intention to consider organizing collection. Initial meetings between the City and haulers will be set up in the coming weeks. This will lead into a period of negotiations before a contract is proposed. Throughout the entire process, public education and feedback is encouraged. Later on in the process, before a contract is signed, a public hearing will be held. Program implementation (carts delivered, etc.) is planned for Fall 2021, but the exact timing is dependent on negotiations and the amount of time haulers need for implementation.

**How would the city step up to ensure that customer service and billing are accurate, reliable, and high quality across all authorized haulers? *(This question was submitted by a resident.)***

The biggest way the City would be able to hold haulers accountable is through the legal contract they’d sign. In this, financial penalties (liquidated damages) can be assessed for various infractions. This is not something that really exists in an individual agreement between a resident and a hauler. City staff have been and will continue to be very involved with all details and very responsive to resident concerns or issues. If inaccurate billing happens, staff will work as quickly as possible to connect with the hauler to fix the situation. They would also be checking in regularly with all haulers before an organized system launches, to ensure that billing information is accurate from the beginning, and that residents have been pro-actively communicated with.

With standard rates for all haulers, and organized sections of the city to pick up, the opportunities for errors on the haulers’ part should be significantly decreased. Hearing this concern about/experience with missed pick-ups and other negative service experiences from many residents has been one of the many reasons why the City is looking at organizing collection - to help protect and advocate for Richfield residents.

**What it will mean for residents once it is implemented?**

An organized collection system would mean that some residents might have a different hauler, depending on the allocation determined with haulers during negotiations. This hauler will bill and communicate with residents directly. City staff will be able to help provide more education and communication about citywide service, which is currently not easy or possible due to the differences between haulers.

**How will residents be able to ask the city to intervene with the assigned hauler if customer service is unacceptable? *(This question was submitted by a resident.)***

Some residents currently contact staff in these situations anyway. The difference is that the City currently doesn't really get involved in private business transactions, and City staff are not preemptively updated by haulers about any service related issues. This would change for the better under an organized system. Not only would staff have designated contacts, but they would be kept up to date on hauling in the city, which would help them inform residents and make sure haulers are also communicating with their customers in a timely manner.

**Am I required to participate in this system? Can I opt out?**

By county ordinance all single family households and multi-family dwellings must have recycling collection. Additionally by January 2022, all cities in Hennepin County will be required to provide the opportunity to participate in curbside organics collection to residents in single-family households and multi-family dwellings up to 4 units.

Residents will be allowed to submit an application to opt out of the organized system but it will be contingent upon having satisfactory disposal options for all waste streams, and be subject to approval from city staff. Opting out does not allow residents to then contract with their hauler of choice.

**Will there be yard waste collection and/or large item pick-up service?**

Yes, these services will be included in an organized system. Usually in an organized system, yard waste is an optional service. There are a variety of ways that bulky items can be addressed in an organized system; details for Richfield will be determined during negotiations based on resident feedback.

**Will there be an option to suspend service for extended leaves of absence/snowbirds?**

Yes, there will be an extended hold policy for residents to suspend service and not be charged while away. Details have yet to be finalized but there will be a minimum length of absence required, which is common for organized systems.

**How much will it cost me?**

It is hard to estimate an individual household's future service charges before negotiations have started. The MPCA has estimated that households can save 12-34% in an organized system, depending on the size of their cart. Hennepin County estimates that households in its single-hauler cities pay between \$7 and 10 per month for organized recycling and organics service.

After receiving future funding from the County, Richfield will begin to offset some of the cost by providing an annual credit to residents participating in organics recycling. The city will also be promoting other cost-saving measures including right-sizing trash bins and having less frequent service options, such as every other week trash collection.

**What are "organics" and what does it have to do with trash/recycling collection?**

Organics, also known as compostable materials, are items that can be separated from the trash and turned into compost, which greatly reduces the large amounts of methane that is released through the

decomposition of food. Organics include food scraps (even bones, shells, etc.), non-recyclable and food-soiled paper (egg cartons, pizza boxes, newspaper, etc.), BPI certified compostable products, and more.

These materials make up a large percentage of what is in most people's trash cans. Not only do organics decompose in landfills and release a lot of methane (a very concentrated greenhouse gas), but there are also significant economic impacts to every household. Households that throw away organic materials throw away more trash and can pay more for service, depending on the size of their trash cart.

State and county taxes are applied to garbage charges only, further incentivizing recycling and organics collection. The current total is 25.25% with the Minnesota Solid Waste Management Tax rate of 9.75% and the Hennepin County Solid Waste Management Fee of 15.5% (which increased from 9% on 4/1/19). All of this means that the more trash a household generates, the more they are paying in extra taxes and fees on their bill.

### **I don't produce enough stuff to compost.**

You probably do and you don't even know it! Around 1/3 of the trash generated by a typical household is compostable materials. It includes any and all food scraps (including meat and bones), unlined paper products (including delivery pizza boxes, egg cartons, tissues, paper towels, 100% cotton balls and q-tips, coffee filters, paper bags and newspapers that can't be recycled), toothpicks, chopsticks, flowers/houseplant trimmings, fur or hair, BPI certified compostable items, and much more! Even if you currently have backyard composting, there is a lot more that curbside collection can take, and keep out of the trash.

### **Can service be tiered? Is cart size universal? *(These questions were submitted by residents.)***

Different cart size options for trash will continue to be available. This includes 35, 65, or 95 gallon options (or something similar to those sizes). A similar pricing structure will continue, with larger carts paying a higher service rate than smaller carts. The City also hopes to include an Every Other Week service option for residents who generate a smaller amount of waste, something that is especially common when people separate their organics as well.

Cart sizes for other services will be determined by existing practice and throughout the negotiation process.

### **I don't want 3 or 4 carts.**

Residents should be able to find space around their garages, driveways, or houses to store carts. Additionally, if you downsize your trash cart by producing less trash (and recycling more or separating your organics), that can help accommodate another cart. Several other cities have successfully implemented curbside programs with 3-4 carts.

### **How will this change my service?**

Details will be worked out with the haulers licensed in the City. The City expects that collection days will be able to remain the same, ensuring a smooth transition. A household's hauler could remain the same or could change, depending on the allocation of customers per hauler and the geographic location assigned to each hauler.

**How/when do I cancel my current service?**

Residents will not need to cancel their current service. Haulers and the City will work to transition all residents in the program to the organized collection system, requiring no cancellation from residents.

**Will residents be stuck with cart-swapping or contract-breaking fees?**

No, there won't be additional fees associated with contract termination for residents to pay.

**What does this system mean for billing?**

Your hauler, as assigned by the organized system, will be billing you directly. This could be the same hauler you've had or a different one. You will receive notification about your hauler before billing occurs.

The City has considered municipal billing, but there is neither sufficient existing staff capacity nor funding available for more staff at this time. With consistent rates across all haulers, there should be fewer billing errors.

**What about returning my current recycling cart?**

We will be working with haulers to coordinate returning/exchanging carts.

**Will waste collectors lose their jobs? *(This question was submitted by a resident.)***

No. Negotiations to create an organized system include the existing haulers in a city, unless they choose not to participate.

**Are all haulers required to charge the same rates city wide? *(This question was submitted by a resident.)***

Yes. An organized system does not permit haulers to charge different rates. Agreed upon rates are determined during the negotiation process.

**What is the length [# years] being considered for the organized contract? *(This question was submitted by a resident.)***

Per state statute, the initial organized contract must be for 7 years.

**If billing is coming from the hauler, who is overseeing the hauler on the correct billing amount? *(This question was submitted by a resident.)***

The City will not see resident bills as billing would be done between the resident and the hauler. Residents will be responsible for insuring their rate matches the contracted price, although the standardization of services and pricing should help billing become more straightforward for residents to understand.

**How is the city going to manage the situation when the labor decides to go on strike? (*This question was submitted by a resident.*)**

Neither City staff, nor state staff that were contacted regarding this question, are aware of a labor strike affecting any organized system in Minnesota. Many haulers do not have unionized drivers. If one were to happen, open systems as well as organized systems would be affected.

**Why can't residents vote on this?**

Whether or not to implement organized collection in the City is ultimately a policy decision for the City Council. Residents wishing to voice their support of or opposition to organized collection can and should contact Council members with their concerns and opinions. The City Council does not have the legal authority to directly put a question on the ballot that would allow residents to vote on organized collection. The City's Charter contains some options for registered voters to initiate actions that could result in a ballot question. Residents wishing to pursue such actions related to organized collection should consult the City's Charter and do their own legal research to learn the specific processes.

*If you have a question that's not addressed here, please email Rachel Lindholm at [rlindholm@richfieldmn.gov](mailto:rlindholm@richfieldmn.gov).*