

Montgomery County Zero Waste  
Baseline Survey  
2018

Montgomery  
Countryside  
Alliance



PROMOTING & PROTECTING RURAL MONTGOMERY COUNTY

## Montgomery Countryside Alliance Zero Waste Survey Results Executive Summary

Montgomery Countryside Alliance (MCA) - as a member of the Montgomery County Zero Waste Task Force – undertook a survey to gauge a baseline of data on county resident’s current waste reduction efforts and what county programs they might support. The survey was made live on the MCA website on June 14, 2018 and closed on October 8, 2018. 199 county residents took the survey reflecting 182 of them answering as solely a household and 17 answering as a business and household.

The full list of survey questions and results follows this executive summary.

### General Takeaways

It must be said that the residents that have taken this survey are a self-selected bunch, mostly already committed to the goal of zero waste. The data also seems to show that the residents who took the survey are already making the changes that would have to be made county-wide to lower waste levels. For instance, 64% of respondents said they compost either on their own property or elsewhere. The percentage of all county residents who compost is likely far lower. While it might seem that this survey is “preaching to the choir,” the respondents are likely to be excellent ambassadors to the “unconverted” who may not have yet considered their waste footprint. If we can make it simple for these motivated residents to further lower their waste stream, it will in turn be easier for those that do not yet have waste reduction goals to get on board. As one respondent said “We are willing to do anything given guidance.”

The respondents on our survey are also more likely to be MCA supporters as we sent the link out to our 9000 person email newsletter list and our social media channels.

### Looking to the County to Lead the Way and Set the Standard

In presenting numerous recycling/composting initiatives for respondents to rate from “not interested” to “highly interested”, the highest interest was in the County being proactive about limiting waste by instituting a “Zero Waste” goal, passing mandatory recycling rules for schools and government facilities under their jurisdiction and mandatory recycling of building waste for contractors. Respondents were favorable to both carrot and stick approaches – heavily supporting both laws to limit the use of hard to recycle items like Styrofoam and plastic bags but also an awards system for businesses that are able to reduce their waste and setting up a “green incubator” to jumpstart businesses that upcycled materials.



*The County has taken the lead on awarding Green Business Certifications – among them, sustainable farms.*

## All that Plastic/Packaging/Styrofoam

When asked an open ended question about obstacles to zero waste goals for the individual respondents in their household or business, 44% of respondents identified packaging as a problem. These respondents are recycling all items allowed under the County’s recycling collection program but wish they could find a way to safely dispose of other items that can’t be recycled – specifically, Styrofoam takeout containers (despite the 2016 ban it seems some businesses are still using these), plastics of the wrong type, plastic films and plastic bags. Many called for an all-out ban on plastic bags to go above and beyond the fee at check out.



### Top Rated Initiatives (4 out of 5 and above)

Initiative	Rating score (out of 5)*
Require Schools and Government Offices to follow green procurement and disposal practices	4.7
The County should adopt a Zero Waste Goal	4.6
Mandatory Recycling of Construction and Demolition Debris by Contactors	4.6
Working with Manufacturers to have them take back and non-recyclable products	4.5
Awards and Recognition for Businesses and Individuals meeting waste reduction goals	4.4
Move to Ban items that are hard to recycle like Styrofoam and Plastic Bags	4.4
Build a 12 category resource recovery center to reuse and recycle items	4.3
County create incubator program for for small recycling businesses and provide a centralized business park (electronics repair café, used housewares, furniture, appliances, clothes, art supplies, bikes, power tools and small engine equipment)	4.2
Partnering with local farmers to site composting facilities on farm properties	4.2
Begin Curbside Pickup of compostable materials (food scraps and other biodegradable items)	4.0
Build a wood recycling park and reuse warehouse	4.0

\*Our survey program through Constant Contact provided the weighted average calculated by dividing the sum of all weighted ratings by the number of total responses.

### Recycling and Trash Pickup Schedules: A Patchwork

A question intended to gauge interest in changing pickup schedules ran up against the patchwork nature of trash pickup in the county where some upcounty areas have no service, some HOAs provide service, some residents pay for their own hauling and some live in districts that already pick up compostables (notably Takoma Park).



### Multi-Family Home Recycling and Composting

A number of respondents living in apartment complexes or condos shared concerns that their building may not be properly dealing with materials intended for recycle pickup regardless of the good intentions of residents. The extra step of composting is seen as a nonstarter for folks in these buildings when coordination of basic recycling seems to not be going well. For these urban residents without yards for on-site composting, the several community compost haulers that have cropped up are seen by some to be a great solution and others to be too expensive to be sustainable budget item.



## Will to Compost Gives Way to Challenges

Our respondents seemed to focus on recycling and composting and reducing purchases as the main ways they were attempting to reduce their household waste. Those that did have the ability to compost on their property seemed interested in more information on what could be composted and keeping critters out of the bins. The will to compost seems strong on the part of respondents but either lack of a yard or lack of education is holding back many from composting long term. 69% of respondents support curbside pickup of biodegradable materials.



## How to Handle the Rest of It?

When asked what should be done with the materials that could not be composted or recycled, there was little support for continuing to use the Dickerson Incinerator. The option of a landfill sited in the County with gas capture garnered the most support.

## What's Next

This small scale survey is a first step in establishing a baseline of waste reduction behavior but a survey with much broader reach should be undertaken to garner data from more corners of the County, particularly urban centers. This is a survey which we understand the County is undertaking currently. While any zero waste survey is going to suffer from a self-selection bias, gathering data is still important. MCA stands ready to support the County toward the goal of Zero Waste and serves proudly on the Zero Waste Task Force.

## Examples of prevalent comments

### Composting

"If the county provided a composting service I could get very close to zero waste."

"Composting food waste has become difficult as I get older. Interested in pickup, though."

"Would like opportunity to compost but don't have the equipment and worried about rats"

"Need to make it as easy as possible. My family composts and looks for ways to reduce, reuse, recycle because I'm committed to it. My husband is not going to take initiative and I imagine a lot of other people are similar to him- he'll do it if it is as easy or easier than the current process (or I do it)."

### Education

"I think County should develop an educational program re: zero food waste and proper recycling (which is evidently a problem). I don't think people understand it. Maybe it should be given in the schools and then on the county tv station, and have educators go around to County agencies and local business to educate before ZW starts. And then monitor"

"Get multi-family housing (rental properties, condos, etc.) on board with recycling. My understanding is that they are currently exempt."

"No compost facilities in my building or nearby. Not sure that recycling is properly disposed of in my building. Apartment building itself provides many single-use products that could be transitioned (e.g., paper towels to hand dryers, gym wet wipes to cloth towels, etc.)."

"Require EVERY business to recycle bottles and cans. Commercial buildings only have mandatory paper recycling. Let's make it universal!"

"Education & buy-in. My folks are relatively uneducated (HS or less), and either aren't aware of, or don't believe in, the recycling efforts of the county. Or don't believe in "that environmental BS" anyway. This despite my efforts to 'remind' them regularly about these efforts."

"No clear, communicated strategy for householders. I look online for waste information but it is limited and unclear (e.g. MoCo waste info). Concerned that waste is burned (incinerator) rather than planning for zero waste. I have done the work myself - how I shop, what I buy, composting (including dog waste). But it needs to be EASY for busy people."

"More clear guidelines would be helpful. I have a double sized post card/flyer you sent out several years ago with pictures of the different items we can recycle. An updated version would be helpful. Also more specific details such as should we recycle greasy pizza boxes, should we recycle small pieces of aluminum foil, etc."

## Businesses

“County paper recycle pickup business service. As of yet, we can't have our business paper picked up by county trucks. only residential. If county offered paper recycle pickup, we would quickly do that. So far management chooses not to purchase the privatized paper pickup services, and that paper has gone to landfill facilities.”

## Transfer Stations

“We used to just recycle plastics. Now we recycle boxes, too. Mostly food boxes and cardboard from deliveries. We utilize Poolesville's Beauty Spot. They need more hours and a clearer set of guidelines as to what can be dropped there. More Poolesville residents are using the Beauty Spot and there definitely is a growing need at that location. Oil?”

“We recycle everything we can ... we just started composting this year (beyond leaves .., adding food scraps ( using the county compost bins . It is getting harder to dispose of waste properly when the county keeps eliminating things the beauty spot used to accept , for example they no longer accept oil .. do we had to take the oil to xfer station”

“There are many items which can't be recycled readily. We are willing to sort and recycle, but not willing to go to the transfer station regularly. Why not consider a bin and occasional pick up of batteries, fluorescent bulbs and tubes, smoke detectors, etc. and perhaps of paints and non-hazardous chemicals, with guidelines.”



**Constant Contact Survey Results**

**Survey Name:** zero waste survey

**Response Status:** Partial & Completed

**Filter:** None

11/5/2018 3:19 PM EST

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**TextBlock:**

Montgomery County has undertaken an ambitious goal to achieve zero waste and we at MCA will be serving on the Task Force to help guide the process. There are many moving parts to our waste system that will have to be studied as we gather a baseline and ideas to move us forward. As MCA serves on this task force, your feedback is helpful. The County will likely send out a more in-depth survey in the future. Please answer the following questions.

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Are you answering for a home or a business?

Answer	0%	100%	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Home			182	91.4 %
Business			3	1.5 %
Both			12	6.0 %
No Response(s)			2	1.0 %
<b>Totals</b>			<b>199</b>	<b>100%</b>

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Number of employees/ Number of household members?

194 Response(s)

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What are the obstacles for getting to zero waste both in your home/business and in the County?

178 Response(s)

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What does your household/business do now to reduce, reuse and recycle?

189 Response(s)





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**TextBlock:**

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What do you do currently with your food waste?

Answer	0%	100%	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Trash			89	45.4 %
Compost on my property			113	57.6 %
Garbage disposal			61	31.1 %
Compost elsewhere			14	7.1 %
<b>Totals</b>			<b>196</b>	<b>100%</b>

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On food composting - please check all that apply:

Answer	0%	100%	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
I compost my food waste on my property currently			111	57.2 %
I want to compost my food waste on my property			26	13.4 %
I'd like training in how to compost			26	13.4 %
Can't/won't compost myself but I'd collect my food scraps for pickup			64	32.9 %
Nope - not going to collect my food scraps for either personal composting or pickup			7	3.6 %
<b>Totals</b>			<b>194</b>	<b>100%</b>



Are you happy with the frequency of recycling/trash pick up?

Answer	0%	100%	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Yes both are fine			138	71.5 %
Need trash service more often			2	1.0 %
need recycling service more often			18	9.3 %
We actually could go longer between pickups of recycling			17	8.8 %
We actually could go longer between pickups of trash			37	19.1 %
Other			7	3.6 %
<b>Totals</b>			<b>193</b>	<b>100%</b>

How interested are you in the county taking on the following initiatives related to currently non-recyclable materials?

1 = Not at all interested, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Very Interested

Answer	1	2	3	4	5	Number of Response(s)	Rating Score*
Adopt a Zero Waste Goal						192	4.6
Increase frequency of curbside recycling						187	2.7
County partners with a non-profit to have a regular bulky item pick-up curbside 1-2 times per month along with your trash						189	3.8
Build a wood recycling park and reuse warehouse.						189	4.0
Your municipal trash fee based on weight or volume and no charge for recycling						188	3.8
Reduce municipal trash service frequency						184	2.6
County create incubator program for for small recycling businesses and provide a centralized business park (electronics repair café, used housewares, furniture, appliances, clothes, art supplies, bikes, power tools and small engine equipment)						189	4.2
Moving to ban the use of items that are hard to recycle, examples include styrofoam and plastic bags						194	4.4
Working with manufacturers to have them take back any non-recyclable products						191	4.5
Build a 12 category Resource Recovery Facility for reuse and recycle items.						192	4.3

\*The Rating Score is the weighted average calculated by dividing the sum of all weighted ratings by the number of total responses.

How interested are you in the county taking the following steps on recyclable/compostable materials?

1 = Least Support, 5 = Most Support

Answer	1	2	3	4	5	Number of Response(s)	Rating Score*
Begin Curbside Pickup of compostable materials (food scraps and other biodegradable items)						188	4.0
Use existing county property to site large scale composting of collected municipal food scraps						188	3.9
Partnering with local farmers to site composting facilities on farm properties						189	4.2
Bring back a bottle deposit system for glass bottles.						192	3.7
Mandatory recycling of Construction and Demolition debris for building contractors.						192	4.6
Require schools and government offices to follow green procurement and disposal practices						194	4.7
Awards and recognition for businesses and individuals with exemplary recycling and reduction programs.						193	4.4

\*The Rating Score is the weighted average calculated by dividing the sum of all weighted ratings by the number of total responses.

If the County institutes a County-wide food scrap recycling program, which would you support:

1 = Least Support, 5 = Most Support

Answer	1	2	3	4	5	Number of Response(s)	Rating Score*
All food scraps trucked to Dickerson Yard Trim Composting facility for composting						178	3.4
Outsource to private company						173	2.8
Have localized food scrap composting sites around the County.						188	4.0

\*The Rating Score is the weighted average calculated by dividing the sum of all weighted ratings by the number of total responses.

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For residual trash that cannot be recycled, would you prefer:

1 = Least Support, 5 = Most Support

Answer	1	2	3	4	5	Number of Response(s)	Rating Score*
Continue to burn all County trash in Dickerson incinerator						172	2.6
Landfill within the County with regulated gas capture						176	3.3
Receive bids from private EPA-approved landfills outside of the County reachable by rail						173	2.9

\*The Rating Score is the weighted average calculated by dividing the sum of all weighted ratings by the number of total responses.

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What other programs should the county be considering?

87 Response(s)

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If you'd like to be contacted for more feedback as we hone in on Zero Waste solutions -please enter your email below - and thanks!

78 Response(s)