

# KING COUNTY SOLID WASTE DIVISION 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



*Per King County Code Sections 10.14.080 and 10.24.020*



**King County**

Department of  
Natural Resources and Parks  
**Solid Waste Division**

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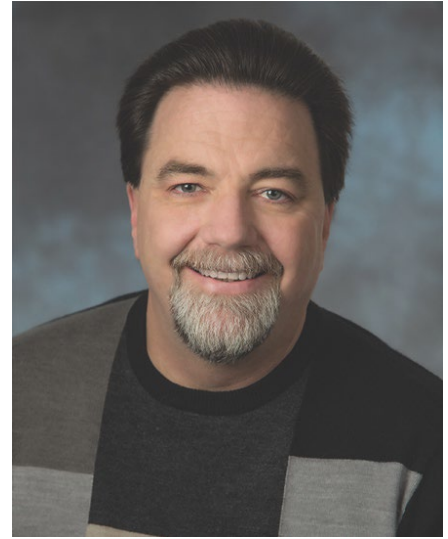
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## Message from the Director

I'd like to start by expressing how truly privileged I've felt to serve as the Director of the Solid Waste Division over the past 12 years, through all its successes and challenges. When I came on board in September 2012, I found a dedicated, skilled team, a strong network of engaged partners, and a solid waste system that was evolving amid a host of changes. I'm incredibly proud of the work we've accomplished together, and I can confidently say that the Solid Waste Division is still an amazing place, driven by a passionate team committed to making a positive impact.

I am pleased to present the Solid Waste Division's 2024 Annual Report, which highlights our major achievements in waste prevention, resource recovery, and waste disposal. The past year was yet another busy one the division as we continued to serve our customers, partners, and community members.



*Pat D. McLaughlin*

One of the most important aspects of our business is the development and implementation of waste prevention and recycling programs to ensure a sustainable future for all King County communities.

Our goal of zero waste of resources by 2030 — articulated in the Re+ program and the County's Strategic Climate Action Plan — is a major focus of the division. Our waste prevention programs extend beyond curbside and transfer station recycling. Our work includes conservation education programs for local schools, technical assistance to improve the sustainability of area businesses, and coordination and funding support for waste prevention and recycling efforts of our city partners.

We also continue to make our operations more sustainable. In 2024, this was evident in progress we made in building the new South County Recycling and Transfer Station Project and advancing the environmental review for the future Northeast Recycling and Transfer Station Project. We've also continued the electrification of our vehicle fleet and even achieved a Zero Energy Certification for the Vashon Recycling and Transfer Station.

Woven into all this work is our commitment to equity and social justice. This year, we continued to prioritize equity, both within the workplace and in how we serve and collaborate with King County communities. These achievements would not be possible without our extremely talented employees. I am proud of everything we've accomplished together this past year. I also want to thank our customers, partnering cities, advisory committees, the King County Executive, and the King County Council.

It gives me immense honor to present the division's 2024 achievements. With such a talented and devoted workforce, I am confident that you all will continue to build on our past successes, look for new opportunities, and meet the challenges that come next.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Pat D. McLaughlin". The signature is stylized and fluid.

*Pat D. McLaughlin*

## About the Solid Waste Division

The Solid Waste Division (SWD) of the Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP) is guided by King County's Strategic Climate Action Plan goal of consumption and materials management, as well as the division's vision to achieve zero waste of resources and to enhance the environment through collaboration and innovation. SWD operates eight transfer stations, two rural drop boxes, and the Cedar Hills Regional Landfill, the only operational landfill in the county. SWD community partners include haulers and cities, as well as residents and business owners in unincorporated King County, and 37 cities throughout the county, with the exception of Seattle and Milton, which are part of separate solid waste systems. The Solid Waste Division's mission is to deliver value to its customers and stakeholders and to continuously improve waste prevention, resource recovery, and waste disposal.

## Waste Prevention and Recycling

King County is committed to reducing the waste we send to our regional landfill. The division's waste prevention programs range from curbside and transfer station recycling to environmental education for local students to offering local community repair events and much more. All this work supports the County's long-term goal of zero waste of resources.

### Recycling declines slightly, organic waste collection grows

Current curbside recycling and organic waste collection data is only available through August 2024. For the period of January-August 2024, curbside recycling collection decreased by five percent, or almost 9,000 tons, compared with the same period in 2023. Curbside collection of food and yard waste in 2024 increased by about three percent, or 3,000 tons, for the same period in 2023 (January-August).

In 2024, the Solid Waste Division (SWD) collected 31,779 tons of recyclable material at its transfer stations and drop boxes, a five percent increase compared to 2023. Yard waste continues to be the most recycled material, with 15,885 tons collected, followed by scrap metal (6,194 tons), clean wood (3,255 tons), and cardboard (2,822 tons).



*Yard waste disposal at the Shoreline Recycling and Transfer Station.*

SWD continued its “Sort it Out” program at its recycling and transfer stations, with employees taking a more proactive role in helping customers sort their materials to increase recycling. The project is focused on helping customers recycle even more scrap metal, yard waste, cardboard, and clean wood at facilities in which those materials can be recycled, and alerting customers to designated bins that make it convenient to recycle these types of material. SWD continues to seek expansion of recycling services at stations and seeks to improve collection and processing efficiencies through materials recovery and innovative hauling efforts.

## **Continuing efforts to reduce contamination in recycling**

Contamination in the recycling stream from wet, soiled items or items that are not recyclable poses a major challenge to the efficient processing and marketability of recyclable materials in King County. As required by the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology), in 2021 the division submitted a Contamination Reduction Outreach Plan (CROP) to outline a path forward on reducing contamination of collected recyclable materials and to continue building on its public information and engagement strategies so the practices that contribute to successful recycling programs are better understood and more readily embraced by the public.

In 2024, King County began the process of updating the CROP, which will be completed as part of the 2025 update to King County’s [Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan](#). King County will continue collaborating with local governments, waste haulers, processors, regulators, industry groups, schools, community members, community-based organizations, and nonprofits to advance policies and practices that harmonize recycling programs and reduce the public confusion that undermines their success.

## **Teaching conservation with the next generation through the Waste Reduction & Recycling Schools Program**

The Waste Reduction & Recycling (WRR) Schools Program allows students to learn and make choices that contribute to a more environmentally sustainable school, community, and planet through a schoolwide assembly show and hands-on classroom workshops. In these workshops, students explore personal connections to natural resource use and are introduced to environmental justice concepts. The programs and services are available to King County schools outside of the City of Seattle and City of Milton and are free to the recipient.

The WRR Schools Program scheduled and performed 69 assemblies, 167 elementary classroom workshops, and 324 secondary school classroom workshops for the 2023-2024 year. This past year, there was an increased demand for the assembly program, elementary and secondary classroom workshops, and further instructional opportunities outside the regular academic calendar. In response to those needs, the WRR Schools Program delivered an additional five summer school workshops in 2024.

## **The Green Schools Program launches new funding opportunity**

In the 2023-2024 school year, the Green Schools Program helped K-12 schools and school districts to initiate or improve conservation practices and to engage students and staff in reducing waste,

recycling, composting, and practicing other conservation strategies in their schools, homes, and communities. The Green Schools Program provided 315 schools with information, recommendations, and resources, such as recycling and composting bins and signs needed to start or expand recycling practices. Schools participating in the program were spread throughout 17 school districts, 35 cities, and unincorporated areas, including 35 private schools. During the 2023-2024 school year, the Green Schools Program also launched its Re+ School Voucher Program, to help fund conservation and waste prevention projects. Seventy-one voucher requests were filled across 70 schools in 14 school districts for a total of \$333,667.

## The Green Building Program offers sustainability resources for King County communities

The Green Building Program helps to provide resources to builders to reduce the environmental impacts of construction, demolition, renovation, and maintenance of buildings in King County. In compliance with the Green Building Ordinance (KCC 18.17) and the 2020 Strategic Climate Action Plan, the program reviewed 440 King County-owned capital projects that submitted annual green building reports. Eighty-eight percent of 75 completed capital projects achieved Platinum rating level in green building, resulting in 1,827,920 tons of construction and demolition waste diverted from landfills.

The program also launched the County's first interactive e-learning course on the Green Building Ordinance, the [2020 Strategic Climate Action Plan](#), and the [King County Sustainable Infrastructure Scorecard](#) in May 2024, with 104 learners enrolled by December 2024 across 10 King County Capital Improvement Programs. Given the great success of the course, the program received encouragement from the Executive to develop seven more Sustainability courses in 2025 and beyond, starting with a focus on implementing equity and social justice actions in all King County-owned capital projects.



*Division staff and community members at the Southard ribbon cutting.*

On June 28, 2024, program staff celebrated the ribbon cutting of the Southard, an 18-unit Net Zero Energy and Salmon-Safe Certified affordable homeownership development located in Tukwila. The building received a Living Future Certification, sponsored by SWD as part of a Strategic Climate Action Plan priority action to increase access to affordable, healthy, and climate friendly housing. In addition, the Green Building Communitywide Program

Manager secured Climate Equity Capital Funds that were applied to the solar array that makes

these homes healthy and more economical to operate for residents. Homestead Community Land Trust affectionately named this development after our dear SWD colleague, Patti Southard, a fierce green building advocate who greatly influenced this project.

Upon the recommendation of an Equity Impact Review (EIR), SWD partnered with the Executive Climate Office to apply Green Building Grant dollars toward the Energize! Program, resulting in 10 heat pump installations in the homes of income-qualifying individuals. In addition, the EIR pressed the importance of green building education, so grant dollars were also invested to increase the awareness of important resources such as the Green Building Handbook.

Updates to the [Green Building Handbook](#) were completed in 2024 and unveiled during Earth Week. The handbook is the County's primary tool for educating readers on potential rebates and how to make a home improvement project more sustainable and healthier to occupy. Four full translations have been completed in Spanish, simplified Chinese, Amharic, and Vietnamese, and outreach is currently following a plan developed with community consultant support to increase accessibility.

### **King County “fixers” help communities conserve resources**

The King County free community repair events program held six events in 2024 at King County Library System libraries in Bellevue, Burien, Des Moines, Kirkland, and Skyway, and at Tukwila Community Center. These events reduce waste, conserve resources, and build community. Skilled “fixers” and sewing experts from a variety of communities and cultures work



*Community members and “fixers” at a King County repair*

together, seeking to repair and mend the public's items, including small kitchen appliances, electronics, small furniture, tools, toys, clothing, and more. This program, which began in 2016, has held a total of 87 repair events in 27 different King County cities and communities outside of Seattle. More than 4,000 items have been worked on and most have been fixed or helpfully diagnosed.

### **Construction and demolition waste fee increase raises funds for sustainability**

King County requires that readily recyclable construction and demolition (C&D) materials, including metal, wood, concrete, and drywall, be recycled at King County-designated materials recovery facilities (MRF). This effort furthers the division's zero waste of resources goal and carbon emissions reduction efforts. As of 2024, there are seven King County-designated facilities accepting C&D materials for recycling.

C&D waste that cannot be readily recycled must be processed at one of four designated C&D waste transfer facilities and ultimately landfilled. The division charges a per-ton fee on King County-generated C&D waste. This fee incentivizes recycling and helps fund the County's C&D management program. In 2024, SWD coordinated with advisory committees and industry groups to present a proposed C&D fee increase from \$4.25 to \$13 per ton to the King County Council. The approved fee increase is the first since 1993 and took effect on January 1, 2025.

## **Deconstruction training provides green job skills**

The C&D program hosted its second green workforce development training session with a focus on deconstruction — dismantling structures so materials can be salvaged and put back into the economy. In 2024, the program added a new core element to the curriculum, Roots of Success, which is a certified apprenticeship program, offering core job readiness skills and a general environmental stewardship skill set that will help launch participants into careers in the growing deconstruction industry. The three-week, on-site, hands-on deconstruction portion of the training was held at homes near Cedar Hills Regional Landfill, which were slated for deconstruction to expand the landfill buffer. King County Executive Dow Constantine visited the field training to talk with the trainees and learn a few deconstruction techniques. The training was in partnership with three community-based organizations (CBO): Freedom Project, Community Passageways, and Hope for Homies. The successful training included six trainees who completed the course and received certificates.



*Trainees learn green job skills through King County's deconstruction training program.*

## **King County awarded EPA grant to expand salvage lumber efforts**

The C&D team was able to secure \$3.4 million over five years to support developing a circular economy for salvaged lumber as part of the \$50 million Environmental Protection Agency's Climate

Pollution Reduction Grant program. The grant was awarded to the King County Executive's Climate Office. The program will begin in 2025 and includes the hiring of a senior project manager and development of grant programs supporting salvaged lumber processors and final product manufacturers; it will also provide support for workforce development, product testing, and manufacturer quality control. This effort reinforces the importance of C&D material diversion, salvaged wood efforts, and increased equity and inclusion within this industry.

## Designated recyclables in King County

As specified in the 2019 [Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan](#), King County's list of designated recyclables is defined and updated by the Washington State Department of Ecology's annual statewide survey of materials that have been recycled in Washington. Designated recyclables in King County include:

- Carpet and padding
- Clean wood
- Construction and demolition debris
- Electronics
- Furniture
- Glass
- Metal
- Moderate-risk waste (all-purpose cleaners, batteries, pesticides, used motor oil)
- Organics
- Other materials (latex paint, toner and ink cartridges, photographic film, tires)
- Paper
- Plastic
- Textiles
- Gypsum



*Commingled recycling container at the Shoreline Recycling and Transfer Station.*

## Transfer Stations

Providing customers with safe, efficient, and responsible waste disposal and transfer is a key service of the Solid Waste Division. In 2024, SWD continued its work to modernize its transfer station system.

### Advancements in updating the transfer stations in south and northeast King County

In 2024, the division continued work on the South County Recycling and Transfer Station Project, which will replace the aging Algona Transfer Station by 2026. SWD also completed the draft environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Northeast County Recycling and Transfer Station Project, set to replace the 60-year-old Houghton Transfer Station in Kirkland by 2029. Both facilities will be designed to meet modern green building standards, providing improved access to waste disposal and comprehensive recycling services.

### South County Recycling and Transfer Station continues construction



*Construction continues on the South County Recycling and Transfer Station project.*

Last year, construction was completed on the foundation and side walls of the transfer building, as well as the foundation of the moderate-risk waste collection area, three storm water vaults, and a majority of retaining walls. Other activities included the installation of utilities along West Valley Highway South, an upgraded sewer line on 11th Avenue North, and stream realignment and habitat improvement. The project was also awarded Salmon-Safe certification in May for the conservation of urban habitat and water quality through erosion and sediment control at the site.

The new facility will include compacted waste collection, commercial and public recycling drop-off areas, household and moderate-risk waste disposal areas, and an administrative office. King County will keep the existing Algona Transfer Station open throughout construction of the new facility, which is scheduled to open in 2026.

### Northeast Recycling and Transfer Station nears completion of environmental review

The division continued progress through the State Environmental Policy Act process with the issuance of the project draft environmental impact statement in early 2024, following an extensive public engagement process. Community and stakeholder feedback continued to further guide the development of the final environmental impact statement, which will be released in early 2025. Site selection will be made following leadership review of the final report. The new facility is

expected to be operational in 2029 and will replace the aging Houghton Recycling and Transfer Station. It will offer convenient, accessible recycling services for a variety of items and materials and will be fully enclosed to control noise and odors. The community will continue to have opportunities to help shape decisions on station design, amenities, and services.



*The Houghton Transfer Station will be replaced by the new Northeast Recycling and Transfer Station, currently in environmental review.*



*Household hazardous waste collection at the Factoria Recycling and Transfer Station.*

### **More than 1.95 million pounds of hazardous waste safely collected**

Properly disposing of hazardous products that contain toxic, corrosive, flammable, or reactive ingredients can be difficult. The Haz Waste Program provides convenient hazardous waste collection services, as well as prevention and education resources, for residents and businesses in King County.

The Haz Waste Program makes it easy to dispose of a variety of hazardous materials, such as cleaning products, motor oil, and pesticides. In 2024, the two modes of Wastemobile services — the roving service and the stationary Auburn Wastemobile — provided safe disposal services to more than 19,000 residents, businesses, and organizations. In addition, the hazardous waste facility at the Factoria Recycling and Transfer Station assisted more than 18,600 residents, businesses, and organizations to safely dispose of their hazardous waste. In total, more than 1.95 million pounds of hazardous materials were safely disposed of in 2024, protecting both the environment and public health.

### **King County’s Vashon station achieves Zero Energy Certification, with more climate successes on the horizon**



*The Vashon Recycling Transfer Station, with solar array in background, achieved Zero Energy certification in 2024.*

SWD continued steps to make our operations more sustainable in 2024. With the installation of a new solar array and other energy-saving features completed, the Vashon Recycling and Transfer Station has been Zero Energy Certified by the International Living Future Institute. The certification signifies that over the course of a year the facility generates as much or more energy through solar power than it draws from the electricity grid.

SWD continues to plan more sustainable facilities. The new South County Recycling and Transfer Station is pursuing the Living Building Challenge—Energy Petal certification and will achieve net positive energy performance when certified. The Northeast Recycling and Transfer Station, while

still under environmental review, is planned to include many features to reduce the carbon footprint of the facility's operations.

SWD has also worked to electrify its vehicle fleet, rolling out electric yard trucks, known as “goats,” that our employees use to maneuver solid waste transfer containers around our transfer stations, where bigger tractor-trailer trucks can't go. These battery-powered electric vehicles have replaced diesel equipment and are already in use at our Shoreline and Bow Lake stations, and more are planned at five additional facilities over the next year. The division has also been piloting a battery-electric heavy-duty truck, the first of its kind manufactured in Washington at Kenworth's Renton assembly plant.

## Cedar Hills Regional Landfill

The Cedar Hills Regional Landfill has been in operation since the 1960s and is the last operating landfill in King County. Every day, more than 100 trucks deliver tons of garbage to the landfill for final disposal.



*Waste tippers in action at the Cedar Hills Regional Landfill.*

### Landfill disposal amounts increase slightly

In 2024, 839,606 tons of garbage were disposed of at the landfill, representing a 0.52 percent increase compared with 2023. During 2024, about 82 percent (684,719 tons) of waste tonnage came from commercial hauling companies, with self-haul tonnage accounting for the remaining 18 percent (154,887 tons). Regional direct tonnage (residuals from the recycling centers) rose by about 7,000 tons (189 percent increase). This large increase was largely a rebound from a very light year for regional direct tons in 2023.

The Bow Lake Recycling and Transfer Station continues to be the busiest facility, with 280,940 tons disposed of there, followed by the Factoria Transfer Station (142,431 tons), the Houghton Recycling and Transfer Station (127,951 tons), and the Algona Transfer Station (105,227 tons).

## **Long-term planning continues for waste disposal and maximizing landfill capacity**

The active landfill cell (Area 8) is expected to reach capacity in 2026. The division advanced plans to extend the life of the landfill for an additional 10 years beyond 2028, as outlined in the 2019 *Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan*. These plans include relocating support facilities, such as office spaces and maintenance buildings currently located at the landfill, to build more disposal capacity at the Cedar Hills site. The division relocated operations work groups, including the repair shop, administrative offices and others to a temporary facility located in Renton. These temporary relocations will allow for the development of new office space and operations buildings at the landfill while maintaining current operations.

A final EIS that considered public comments on the draft proposal presented in 2020 was published in March 2022. In it, SWD identified its preferred alternative to permanently relocate support facilities to the southeast corner of the landfill property. In November 2022, SWD leadership identified its preferred alternative for landfill development, which entails:

- No additional landfilling in the Main Hill and Southeast Pit areas
- Landfilling in the southern portion of Areas 2/3, 4, and the Central Pit up to 788 feet
- Landfilling in Areas 5 and 6 up to 788 feet
- No additional landfilling in Area 7, which is currently at 788 feet
- Landfilling in Area 8 to no more than 830 feet
- New Area 9 development in southeast area and landfilling to no more than 830 feet
- Pursuit of a Special Use Permit to place the new support facilities within the existing southern buffer zone.

The relocation provides a planning runway for the next disposal options after the landfill closes. Landfilling is currently the most cost-effective option with the fewest environmental impacts and offers a reliable local disposal option that doesn't require rail export.

## **Facilities relocation project prepares for future development**

To prepare for future planned development projects at the Cedar Hills Regional Landfill, the division relocated operations work groups, including the repair shop, administrative offices, and others to a temporary facility located in Renton.

Future interim relocations are being planned for landfill staff and equipment through projects at the following locations:

- Bow Lake Recycling and Transfer Station
- North Flare Station at the Cedar Hills Regional Landfill
- South Area of the Cedar Hills Regional Landfill
- Truck domiciling at nearby Cedar Grove property

These temporary relocations will allow for the development of new office space and operations buildings at the landfill while maintaining current operations.

## **Waste Clearance Landfill Disposal Service manages special waste**

To protect public health, safety, and welfare, certain solid wastes — special wastes — are not accepted at the division’s transfer stations and must be delivered directly to Cedar Hills Regional Landfill for disposal by permit. Special wastes include wastes that are regulated at the federal, state, or local level or are operationally challenging to handle. Waste Clearance Landfill Disposal Service provides customers free consultation to determine whether their waste requires a disposal permit. Those who receive a permit deliver their loads to the landfill by appointment, where permits are checked and loads are verified to meet the required conditions of disposal. Customers are escorted on the landfill to the appropriate disposal location. Waste Clearance loads are observed and inspected during unloading. Although only one percent of the total waste received by SWD is received through the Waste Clearance Landfill Disposal Service, handling special wastes using careful and controlled protocols fulfills the division’s goal to deliver safe and environmentally sound disposal services.

## **Landfill gas-to-energy operation temporarily paused**

Since 2008, King County has contracted with Bio Energy Washington (BEW) to develop and operate a gas purification plant to convert the methane from landfill waste into natural gas. In 2023, BEW paused their gas processing over a dispute with King County. King County has been working with BEW to resolve issues and come to resolution so that gas processing can resume and gas from the landfill can be successfully converted into renewable energy.

## Equity and Social Justice

Following the lead of Executive Dow Constantine, the division is committed to advancing equity and social justice (ESJ) for both its employees and customers. In the past year, the Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (EIB) manager established several Equity, Racial, and Social Justice (ERSJ) Priority Actions, including strengthening the ERSJ Committee, designing a training plan, furthering low-income discount programs, establishing ESJ learnings, known as Equity and Social Justice Moments, and establishing further guidance and purpose for the Re+ Community Panel. The EIB Manager also supervised the equity, racial, and social justice portfolio for capital projects that was executed by SWD Equity and Social Justice Managers.

In the past year, SWD has put systems in place for a more equitable work environment. Through designated learnings during quarterly Leadership Team and All Hands meetings, the EIB manager has provided recurring and hands-on trainings for leaders and staff on a plethora of topics, including how to navigate microaggressions amongst supervisees, refreshers on the anti-harassment policy, and contributions to solid waste labor laws by Black unions (in celebration of Black History Month). Some other accomplishments for equity in the workplace have included the expansion of the ERSJ Committee to a consistent 25 members and the establishment of subcommittees (SWD Culture, Resource Support, and Accountability). Some notable accomplishments of the ERSJ Committee included providing monthly talking points and expectations to operations supervisors to discuss with staff, offering diverse recruitment strategies and staffing recruitment fairs, and documenting a baseline for the ERSJ Strategic Plan. The Solid Waste Division Management Team (SWDMT) leadership continues to be committed to ERSJ through collective learning.

### Create a more equitable workplace with Closing the Gap

In 2024, the division continued to incorporate ESJ efforts in our work. Closing the Gap (CTG) is an employee-led, cross-functional team effort focused on creating a more inclusive workplace for nonsupervisory employees, who reported feeling less connected and valued than leadership-level colleagues in the 2022 Employee Engagement Survey. In 2025, the project team will partner with the Athena Group to develop division-wide listening sessions with staff and build out a plan. The plan will identify ways to improve communication, improve engagement, create a sense of belonging among nonsupervisory staff, and identify ways to improve trust between SWDMT and staff. The goal is to use the recommendations provided by the consultant to partner with leadership to build an improved culture at the SWD.



In 2024, the CTG team made presentations at All Hands and Leadership Team meetings about improving work culture. The CTG team interviewed consulting firms and developed a proposal. The Athena Group was the consultant selected to support this work in 2025. Due to contracting delays, the contract is in its final stage with procurement. The primary goal of this project is to partner with

the consulting firm to help SWD staff, staff-led groups, and leadership create a more inclusive workplace for nonsupervisory employees. The project will:

- **Identify Areas for Improvement:** Recognize specific actions, behaviors, processes, and policies that need enhancement.
- **Cultivate Better Practices:** Foster improved communication and engagement practices to ensure all employees are informed and involved.
- **Remove Barriers:** Eliminate obstacles that hinder effective communication and engagement across all levels of the organization.
- **Enhance Decision-Making Inclusiveness:** Create more opportunities for nonsupervisory staff to participate in decision-making processes.
- **Foster a Valued Culture:** Develop a workplace culture in which all staff, particularly nonsupervisory employees, feel heard, valued, and appreciated.

The team developed a CTG SharePoint site for staff to access any resources. The team meets monthly to discuss opportunities and create a space for staff to feel heard and valued.

### **Incorporating Equity and Social Justice into capital projects**

To ensure capital projects are bid, designed, constructed, and operated equitably, the division has developed ESJ plans for all capital projects and programs. The review process identifies the potential benefits and impacts of a project and what types of community outreach are needed to better understand and mitigate those impacts.

The team developed an updated ESJ Management Plan that closely follows the ESJ Sustainability Scorecard. This is a rating system for sustainability of capital projects, with equity included as a key consideration. The updated 2023 Sustainability Scorecard included additional ESJ credits and has been incorporated into “eco-charettes” for projects — interactive workshops in which participants brainstorm ideas for sustainable design and ESJ. In 2024, SWD held seven eco-charettes.

SWD also conducts demographic analyses as part of the ESJ Management Plan and Equity Impact Review processes. These analyses consider race, income, multilingual access, and several other factors in the project area. This helps understand how communities are impacted by a project and how best to reach them.

Equity reviews in action strive to mitigate negative impacts of projects and programs and identify possibilities to partner, inform, provide economic opportunities, and even co-create with communities. Examples of project-related ESJ actions include job training and apprenticeships. The team helped plan a King County pro-equity contracting event in 2024 to advertise current projects, giving capital project managers the opportunity to network with potential consultants.

## **Cleanup LIFT continues to make services more equitable**

To make services more equitable for customers and to advance ESJ goals in King County, SWD continued to implement a discount program called Cleanup LIFT — a discounted disposal fee for lower-income customers who bring their garbage and recycling materials to a King County disposal facility. That fee increased from \$15 to \$16 per transaction, effective January 1, 2024. The program had 23,841 transactions for 2024, saving customers a little over \$381,000 and providing financial relief to the division’s most economically vulnerable customers. This reflects an approximate 23 percent increase in use of the program compared with 2023.



## **Disposal support for residents who are victims of illegal dumping or on a fixed or limited income**

The Disposal Assistance Voucher Program enables environmental site inspectors from county agencies and cities to request vouchers that can be used to subsidize limited disposal costs for residents who are either victims of illegal dumping or on a limited income. Site inspectors must be trained to access the program. In 2024, 26 site inspectors accessed vouchers on behalf of 100 residents and 29 additional site inspectors were trained to provide the service. This service provides valuable assistance to individuals who, through no fault of their own, would have to bear full costs to dispose of illegally dumped waste or those who might otherwise struggle to pay for some or all disposal costs.

## **Junk vehicle affidavit service assists landowners across the county**

The division offers a free service that provides an ownership document — affidavit — for individuals without title to the vehicles or vessels on their private properties. With an affidavit in hand, the landowners can access disposal or recycling services for those items. Junk vehicle affidavits are issued for vehicles/vessels that meet the Washington State Department of Licensing’s criteria for junk after inspection by the division. Each year, the division inspects and researches ownership for 600-800 vehicles/vessels across the unincorporated areas and cities, excluding Seattle and Milton. Removing junk vehicles on private properties protects the environment, discourages illegal dumping, and helps landowners come into compliance with property codes.

## **King County strengthens its commitment to unincorporated residents**

King County has increasingly focused on advocating for residents in unincorporated areas in 2024, especially around managing costs that impact residents directly. This commitment was highlighted by our involvement with a rate increase proposal process, wherein King County scrutinized proposed operational costs by the service provider and collaborated with the Washington Utilities and Transportation Committee (WUTC) to ensure residents’ concerns about costs were addressed. King County’s proactive approach led to a significant reduction in the monthly expenses for residents, highlighting its role in safeguarding community interest. King County’s actions have encouraged greater public engagement and have been recognized as pivotal in representing and supporting unincorporated residents. King County will continue to remain dedicated to enhancing these advocacy efforts, focusing on strengthening the voice and representation of these communities.

## Planning

The Solid Waste Division works with its 37 partnering cities, two advisory committees, the King County Council, and other interested parties to ensure it is delivering value and the utmost in waste prevention, resource recovery, and waste disposal.

### **New solid waste disposal rate supports essential services, invests in environmental goals**

Beginning January 1, 2025, King County's Solid Waste Division will enact a rate adjustment of 10 percent for solid waste disposal, an estimated \$0.93 increase to monthly residential curbside collection bills. The new rate was approved unanimously by the King County Council on August 20, 2024. New minimum fees will change to \$32.60 per vehicle and \$203.81 per ton for self-haul customers. Yard and wood waste fees will remain the same, at \$18 for sedans and two-door hatchbacks and a weighted rate of \$115 per ton for all other customers. Increased discounts for qualifying low-income customers will also coincide with the change, rising from \$16 to \$18.

Contract haulers will pay \$165.91 per ton, in addition to their fixed annual charge. The fixed annual charge is a new part of SWD's rate structure intended to help stabilize revenues and rates as waste tonnage — the largest source of revenue for the division — decreases due to diversion efforts. The new structure essentially converts part of the per-ton tip fee (variable revenue source) to a fixed fee (fixed source). The fixed annual charge is shared with cities and unincorporated areas based on the share of tons each city/area contributes to total tonnage. For 2024, the first year this new fee we implemented, the fixed annual charge was set at \$22,614,181.

Revenue from the 2025 rate will allow SWD to continue essential services and avoid cuts to vital programs and services, while supporting capital projects and programs crucial to environmental progress on climate change mitigation, recycling, and waste reduction efforts.

In addition, the new rate further supports the division's goal of climate neutrality by strengthening commitments to resource recovery and green innovations, such as electric trucks, renewable diesel, and other low-emission technology.

### **Re+ continues to make progress on waste reduction**

The King County Solid Waste Division has formally committed to reducing waste and greenhouse gas emissions of our solid waste system through the 2019 [Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan](#), [Strategic Climate Action Plan](#), and King County Code. Re+ is the division's approach to achieving these goals and represents a major shift away from the 20<sup>th</sup> century approach to solid waste management and toward prioritizing waste reduction and prevention, recycling, and reuse. [The Re+ Strategic Plan](#) outlines the County's waste reduction priorities, including bringing together diverse communities to create a more equitable, waste-free King County. In 2024, the division continued its progress by supporting important policy changes, providing funding for partners' waste prevention efforts, engaging with community, and advancing many other important Re+ goals.

## Re+ Community Panel works with King County to make a more equitable waste system



*A Re+ Community Panel meeting in 2023.*

The 12-member Re+ Community Panel provides insight and direction around the intersection of equity and solid waste policies in King County. Meeting monthly since 2022, the panel includes residents, workers, and volunteers of King County who have lived experienced as a frontline community member — those disproportionately impacted by climate change and more affected by materials management decisions. The Community Panel is an opportunity for community members to help shape solid waste policies to best serve historically overlooked populations in King County.

In 2024, the panel provided valuable input to inform the County’s approach to Re+ actions, including extended producer responsibility, Re+ grants, mixed waste processing, and the 2025 Strategic Climate Action Plan. Panel members also participated on evaluation committees for Re+ grants and helped develop an equity framework to determine how King County and SWD can measure progress in meeting ESJ goals. With the guidance of the Community Panel, the division also created a subgroup focusing on tribal engagement.

## Re+ City Grant funds creative zero waste projects

The Re+ City Grant program provides support to the 26 King County cities that have signed on to the Re+ Pledge. The division awarded \$390,000 to help cities invest in, develop, and deliver on projects that help create a more circular economy and support the County’s ESJ goals to ensure that all people can thrive, enjoy a healthy environment, and have equal access to waste services and resources.

The Re+ team also developed seven Plug and Play project plans to provide easy-to-follow



*Ribbon-cutting at the grand opening of Shoreline Tool Library, which received funding support from the Re+ City Grant.*

guide to help cities use available grant funds on the most impactful waste reduction and diversion projects. The division also completed the recruitment for the second round of the Re+ Circular Economy Grant program. In the first grant cycle, King County awarded \$2.3 million to local businesses and organizations with promising waste prevention and recycling projects in 2023. The grants team is currently reviewing applications and plans to announce the grant award winners in early 2025.

## Division continues to explore mixed waste processing technology



*The Juno mixed waste processing facility.*

As part of the Re+ goal of recovering more resources from our waste stream, SWD is investigating a new set of technologies, called mixed waste processing, that can capture and divert recyclable material from garbage before it goes to the Cedar Hills landfill. Mixed waste processing facilities can act as a last screen for garbage, working in tandem with municipal recycling and composting programs to divert resources.

Beginning in 2024, SWD began working with a consultant to evaluate options for including mixed waste processing in the region's municipal solid waste infrastructure. This analysis will help SWD evaluate options, consider whether mixed waste processing is a good option for King County to optimize resource recovery, and outline potential next steps. Based on the results of this feasibility study and subsequent outreach to interested parties, SWD may pursue further research, including refined cost estimates, siting, and field trips to operating facilities. SWD may also decide that mixed waste processing does not currently have a role in supporting Re+ goals, in which case the region will focus on other Re+ actions.

## Statewide policy and legislative achievement supporting Re+

The Solid Waste Division has been actively engaged in both state legislation and countywide policies that would reduce waste, increase recovery of valuable resources, and ultimately reduce negative impacts on our environment. Policies are often more effective on a statewide level, as that can provide additional funding and resources for actions that would be too costly for each individual jurisdiction to implement on their own. Examples of such policies are extended producer responsibility (EPR), whereby producers are responsible for managing the end-of-life of their own products and packaging, or statewide education and outreach campaigns. Statewide policies can also provide clear guidelines and regulations that ensure harmonized health, safety, and environmental standards.

In 2024, SWD was successful in:

- Supporting the passage of HB 2301 for organics management and securing more than \$2.3 million in environmental grants

- Working with the Northwest Product Stewardship Council (NWPSC) to successfully extend LightRecycle (the EPR program for mercury-containing lights) rather than allowing it to sunset in 2025
- Developing, as part of a cross-departmental team, a new countywide PFAS Strategic Plan and Framework for managing contaminants of emerging concern. PFAS are recently detected chemicals and substances with few regulatory standards and are potentially harmful to life at environmentally relevant concentrations. The plan and framework are set to be adopted in early 2025

## **King County provides business support to divert organic waste**

As part of the [2022 Washington Organics Management Law](#), commercial businesses and schools in King County are required to divert organic waste from the landfill to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The first phase of the law began in 2024 with larger businesses that produce at least eight cubic yards of organic waste per week. The division created the Commercial Organics Resource program to conduct outreach to help businesses access opportunities to conserve resources, save money, and comply with the new law. In 2024, the program conducted outreach to over 130 businesses and piloted an incentive program to encourage further engagement with organic waste reduction practices. The program will continue in-person outreach in 2025 and grow to best serve business needs.

## **Single-family organics expansion**

The [2024 Organics Management Law](#) mandates that, by April 2030, all single-family and commercial properties in large cities must have source-separated organic solid waste collection services. Last year, SWD initiated implementation of the Organics Management Laws by determining which areas of King County need to adapt to new waste collection requirements. As we move into 2025, we will continue to collaborate closely with cities across the county. Our goal is to establish ordinances that support the sustainable management of organic waste in alignment with the statewide policy. This partnership will be crucial in ensuring that all single-family residents not only comply with the new regulations but also contribute to broader environmental sustainability efforts.

## **Regional debris management plan**

In August 2024, SWD finalized and adopted the King County Disaster Debris Management Framework. Through the planning process, SWD collaborated with regional partners to ensure a comprehensive, accurate, and functional regional plan. This plan provides guidance to prepare for and respond to a disaster debris-causing incident, with the goal of preventing health problems, protecting lives and property, and reducing environmental harm. It describes how the County and its regional partners will collect debris, sort it, and transfer it to its final disposition location. Having this framework in place will greatly enhance King County's ability to respond swiftly and efficiently to debris challenges, ensuring a quicker recovery for our communities.

Extreme weather events in late 2024 provided an opportunity to test the plan, which helped guide countywide operations, while also identifying potential areas for improvement. SWD will be working with key partners in the coming months to address those gaps to ensure a truly operational plan. In addition to the base plan, cities, Tribes, and special-purpose districts within King County

have been encouraged to develop their own debris management plan annexes using the template provided by SWD. These annexes will support specific jurisdictions during smaller-scale incidents that might not warrant the need to activate the regional base plan.

### **Comprehensive plan update addresses long-term disposal**

In 2024, the division continued work to update the 2019 [\*Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan\*](#) with its solid waste advisory committees. Updates are being made to the chapters on sustainable materials management, landfill management, solid waste system financing, and solid waste disposal, including the County's next disposal system after Cedar Hills Regional Landfill closes. Consulting firm Tetra Tech concluded its analysis on long-term disposal options and presented these findings to SWD and to our advisory committees in a series of meetings beginning in the spring. The options being studied are waste export by rail, waste-to-energy (mass burn with export), gasification, pyrolysis, and refuse-derived fuel. Only waste-to-energy and waste export by rail were found to be viable options. The final study report is expected to be completed in early 2025.

## 2025 Outlook

Looking ahead to 2025, the Solid Waste Division will continue to strive for excellence in waste prevention, resource recovery, and waste disposal.

### Five-day hauling and tipping pilot seeks to increase efficiencies in operations

In January 2025, the division began a pilot project to cease weekend hauling and tipping at the Cedar Hills Regional Landfill. The pilot is in response to the ongoing declines in waste received at our stations during weekend operations. Once fully implemented, this pilot will provide benefits, including:

- Reduced operational expenditures by millions of dollars annually that, as a result, will decrease the amount of revenue needed and apply downward pressure to the rate path.
- Transfer station and landfill neighbors will experience reduced weekend impacts, such as less truck traffic and heavy equipment operations.
- Reduced wait times and more space for commercial haulers at our transfer stations.
- More floor capacity that will allow us greater opportunities for materials recovery of commercial waste on the floor, aligning with our Re+ efforts to keep valuable materials out of the landfill.

The division will monitor the success of the pilot over the course of the year to determine if the five-day hauling schedule could be adopted as a long-term model.

### Division prepares 2026-2027 rate proposal

The division is currently working with its advisory committees and the King County Executive Office to develop a rate proposal for 2026-2027. This rate proposal will continue to support current services and make progress on division goals, such as Re+ and carbon neutrality, and Comp Plan commitments, such as building the South County Recycling and Transfer Station, the Northeast Recycling and Transfer Station, and expanding the life of the Cedar Hills Regional Landfill. It will also support increased recycling activity at the busiest transfer stations, provide staff to satisfy increased regulatory requirements at the landfill, allow better management of flow control, and improve employee retention.

### Capital projects progress

In 2025, the division will continue work in the Cedar Hills Regional Landfill Site Development Plan and Relocation Project and pursue a Special Use Permit to place the new facilities within the existing southern buffer zone.

The Northeast Recycling and Transfer Station project will evaluate the potential environmental and community impacts to two potential sites and one no-action alternative. A final EIS is set for publication in early 2025.

The South County Recycling and Transfer Station project continues to make progress in construction with substantial completion expected in 2026.

KING COUNTY SOLID WASTE DIVISION  
**2024 ANNUAL REPORT**



**King County**

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**Solid Waste Division**

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