

# City of Framingham Composting Task Force Into the Future

December 11, 2025

Dear Mayor Sisitsky,

The Composting Task Force thanks you for allowing us to assist the City in expanding composting for our residents and our schools. This memo serves as a record of the work that we have accomplished and a set of recommendations for the future. Our work has been to help determine and support the best strategy for food waste diversion for the City that is fiscally responsible, and in line with the State's solid waste goals. Working closely with the Department of Public Works team has been instrumental in our success.

## Accomplishments:

- We began by learning from neighboring communities as to their process and programs for food waste diversion.
- In March 2023 we issued a letter to you with an actionable plan and recommendations and budget implications for increasing residential curbside collection. **(Appendix C)**
- We worked with the city procurement department to develop a Request For Proposals for a preferred vendor to do residential curbside collection and in February 2025 the City signed a contract with Black Earth Compost as preferred vendor.
- We submitted and received a grant for \$22,000 from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, Sustainable Materials Recovery Program (SMRP) for a wheeled-cart grant to subsidize the costs for the curbside collection of food waste. With that grant we purchased 924 bins and began development of a pilot program to increase curbside collection including developing educational materials, promotional campaigns, and talking points.
- In August of 2025 we launched a pilot initiative providing one free curbside bin and a roll of liner bags for new subscribers to Black Earth Compost, while supplies last.
- We learned from the pilot at Dunning Elementary school that was started with support from Energize Framingham.
- In January 2025 did a surface level assessment of food waste and gardening programs, and interest in the Framingham schools. Multiple elementary and middle schools have implemented share tables for redistributing uneaten/unopened food items for snacks or reuse.
- In collaboration with schools and the Department of Public Works, through use of the Recycling Dividends Rewards Program (RDP), we are supporting expansion of elementary school composting efforts at Brophy and Potter Road schools in the upcoming FY26 school year. Task Force members are collaborating with PTOs for volunteer recruitment.

## Recommendations for Residential Collection:

1. Continue to publicize the free bins currently available at DPW as a way to spur interest in residential curbside composting programs.
  - a. In process:
    - i. Sanitation truck wrap
    - ii. Email from Black Earth Compost to current subscribers sharing information about the referral program with a request for subscribers to help spread the word about the city wide free bin/bags program.
    - iii. Program at the Callahan Center in January 2025
    - iv. Programs at churches in Spring 2025
    - v. Continued promotion via social media and active environmental group reminders
  - b. Seriously consider a broad scale marketing campaign coming directly from the Mayor's office with personal appeals by the Mayor:
    - i. Have the Mayor sign up for the curbside program and share a picture of him with his bin and bags on social media and via other means.
    - ii. A postcard mailer going to all residents similar to the one that Arlington sent. Black Earth Compost has offered to help here. **(Appendix A)**
    - iii. A personal email from the Mayor to many residents similar to the way the Newton Mayor shared info. **(Appendix B)**
    - iv. Including information in water and/or real estate tax bills.
    - v. Any other broad scale ideas that the Mayor's office can envision.
  - c. Other ideas:
    - i. Further promoting the bin incentive program at the Recycling Drop Off Center.
    - ii. A pumpkin smash or other creative opportunity to engage residents.
2. If the bin distribution significantly slows down, consider further incentivizing the program or jumpstarting the density discount and learning from other communities that have tried subsidizing the membership in various ways.
3. Conduct a comprehensive benefit cost analysis based upon Framingham waste tonnage and a statewide percentage of organics in the waste stream. Determine when there will be a cost-savings to the City if enough residents begin composting.

## Recommendations for Schools:

1. Continue the model of using RDP funds to support and expand cafeteria composting and make it an annual DPW and Framingham Public School budget conversation.
2. Continue to support schools with cafeteria composting via promotion, recognition and explanation with school facilities and kitchen staff.
3. Explore expanding cafeteria composting to kitchen areas.
4. Consider expanding to a middle school as students from the feeder elementary schools that are used to composting enter.

## Recommendations for other City actions:

- Establish a Solid Waste Advisory Committee or Task Force to work closely with DPW on a transition for the Mt. Wayte yard waste site and potential municipal compost collection.
- Staffing is the key to the success of the composting program and the DPW staff were essential to making this effort happen. The City must ensure adequate staffing of the sanitation department.
- Continue to monitor and apply for state and other grants to support composting efforts.

We ask this letter be posted on the City's website as the culmination of the work of the Compost Task Force.

Recognizing that as the task force disbands, the opportunity to continue food scrap diversion among Framingham residents will require effort by the Mayor's office in close coordination with DPW and we wish you continued success.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to serve and build a more sustainable municipal infrastructure that builds a healthier community and planet for all.

Sincerely,

Mayor's Composting Task Force

2023-2025

- Leora Mallach, Chair, District 7 City Councilor
- Mike Croci, Vice-Chair, Mayor appointee
- Diana Zimmerman Porter, Secretary, Energize Framingham
- Aimee Powelka, Member, Energize Framingham
- Bob Lewis, Member, Framingham Department of Public Works
- Darren Guertin, Member, Framingham Sanitation Operations Manager
- Erin Ellsworth, Member, Chair Framingham Sustainability Committee
- Evelyn McIver, Youth Member, Mayor appointee
- Heather Smith, Member, Mayor appointee
- Janet Leombruno, Member, City Councilor / Former Chair of City Council's Environmental & Sustainability Subcommittee
- Lincoln Lynch IV, Member, Framingham Public Schools Executive Director of Finance & Operations
- Michael Tarselli, Member, Mayor appointee
- William LaBarge, Member, School Committee member from the Environmental & Sustainability Subcommittee

# Framingham Compost Task Force 2023-2025



# APPENDIX A

A mailer sent by Arlington DPW..



## APPENDIX B

Email sent by Newton Mayor. Members of the task force are available to help write this.

### Mayor's Update



#### Compost, Grow, Eat, Repeat

Cucumber peels, chicken bones, lobster shells, even paper napkins – it's all food waste. It's also heavy. Food waste makes up 26 percent of the weight of the trash in Massachusetts, filling landfills and costing us a lot of money in waste disposal fees.

Most important, if we compost our food waste we create dirt that can grow more food.

Food waste doesn't have to be thrown out with the garbage.

The City of Newton is partnering with Black Earth Compost to offer a once-a-week household curbside food waste collection service for your meat, dairy, fruits & veggies, and coffee grounds,

tea bags and more.

The City went out to bid to vet a vendor on behalf of Newton residents. The service will cost Newtonians \$59.99 for six months, plus a one-time start-up fee of \$34 to pay for a 13-gallon lockable bin to collect food waste for weekly pick-up on the curb by Black Earth Compost.

Black Earth Composting is already giving Newton a volume discount. The cost per Newton household will go down even more as more people sign up. When 3,000 households are enrolled in the program the price will fall to \$49.99 for six months. It will fall to \$44.99 for six months once there are 5,000 households enrolled, and to \$39.99 for six months once 7,500 or more households are enrolled in the curbside composting program.

The City's Five-Year Climate Action Plan motto is "Use Less and Green the Rest." This is an exciting opportunity for Newton to partner with this Massachusetts company to help those who sign-up "Green the Rest."

It's no secret recycling costs are increasing dramatically, and the City's next contract with Waste Management (our waste and recycling contractor) reflects that as well as increases in salaries and other costs. In the coming year, Newton will have to pay approximately \$1 million more for our recycling and trash collection. Every bit we can reuse and green instead of throwing out will help the planet and our wallets.

Get more information about composting and sign up for Black Earth Compost at [www.blackearthcompost.com](http://www.blackearthcompost.com).

Watch a short video and learn more [here](#).

# APPENDIX C

Sent on March 6, 2024

Dear Mayor Sisitsky,

## Recommendation

As requested in your State of the City address, we, the Mayor’s Composting Task Force, suggest a multifaceted approach to compostable waste that will cost the city \$200 and have cost saving benefits of up to \$28,000 per year and includes a concerted effort to engage the whole of our diverse community. This aligns with our objective to help determine and support the best strategy for food waste diversion for the City that is fiscally responsible, and in line with the State’s solid waste goals.

This will include: Increasing resident use of **private curbside collection** via promotion and incentives

- Providing **centralized collection** at Framingham’s recycling center
- Promoting **backyard composting** of food waste
- Expanding **school cafeteria composting** efforts

## Requests for Mayoral Action

- Expedite a preferred vendorship for Black Earth Compost as an organics collection company pending approval by acting chief financial officer.
- Approve the support of the multifaceted waste diversion approach using existing Recycling Dividends Program (RDP) funds for no net cost to the City.
- Approve applying for Wheeled Organics Cart grant funds.

## Budget Impacts

Program	Cost	Estimated Grant Funds Available	Existing DPW Recycling Dividends Program (RDP)	Net Budget Request	Estimated Cost Offset
Curbside collection pilot (700 carts and bags)	\$23,072 – \$25,200	\$14,000 MassDEP Wheeled Organics Carts grants	\$9,072- \$11,200	\$0	\$21,528 Reduced Tipping Fees (with 700 additional subscribers)
Centralized collection (1-2x per week)	\$9,360 – \$10,400	\$0	\$9,360 – \$10,400	\$0	\$7,000 additional RDP funds
One additional school cafeteria composting	\$3,108	\$0	\$3,108	\$0	

Backyard composting (approx. 45 bins)	\$1,125	\$0	\$1,125	\$0	
Translation, Education and Outreach	\$200	\$0		\$200	

### Funding Opportunities

- There are many opportunities to offset the cost of the proposed programs using grant funds.
- The RDP is a grant from MassDEP that Framingham already participates in. We are awarded funds each year for satisfying certain sustainability initiatives. We were awarded over \$55,000 this most recent grant cycle, and these funds roll over if they are not spent in the FY. Currently the RDP account has ample funds to purchase the curbside starter kits while we await reimbursement from the MassDEP’s Wheeled Organics Cart Grant. That grant cycle opens at the end of April. It provides for reimbursement of \$20 per cart.
- RDP funds are also eligible to be used to support school composting initiatives and outreach/education programs.

### Curbside Collection

- The task force researched options for private curbside collection companies and found Black Earth Compost to be the best option for a preferred vendor based upon reputation, reliability and pricing. Each household pays for their compostable materials to be picked up at a projected cost of \$140-\$165 per year based upon the current density of 371 subscribers. With the addition of the 700 subscribers from this pilot program this annual cost will be further reduced to \$110-\$140 per year once we reach 1,000 subscribers in Framingham.

### Proposed Pilot: The City of Framingham provides starter kits (wheeled compost cart and bags) for 700 residents in FY25 using existing Recycling Dividend Funds.

- As approximately 20%-30% of waste from households in the program would be diverted, tipping fees for waste disposal will be reduced, saving the city approximately \$20,000 annually per 700 households, at current rates. We believe the initial investment could be covered by funds the Department of Public Works has received from the Recycling Dividends Program. **In order to move forward, preferred vendor status must be approved by the city.**
- New households subscribing to a year of curbside composting service through Black Earth, in addition to receiving a free starter kit from the city of Framingham, will also receive 3 months of service for free, courtesy of Black Earth.
- In distributing the free starter kits, the task force is committed to engaging non-English speaking communities within Framingham to ensure equitable application of the program. In support of this we ask that the city provide \$200 in funding for translation services and promotion.
- To increase the subscriptions, the compost task force looks forward to working closely with the city to promote this opportunity including vocal support from the mayor, a multi-lingual flier included with the tax or water bill sent by the town, social media outreach, and press coverage. In Newton, similar efforts saw a 150% increase in subscribers from 400 to over 1000.
- Based on the success of the pilot program, we would recommend the city requests an earmark from the state to fund an additional 1000 starter kits in FY26. Brookline recently received such an earmark for \$30,000 via Senator Cynthia Creem.

## Centralized Collection

- Having food waste drop off available at the recycling center will support households who do not choose to subscribe to curbside composting. For a startup fee of \$50, the city would have 10, 64-gallon bins available for residential drop off during regular recycling center hours. The waste would be picked up either weekly or twice weekly by Black Earth Compost. The addition of this drop-off option would earn the city two additional points from MassDEP's RDP grant at \$3,500 per point, for an additional \$7,000 annually. We cannot estimate engagement in this program at this time, but we expect this would also reduce waste tipping fees for the city, with options seen below:

Pickups	Weekly cost	Yearly Cost	RDP Grant Funds Reimbursement	Total Cost After Reimbursement
1 x Week	\$180	\$9,360	\$7,000	\$2,360
2 x Week	\$200	\$10,400	\$7,000	\$3,400

## Backyard Composting

- Currently the city offers backyard composters at cost to all residents, available for purchase at the recycling center. In the past 3 years residents have purchased approximately 45 composters per year from the city (42 in FY23, 45 in FY22, and 51 FY21). Backyard composting is a wonderful practice for many home gardeners but is not a practical option for all residents, due to lack of a suitable yard, limited strength or mobility, or available time. Nor does it allow for composting a full suite of organics, including bones, turkey carcasses, fats and spoiled food, that are composted by curbside composting operations.
- The Composting Task Force advises the promotion of backyard composters for those with the space and ability to do so. Education and outreach might be done via the library learning series, local gardening clubs and sustainability groups. Through education and outreach utilizing existing staff, volunteer efforts, and minimal funds if any. Vermicomposting (worms) is also a possibility for limited food scrap diversion for some residences.

## School Cafeteria Composting

- A volunteer driven cafeteria composting pilot program at Dunning Elementary has proven to be an incredible success in empowering students and engaging the community. The students are motivated to act as leaders and encourage one another to compost in the cafeteria, are interested in the science behind compost, and have proven themselves to be more than 90% effective at separating food waste from trash. Community members from both Hemenway and McCarthy have expressed interest in starting their own cafeteria composting programs. The Youth Council Environmental Subcommittee energetically supports cafeteria composting expansion to all schools in Framingham and several high school students have advocated for composting at FHS. Currently the pilot program at Dunning costs \$84 per week, for a total of \$3,108 in a 37 week school year.

**We recommend allocating RDP funds to establish an additional composting program in one or more schools per year.** The following year, the school would include funding for the continuation of the project in their budget.

The Composting Task Force looks forward to continuing this conversation and we thank you for your time and attention. We would be pleased to have your response at our meeting on March 20 at 6:00pm.

Sincerely,

Mayor's Composting Task Force

Leora Mallach, Chair

Eve Carey, Mike Croci, Erin Ellsworth, Darren Guertin, Janet Leombruno, Bob Lewis, Lincoln Lynch IV, Aimee Powelka, Heather Smith, Mike Tarselli, Diana Zimmerman-Porter

## APPENDIX D

We have seen other municipalities succeed in encouraging public engagement with private curbside composting through pilot programs funded by the city that provide a certain number of subscriptions and/or a free starter kit (wheeled compost cart and bags). Options for sourcing the starter kits include having Black Earth manage delivery directly to residents or purchasing in bulk from Black Earth or Orbis and distributing through the Department of Public Works.

<b>Initial Cost, Grant Funds, and Estimated Annual Savings of Providing Curbside Composting Starter Kits to 700 Households</b>						
Bin sourcing and delivery options	Cost per Starter Kit	Cost Total	Grant Reimbursement	RDP Funds	Savings in first year*	Estimated Annual savings*
Source: Black Earth Delivery: DPW	\$34.50	\$24,150	\$14,000	\$10,150	\$11,378	<b>\$21,528</b>
Source: Black Earth Delivery: Black Earth	\$36.00	\$25,200	\$14,000	\$11,200	\$10,328	<b>\$21,528</b>
Source: Orbis Delivery: DPW	\$32.96	\$23,072	\$14,000	\$9,072	\$12,456	<b>\$21,528</b>

\*Framingham has an average of 18,400 Tons of Trash annually from 17,500 Households, therefore 1.051 tons of trash per household, our tipping fee is currently \$117 per ton or \$123.02 Tipping per household annually. Food waste comprises 20%-30% of household trash which results in \$30.75 less paid in tipping fees by the city per household annually or \$21,528 saved annually per 700 households composting with private curbside composting.