

# Multi-Family Recycling in Skagit County

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# Executive Summary

In Skagit County, WA, there is very few (if any) multi-family residences that have a recycling program. We hope to re-establish a recycling program for the people of Skagit County through the use of education, outreach, and signage.

To start a recycling program, there are many factors that have to be considered. Skagit County is home to roughly 121,000 people (as of 2015) with many different backgrounds. English is the primary language but Spanish and Russian are also spoken throughout Skagit County. We have identified education and outreach to be most effective in the success of this project. Our first step would be to put up signage around the recycling bins to make it easier for residents to recycle. There will be multiple languages on the signs, but there will be primarily images so people will know what to recycle. We have identified the need for a pilot program to further understand the challenges in multifamily recycling. We hope to initiate a pilot program in which residents are provided with smaller and easy to carry recycling bins for in their homes. Finding several focus groups will be key within this pilot program; by having a community picnic with food and games to help educate the residents about recycling will be instrumental within this program. With this, we believe that the residents will be more inclined to recycle because they have a bin in which they can throw their recycling in and once it's full, take it out to the single-stream recycling bin which will be located near the garbage dumpster. Our budget is roughly \$2000-\$5000, and we hope that if this pilot program is successful, that we will be able to encourage other multi-family residents to follow suit. We hope that this project will last for many years to come with the help of the residents, property managers, Callie Martin, and Margo Gillaspy.

## Statement of Need

The multi-family residences of Skagit County needs a recycling program to reduce their amount of garbage that is going straight into the waste stream. By recycling, less garbage gets into the waste stream and less contaminants get into the soil, water, and atmosphere. The cost of recycling compared to the cost of garbage is significantly less expensive. In a majority of the case studies we have researched, we have learned that increased recycling reduces the overall garbage bill for that multi-family residence.

We all know that recycling is good for the environment, but it can also create jobs and save energy. By recycling 10,000 tons of recycling, this creates 36 jobs, but if you were to take that same amount of garbage and put it in a landfill, that only creates six jobs (Waste Management website). There are well over 20 apartment complexes in Skagit County, and all of them should have a recycling program to both save money and to make a small difference in their community. The fact that Skagit County used to have a recycling program at multi-family residences means that they could do it again and with better success.

With this project, we hope to change that. We have contacted several apartment complexes and asked them if they had a recycling program, and to our disappointment they said no. When asked the reason their answers were that they used to have a recycling program but people were contaminating the recycling bins with garbage instead of properly recycling. With this contamination, the apartment complexes were getting fined from their garbage haulers and decided to terminate the recycling program. Everyone in these communities will benefit with the new implemented recycling program by having the sense that they are doing something to make a difference, even if it is a small one. Enough small differences can lead to make one big difference.

## Project Description

The long term goal of this project is to have recycling systems in place at all possible Skagit County multi-family residences. Our proposal address critical steps in ensuring a recycling system that works for and benefit tenants, landlords, waste haulers and municipalities. Measurable outcomes for this project include the number of residences that have pledged support and percentage increase of recycling from each complex. These statistics would be kept by municipalities and reported to county waste officials. We feel the implementation of a pilot program at three apartment complexes is good first step to measuring success. We would be supplying residents with one individual recycle bin for in the home as well as post and hand out recycle “how to” guides around the complex. After a successful pilot program, this would be expanded to all participating multifamily homes. City recycling officials would get in touch with property managers and get them recycling materials such as flyers, signage, and help with space constraints. Reaching out to the tenant right as they move in is most effective, getting each resident a “how to” recycle guide will show them that not only the community participates in recycling but shows them how and where to take recycling on the property. We expect to get feedback from major stakeholders that include tenants, landlords, WM, and cities; this project will strengthen those relationships and improve recycling throughout Skagit. Beginning this pilot program as early as Jan 2018 would give time to tweak and improve the system with hopes to roll out the new tenant recycling tool box in the spring of 2018. This project builds on work done through Waste Management whose efforts in Multi-Family homes have included a recycling memo for new/old residents. They also offer recycling guides in multi languages. Using the available resources mentioned while working to expand their reach will be a goal of this project. Studies in Kirkland, Federal Way and King County have shown as much as 40% increase in recycling after implementation of recycling at a specific apartment complex. Challenges that could comprise our project include the assistance and commitment from landlords.

## Budget and Other Resources

Our budget for this project is between \$2000-\$5,000 and this figure is coming from Skagit County waste officials and would be needed every year for the continuation of this project. For the pilot program we would need roughly \$1100 (per apartment complex) to purchase individual recycle bins, print recycling media, and have a community recycling kick-off. We hope that with our pilot program we will have three apartment complexes willing to be a part of this initial first step. The remaining \$1700 could be used for any additional costs that could arise with the pilot program. Continuing costs would be the printing of additional recycling guides for residents as well as the costs of human labor. The departments involved would be Skagit County waste and city waste staff, these would be in charge of getting documents to property managers and coming out to specific sites when needed to address space constraints and issues.

Education and outreach are some of our biggest barriers and we will need to have Callie Martin or Margo Gillaspay (or another city employee) to go out to the individual residences and present how and what to recycle. This will cost money to go out to the residences, do the presentation, bring pamphlets/brochures, and the man hours. This is a very important step due to the fact that there is not a lot of education or outreach in the multi-family residences. We understand that costs may change over time, but we hope to keep costs as low as possible.

## Sustainability

In order for this project to be a success, we need to investigate all the different financial aspects of this project. This plan will require a budget of \$2000-\$5000 to be supplied by the county and/or participating municipalities for the initiation of the pilot program. These funds will go to the purchase of recycling bins and relevant materials as well as to cover the costs of formulating and disseminating educational materials to those affected. This money will also be used to have a community picnic to motivate the residents to recycle and learn more about it. Depending on the success of the pilot program, additional funding will be needed to maintain and (if successful) expand the program. These costs cannot be accurately predicted until after the implementation of the pilot program. Once established, this program will not require any further institutional and or economical improvements or alterations. Because the infrastructure already exists, and garbage is already being collected from these sites, the county can only stand to economically benefit (beyond the initial investments) by an overall reduction in waste collection costs.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

To monitor this project we plan to implement a “living” document that apartment complexes can put their location on the map that shows which multi-family homes have started recycling as a result of this project as well as show units that have been recycling. This map would be updated by county staff and would show the growth of this project. To evaluate the success and effectiveness of this project a open communication stream between landlords and county staff should exist to understand the challenges or conflicts that arise as a result of this project. Getting anecdotal accounts of a system will help work out the kinks. County officials will monitor the “living” document to ensure the growth and success of the project. City staff will be in communication with individual apartment complexes to work through issues and work with WM to ensure success.

## Conclusion

With this project, we hope to make recycling easier for residents of Skagit County. Multi-family residences have had recycling programs before that have failed, but with our approach, we hope that our program lasts for very long time. The fact that Skagit County is a single-stream recycling county, will make it that much easier for people to recycle. We hope that our pilot program will make it easier for the residents to recycle. Even if they only recycle plastic; that's so much better than just throwing it in the trash. By educating the residents about what is and isn't recyclable will also make it easier for them to recycle. We also want the residents to know that every little bit counts and with signage, education/outreach, and our pilot program, we will make recycling easier for the multi-family residences of Skagit County.

