

Downtown Recycling Survey – CHAPEL HILL, N.C. AND VICINITY

(Information obtained during July 2008 - RB)

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- **DO YOU HAVE A UNIFORM PROGRAM FOR TRASH AND RECYCLING FOR DOWNTOWN BUSINESSES? / HOW IS TRASH HANDLED IN YOUR DOWNTOWN AREA? HOW IS RECYCLING HANDLED IN YOUR DOWNTOWN AREA?**

It is not uniform at all. There are two compactors that serve a total of about 40-50 businesses in the 'main' block of E. Franklin in Chapel Hill, they all pay a fee to the Town based on size of business and the Town lets a contract to Waste Industries to service compactor. The rest of downtown is a hodgepodge of public & private dumpsters and compactors of various types & sizes and also public & private dumpsters for cardboard recycling. Downtown Carrboro & Hillsborough are much the same except for no public co compactors and just two public cardboard dumpsters in one tiny area of downtown Hillsborough that are heavily used and a source of controversy over who should pay for them and how. Hillsborough has franchised its commercial waste collection to Waste Industries so they almost monopolize the downtown collections.

Recycling is a mix of public and private services. Due to the ban on landfilling cardboard, that is almost universally collected, mostly privately. The few publicly provided & collected dumpsters are an anomaly but not necessarily NOT the future (get it?) Most bars & restaurants recycling is collected 'free' source separated in roll carts provided by the County and costs are covered by the County's 3-R fee charged to all 'front doors' regardless of type. No specific commercial fee yet. Many private businesses have voluntarily opted for their own office paper recycling and pay for it themselves. Many others have a dedicated person or two who self hauls to a drop off site.

- **IS PICKUP IN THE DOWNTOWN CURBSIDE (BACK DOOR OR FRONT DOOR) OR AT CONSOLIDATED DUMPSTER SITES:**
 - **Trash:** Consolidated sites mostly, some compactors, mostly dumpsters, all at back door, nothing at the curb in any of three towns.
 - **Recycling:** Mostly individual sites some shared b/w two-four businesses. Nothing at the curb in Chapel Hill main blocks of Franklin but a few pedestrian oriented

containers. County services for separated cans, bottles and paper. Downtown Carrboro and Hillsborough have some curbside bins through 'bin creep' and businesses put them out and our residential curbside contractor collects them. Highly irregular. One block in each town only.

- **DO YOU HAVE YOUR OWN FLEET, OR DO YOU CONTRACT OUT FOR SERVICES?**
 - **Trash:** *This is a mix of public & private services in Carrboro it's 50/50. In Hillsborough the Town lets a contract for one private hauler on franchise so it's 95/5 i.e. a few don't comply. Chapel Hill is about 90/10 public/private. Compactors are contract as described above.*
 - **Recycling:** *Mostly public with some private in offices esp. second floor over the retail level, while retail/bars/restaurants tends to use the roll cart system the County provides at the 'back door' – some are at the side or in an alley. There are also a few locations owned by the University that their recycling contractors service a combination of indoor & outdoor containers.*

- **IF CURBSIDE, IS PICKUP AUTOMATED OR MANUAL?**
 - **Trash:** *where residential is integrated into the downtown area it's mostly manual. Outside downtowns both Hillsborough & Carrboro have gone to automated, Chapel Hill is still semi automated in roll carts w/ manually operated lifters on rear packers*
 - **Recycling:** *Manual in bins. Two bin system.*

- **HOW IS THE FEE CHARGED? (PER TON, PAY AS YOU THROW, FREE/DISCOUNTED RECYCLING IF ON TRASH SERVICE OR BASED ON TYPE OR SIZE OF BUSINESS---RETAIL VS. RESTAURANT, FOR EXAMPLE)**
 - **Trash:** *Trash is mostly based on a combo of volume & frequency of collection whether public or private, it's almost all fee based, though the Town of Chapel Hill still 'subsidizes' its fees. None of the public collectors provides dumpsters, regardless of whether waste is publicly or privately collected, dumpsters must be privately rented. Where compactors are in use downtown, the businesses are billed based on size & type at a three-tier system. We attempted to provide a discount to those bars & restaurants that were recycling, which was shot down. They also started w/ a key system where each business had its own slot on the compactor and was to be billed on the number of 'clicks' each month, that didn't work out. too many key losses, and*

mechanical problems w/ the key slots, etc. plus if one guy was out there w/out his key, another guy would 'let' him use his key to get his stuff dumped.

- **Recycling:** *Public recycling is charged \$37/front door per year as the 'basic' level of the County's recycling fee. Since only about 10% of businesses are now on the County's programs with roll carts, this fee covers the costs because all pay it. If you own a building with four businesses, you pay four basic fees of \$37 each. If you own a 100 unit apartment building, you pay 100 basic fees AND 100 apartment fees as well. So the apartment fee supports all apartment recycling programs, likewise with residential curbside fees, it makes that program self-supporting. A public commercial program is still being planned.*
- **Additional Note from Rachael Budowle:** *The above discussion might be somewhat confusing, because the source person filled out this questionnaire himself. Upon further investigation, I found out that the County provides free collection of source separated recycling to most downtown restaurants and some businesses, as they pay the annual 3R Fee. This is a yearly fee for everyone with a "front door" (residents, apartments, and businesses) that goes to recycling. It is in addition to weekly/monthly service fees.*
- **HOW OFTEN ARE COLLECTIONS MADE?**
 - **Trash:** *Trash is mostly once a week in eight yard containers, some restaurants have more frequent pickup. The compactors downtown are usually twice a week. One can opt for more collections for a higher fee.*
 - **Recycling:** *Most public recycling is once a week. Some heavily used small sites are more frequent. Some heavily used sites have double sets of roll carts. Private frequency is unknown.*
- **WHAT TIME OF DAY IS PICKUP?**
 - **Trash:** *They used to be at night, now it's no earlier than 6am*
 - **Recycling:** *Any time from 2am to 10am*
- **HAVE YOU HAD AN ISSUE WITH SMELL/SPACE AND PATRONS WALKING AROUND DOWNTOWN (ESPECIALLY WITH CURBSIDE PICKUP)?** *Yes, in the alleys and backs of buildings as that's where all dumpsters are and people do cut through those spots and some back up on to campus or other streets, there is no true back on most of the downtown buildings as all back up to something else.*

- **IF CURBSIDE, WHAT SIZE CARTS/BINS? ARE THEY STORED INDOORS OR OUTSIDE?**

- **Trash:** *Most businesses use dumpsters. The Town of Chapel Hill has 68-gallon carts, Carrboro & Hillsborough are 96 gallon. All stored outdoors*
- **Recycling:** *Most public roll carts are 95 gallons. Some are 65 especially for food waste, some food waste is collected in dumpsters. Most privately collected corrugated cardboard is collected in dumpsters.*

- **IF DUMPSTERS, WHAT SIZE?** *Mostly 8 yard. Some six yard for waste & recycling both.*

- **HOW LONG HAVE YOU “HANDLED” REFUSE/RECYCLING IN THIS MANNER?** *Public collections in the Towns since the 1940s. Public/private competition since about 2000. UNC has contract collections that serve many of their buildings near/around downtown.*

- **HOW DID YOU HANDLE REFUSE/RECYCLING PRIOR TO THE CURRENT SYSTEM?** *All public before 2000 except special situations. Don't know if UNC has always been contracted or??*
- **DID YOU HAVE ANY DIFFICULTIES/ISSUES WHEN YOU SWITCHED TO YOUR CURRENT PROGRAM?** *Many were unhappy about having to pay for something that had been part of the tax base. There is a real reluctance to start paying for commercial recycling.*

- **ANY OTHER INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR PROGRAM? PROS/CONS?**

We are beginning to have more theft of recyclables and even food waste for local farms with animals. E.g. the spent grain from breweries is being taken for local hog feeding, some restaurants are giving their food waste to hog feeders where they used to put it in carts for the composting program that's free of charge.

At some point, we have to start charging a fee to expand commercial recycling, but it's been going on for so long 'free' that will be a real hurdle as will devising a variable rate system for payment as a function of size, use intensity and usability of the program. While our ban on cardboard works well, should the public provide this service now as other public recycling is expanded is a key question to address.