



2007 | Waste
Town of Ladysmith
British Columbia
 Population: 7,700

Ladysmith Organic Curbside Collection Program



Summary

In February 2006, the Town of Ladysmith became the first municipality in British Columbia to begin curbside collection of organic waste. During the first 10 months of the program, residents of this small Vancouver Island community diverted an average of almost 33 tonnes of organic waste per month to a Nanaimo composting facility. By doing so, the town greatly reduced the volume of methane produced in landfill sites, a significant source of greenhouse gases. Public support for the organic waste program is high and the community is proud to be the first in the province to launch a successful program. As an added benefit, the rate of recycling for paper, plastics and glass in the town has also increased since the organic waste program began.

Background

Ladysmith, founded in 1904 on the scenic southeastern shore of Vancouver Island, is home to 7,700 residents. The town has changed from a bedroom community for a former coal mine into a tourist destination with a big view — of both the ocean and its own future. Ladysmith's vision statement describes the town as “a spirited community that values its small town feeling and offers residents a full and healthy way of life. The citizens work together as stewards of their heritage, environment and economy.”

In 1995, Ladysmith was the first municipality in the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) to introduce biweekly curbside collection of recyclables. Other green initiatives have included a community compost site for yard and vegetable waste and a spring cleanup week.

By provincial law, the town's waste collection is managed by the larger CVRD. In 2005, the CVRD learned that its contract with a nearby landfill site would expire at the end of 2006. Looking for alternatives became an immediate priority for Ladysmith's town council.

In 1999, Ladysmith had considered launching a curbside compost program but the costs were considered too high, so the idea was abandoned. Then, in 2005, the International Composting Corporation (ICC), based in Victoria and Nanaimo, B.C., approached the town with a proposal to transform its organic waste into quality compost. Ladysmith's councillors decided the time had come to reduce the town's dependence on landfill.

Project Development

Four main partners, each with an active role, worked to make curbside organic waste collection a reality in Ladysmith. The Town of Ladysmith cooperated with the CVRD, a private-sector contractor that collects the organic waste and another private company that composts the organic waste.

The CVRD supported the project from the beginning. In fact, the CVRD's Zero Waste initiative spurred Ladysmith to pursue organics collection to divert as much waste as possible from landfills. The CVRD's ongoing support extends to supplying a container for Ladysmith's organic waste at a CVRD waste depot near Duncan. When that container is full, the CVRD then trucks it to a composting facility near Nanaimo.

The town's staff and councillors worked to create and deliver a high-profile public education plan. This campaign ultimately made a profound difference in citizens' support for the organic waste program.

Project Implementation

In September 2005, after deciding it was committed to organics collection, the town contracted a private company to begin organics pickup once per week. The company had helped to design collection containers, decide what organics could be collected and determine how often the organics would be picked up. To do its job, the contractor decided it needed to buy a new “split truck” that would allow pickup of garbage or recyclables and organics at the same time. Delivery of the new truck would take three to four months.

While waiting for the truck, the town worked with its end-use composting partner to develop and deliver an extensive public education campaign that included the following activities:

- A booth with printed information was set up at many local events, with city councillors staffing each booth and answering questions.
- A 45-minute presentation created by town staff was delivered to students at all local elementary schools and at Ladysmith’s high school.
- Advertisements and news articles appeared in local newspapers.
- Media in Victoria and Vancouver provided news coverage of the program.
- Information flyers were mailed out with the town’s utility bills and the town’s website offered similar information to residents.
- Posters announcing the program were displayed at various locations throughout the town.
- Local retailers put information flyers about the new collection program in customers’ shopping bags.

The week before organics collection began, each single-family home was supplied with:

- a four-litre under-the-sink container to collect food scraps and soiled paper;
- a 45-litre green bin on wheels with a secure lid to take to the curb; and
- 10 biodegradable bags to line the large collection bin.

Printed information inserted inside the bins included a collection schedule, a list of what could go into the organics bin, an explanation of why the town decided to begin the program, and a note explaining the cost to residents (an 85-cent increase in monthly waste collection charges).

The new collection schedule began February 6, 2006. Organics were picked up weekly while recyclables and non-organic garbage continued to be picked up biweekly on an alternating schedule.

The town’s department of public works has monitored and evaluated the program since it began.

All aspects of the program were successful, including the tendering process, the public information plan and the way partners collaborated. A “systems-thinking” approach helped ensure that all issues and details were discussed before they were put into effect.

Due to Ladysmith’s success with organic waste collection, the Capital Regional District, the Regional District of Nanaimo and three other municipalities in the CVRD are planning their own organic waste collection programs. Because the end-user, the ICC, is based in Nanaimo, the south Vancouver Island region has a state-of-the-art facility ready to accept and process organic waste. The success of organics programs in other parts of Canada might depend on the proximity of such a facility.

Results

- The amount of garbage sent to landfill by the Town of Ladysmith fell from 71 per cent of total waste in 2005 to 37 per cent in 2006.
- People in Ladysmith have increased their recycling by 15 per cent since organic waste collection began. The town attributes this higher participation rate to the public education efforts for the organics program — an effort that raised citizens’ general awareness of waste and environmental issues.
- Although household participation in the organics program is required by town bylaw, being involved in such a pioneering effort has given residents a sense of pride. They know that they and their town are making a difference.
- Other positive results of the program are stronger relationships among municipal departments and with other municipalities, and between the public and private sectors. The town’s contracts with Waste Services Inc. and the ICC have provided local jobs, strengthening Ladysmith’s economy.

- A local grocery store now packs customers' purchases in biodegradable grocery bags instead of plastic bags. This directly supports the organics collection program because the new bags can be used to line residents' under-the-sink organics containers.

Lessons Learned

- **COMMUNICATE THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS.** The director of public works, Joe Friesenhan, says the town learned the benefits of communicating when it launched this program. "We got together with the contractor that picks up the waste, with the end-user [that turns the organic waste into compost] and with our other level of government [the CVRD] to talk about how this program could happen. We went through many variations and asked many questions before deciding what we agreed to try."
- **TAKE IT SLOW.** The town's "systems-thinking" approach was complemented by a fortunate delay in the delivery of a new truck to collect the organic waste. Friesenhan is convinced that the four months spent waiting for a new garbage truck gave all partners the chance to take part in an intensive public education campaign. "Make it as easy as possible for people to be part of the program. Habits take time to change. Do a three- or four-month education campaign if you can," he advises.
- **BE PREPARED.** Before organic waste collection started, "we made sure every homeowner had bins and bags. We gave them everything they needed. The program was not a surprise."
- **SHOW YOUR SUPPORT.** Having town councillors rather than staff on hand at special information booths set up at local events worked well in Ladysmith, Friesenhan said.

Related and Future Initiatives

The town is planning to extend its organics pickup service to multi-family dwellings and to the commercial sector.

Based on the success of the organics program, Friesenhan says he "honestly believes that it's possible to get to zero waste in our region and in our town. Right now, almost 90 per cent of [non-organic] garbage is recyclable, and the things that aren't yet recyclable will be in the future."

Partners and Collaboration

Cowichan Valley Regional District
International Composting Corporation
Waste Services Inc.

Contact Information

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