

Commerce City Organics Recycling (Food Scraps Composting) Pilot Program

Draft Policy Proposal + Executive Summary + Scorecard (For Review)

Prepared for: Commerce City (internal review)

Date: February 11, 2026

Status: Draft – for discussion and refinement

1) Executive Summary

Recommendation

Commerce City should launch a **12-month, data-driven curbside organics (food scraps) pilot** in partnership with **Republic Services** and a **permitted composting facility** (e.g., A1 Organics, Compost Colorado, or comparable). The City should **start small** (baseline: ~1,000 households) on 1–2 efficient routes and **scale over multiple years** based on performance.

Why this matters

Food scraps are one of the highest-impact landfill diversion streams. A pilot will:

- Reduce landfill tonnage and related emissions
- Improve citywide diversion outcomes
- Create local soil-health benefits by **returning compost** for Parks & Recreation use (offsetting purchased soil amendments)

How the pilot will work

- City selects initial pilot routes using **Republic route/customer indicators** (highest trash generation / best operational efficiency)
- City procures and distributes organics carts and kitchen pails (opt-in)
- Republic collects weekly and delivers organics to a compost processor

- Processor provides contamination feedback and (ideally) compost return/discount
- City tracks outcomes and presents a 6-month and 12-month decision on expansion

Baseline pilot scope (planning assumption)

- **Residential:** 1,000 households (opt-in)
- **Internal (City facilities):** up to 10 facilities in Phase 1 (see Section 7)
- **Optional commercial add-on:** up to 15 targeted accounts (restaurants/grocers) if operationally feasible

Baseline cost estimate (planning range)

Year-1 program cost: \$250k–\$400k (cart procurement + education/contamination control + collection/transport are the big drivers).

Offset strategy: pursue State of Colorado/C3 grant & rebate opportunities and negotiate compost return/discount; capture avoided landfill disposal where measurable.

Initial success targets (Year 1)

- Participation: **≥35% of invited households** enrolled
- Set-out: **≥50%** of enrolled households set out weekly (average)
- Contamination: **≤10% by Month 6**, trending down
- Diversion: **≥250 tons/year** (pilot-scale target)
- Net cost effectiveness: **≤\$200/ton diverted** (target with pathway to improve)

2) Purpose and Policy Statement

Purpose

Commerce City will implement an Organics Recycling Pilot Program to divert food scraps from landfill disposal through curbside collection and composting.

Draft policy statement (adoption language)

“It is the policy of Commerce City to reduce landfill disposal by implementing a **phased organics recycling program** that begins with a data-driven pilot; partners with the City’s contracted hauler and qualified processors; prioritizes contamination control, equity, and cost effectiveness; and maximizes local benefits through the use of finished compost in City operations.”

3) Pilot Scope and Design

3.1 Pilot model (baseline)

- **Opt-in** curbside organics cart for selected routes
- **Weekly** collection (same day as trash)
- Material delivered to a **permitted compost facility** (contracted)

3.2 Pilot size (baseline)

- **1,000 households** (with ability to expand to 1,500 if participation is strong and operations stabilize)

3.3 Pilot targeting (data-driven)

Republic provides route-level indicators (as allowed by contract/privacy) to identify “best start” segments:

- Highest trash generation / cart size patterns

- High set-out consistency
- Route efficiency (drive time, minimal deadhead)
- Equity considerations (ensure fair access and outreach)

Commerce City currently partners with Republic for trash/recycling services; this pilot leverages that relationship and existing service structure.

3.4 Materials accepted (baseline)

Accepted: food scraps, coffee grounds/filters, tea bags, soiled paper towels/napkins

Conditional: compostable liners/serviceware only if processor accepts and contamination risk is manageable

Not accepted: plastic bags, packaging, glass/metal, diapers, pet waste, hazardous waste, etc.

4) Operations Plan

4.1 Procurement (baseline quantities)

- **1,100 curbside organics carts** (1,000 enrolled + spares)
- **1,000 kitchen pails**
- Cart labels, “what goes where” guides, magnets, QR codes, and outreach kit materials

4.2 Distribution

- Republic or City crews deliver carts/pails
- Deliveries logged by address/route (enrollment tracking)

4.3 Collection cadence

- **Weekly** collection (same day as trash preferred)

4.4 Processing partner

- Contract with permitted compost processor (A1 Organics, Compost Colorado, etc.)
- Contract includes: acceptable materials list, contamination thresholds, reporting requirements, rejection handling

4.5 Compost return and Parks utilization

Negotiate one of the following:

- **Compost return** to the City (baseline target: **150–300 cubic yards/year**, pilot-scale),
OR
- **Discount/credit** on processing in exchange for feedstock

Parks & Recreation will:

- Identify priority sites (turf renovation, tree planting, soil restoration)
- Track avoided compost/soil amendment purchases as a cost offset

A1 Organics operates along the Front Range (including Commerce City) and positions itself as a large organics recycler, suggesting proximity/feasibility for processing partnerships.

5) Phased Growth Strategy (Pilot → Scale)

Year 1: Pilot (1,000 households)

- Establish baseline performance
- Tune contamination controls and education
- Finalize processor feedback loop
- Produce a scale recommendation

Years 2–4: Expand based on results

- Expand to additional routes annually
- Add targeted multi-family/commercial where feasible
- Adjust collection frequency and enforcement based on contamination trends

Peer examples:

- **Denver:** phased, district-by-district compost rollout; early contamination challenges led to strong emphasis on education/auditing.
- **Fort Collins:** a **subsidized one-year pilot** with a local compost provider supported up to **600 residents and 20 businesses**, explicitly to measure contamination, adoption, and processing metrics.

6) Funding Strategy (State + Local + Offsets)

6.1 State of Colorado funding pathway (baseline)

Commerce City should pursue grants/rebates through the **Colorado Circular Communities Enterprise (C3)** (which replaced prior state recycling programs and provides project funding/assistance).

6.2 Cost offsets (baseline)

- Negotiated compost return/discount
 - Avoided disposal (where measurable and attributable)
 - Reduced Parks compost purchasing through compost utilization
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7) Internal Rollout Policy (City Facilities)

Commerce City should roll out organics recycling **internally** in parallel to the residential pilot to:

- Build operational expertise
- Demonstrate leadership
- Generate early tonnage with controlled participants (staff)

Phase 1 (first 3–6 months; baseline)

Up to **10 facilities**:

- Recreation centers
- Civic/campus facilities
- Parks maintenance yards with breakrooms
- City-operated concessions (if any)

Actions:

- Install standardized indoor organics bins + signage + back-of-house carts
- Train staff + custodial teams
- Implement SOPs (bagging/staging, contamination response)

Phase 2 (months 7–18)

- Expand to additional City facilities
- Add City events/festivals where feasible
- Integrate organics separation expectations into event/vendor requirements (where appropriate)

Draft internal policy verbiage

“All City facilities that generate food waste shall separate organics for composting where service is available. Departments shall ensure placement of labeled bins, staff training, and compliance with contamination controls. Procurement shall prioritize compostable serviceware only when the processor accepts it and contamination risk is managed.”

8) Baseline Budget (Year 1 Planning Estimate)

Important: these are **planning ranges** until Republic and the processor confirm pricing.

Cost Item	Unit Assumption	Qty	Planning Estimate
Curbside organics carts (purchase)	\$75–\$95 each	1,100	\$83k–\$105k
Kitchen pails	\$6–\$10 each	1,000	\$6k–\$10k
Labels/signage/outreach materials	Lump sum	—	\$10k–\$20k
Education + cart tagging/audits	Lump sum	—	\$25k–\$50k
Collection & transport (incremental)	\$5–\$8 / hh / month	1,000×12	\$60k–\$96k
Processing/tipping (if applicable)	\$0–\$35 / ton	250–400 tons	\$0–\$14k

Program admin & data reporting	0.3–0.5 FTE equiv.	—	\$35k–\$75k
Contingency (10%)	of above	—	\$25k–\$40k

Estimated total Year 1 cost: \$250k–\$400k

9) Roles and Responsibilities

City of Commerce City

- Program governance and policy oversight
- Procurement support (carts, signage, outreach materials)
- Communications and community engagement
- Internal facility rollout + Parks compost utilization plan
- Quarterly reporting and annual evaluation

Republic Services

- Route selection support using operational indicators
- Collection operations and service reliability
- Monthly reporting: enrolled addresses count, tons collected, contamination indicators, missed pickups/complaints (aggregated)

Compost Processor

- Processing + contamination feedback loop
- Reporting on inbound tonnage, contamination, and rejects

- Compost return/discount arrangement (if negotiated)

10) Implementation Timeline (Baseline)

- **Months 0–3:** program design, contracts/MOUs, procurement, route selection, outreach development
- **Month 4:** enrollment + cart distribution
- **Months 5–16:** weekly operations; education and cart tagging; quarterly reporting
- **Months 17–18:** evaluation + scale plan for next year

Appendix A — Quarterly Scorecard Template (Copy/Paste)

Metric	Definition	Target (Year 1)	Q1	Q2	Q3/Q4
Participation rate	% of invited households enrolled	≥35%			
Set-out rate	% of enrolled setting out weekly (avg.)	≥50%			
Tons collected	Total organics collected	≥250 tons/yr			
Contamination	% by audits or processor rejects	≤10% by Month 6; ≤7% by Year-end			
Cost per ton diverted	Net City cost / tons	≤\$200/ton (improving trend)			

Customer satisfaction	Survey score or complaint rate	≥80% satisfied; fewer complaints over time
Compost returned/used	Cubic yards applied in City projects	150–300 yd ³ /yr

Narrative fields (each quarter):

- What's working
- Issues encountered (missed pickups, contamination spikes, cart delivery problems)
- Corrective actions taken
- Next-quarter priorities

Appendix B — Draft Data Request to Republic (Pilot Design)

Requested (subject to privacy/contract limits):

- Route-level customer counts and service characteristics (trash cart size distribution; set-out frequency proxies)
- Estimated tons collected per route (trash/recycling) and service days
- Candidate routes ranked by operational efficiency (drive time) and diversion opportunity
- Monthly pilot report format: enrolled count, tons organics, contamination indicators, missed pickups/complaints