

Recycling Fact Sheet #2

Joint City/County MRF

What is a Joint City/County MRF (Joint MRF)?

A Material Recovery Facility (MRF) is where recyclable materials are sorted into marketable commodities and subsequently sold to manufacturers. The Joint City/County MRF will be located in a building owned by the City of Milwaukee, with processing equipment owned jointly by the City and Waukesha County. The Joint MRF will process recyclables from both communities.



Recyclable materials delivered to the MRF tip floor.

Why Create a Joint MRF?

Economies of scale made a Joint MRF more economically sustainable than individual City and County recyclable processing facilities. Processing the combined recycling tonnage from both communities reduces the MRF capital and operating costs per ton.

Between 2007 and 2012 the County and City completed a series of studies to evaluate their respective recycling programs and plan for the future. Previously, the County and City each owned aging dual stream MRFs in need of costly updates. In a dual stream system, paper/cardboard are processed on a separate line from plastics, glass, and metal containers. Consultants strongly recommended switching County and City recycling programs to single sort recycling systems, where paper, containers and other recyclables are mixed together by residents, usually in large wheeled carts.¹ Some key study conclusions relating to the MRFs included:

- Merging City and County recyclable tonnages and switching to single sort will generate over 50,000 tons each year, approximately equally split between the two communities.
- Merging City and County tonnage will lower the per ton processing costs, reduce program risks, and provide a better return on investment.
- All new, highly automated processing equipment is required to operate a single sort MRF. The Milwaukee MRF building is large enough to handle the new equipment, but the County MRF is too small with no room for expansion.

¹ For more information, see *Fact Sheet #1 – Single Sort Recycling*

- Switching to single sort will increase recyclables tonnage by an estimated 25% in Waukesha County due to increased convenience for residents and more types of materials being recycled.
- Communities could save 10% of their total hauling and trash disposal costs by switching to single sort. This is because larger containers allow for every-other-week recyclables pick-up, and increased recycling rates translates to less tons going to the landfill and less landfill tip fees.
- A Joint MRF could process additional recyclables tonnage from third-party sources, which would further improve the return on investment.

Who will operate the Joint MRF?

A private company will operate the facility, similar to the County-owned MRF. In late 2013, the County and City jointly released a request for proposals from the private sector to design, build, and operate the Joint MRF or, alternatively, to process County and City recyclable materials at a privately-owned MRF. A very competitive bidding process resulted in a 10-year contract with a private company named *ReCommunity* to convert the Milwaukee MRF to a state-of-the-art single stream facility that could process recyclables from the County and City programs. The County and City executed an intergovernmental agreement in April 2014 to oversee Joint MRF construction and operation.



How does this affect Participating Municipalities?

The primary impact is switching to a single sort recycling collection system. The County is now coordinating the bidding of local collection contracts to facilitate this switch. With the above noted arrangement, the revenues that ReCommunity generates from the sale of recyclables are shared with the City and the County – and, likewise, back to our 25 partner communities. This public/private partnership is a national model that has proven to be very successful and competitive, locally, since 1991.

This model has allowed the County to provide a number of recycling services to our 25 partner communities for over two decades at no fee, including the processing of recyclables and the delivery of education programs, drop-off boxes, and recycle bins. At the same time, the County has distributed over \$12 million in tax relief to communities in the form of annual dividend payments. These payments have helped communities recover approximately 1/3 of their recycling collection costs.

What is the Timeline for the Joint MRF?

The Joint MRF is currently scheduled to go on line in January 2015, about the same time as most communities will be switching their collection systems. Updates will be sent to communities as construction progresses.

Where can I get more Information?

More information on all the MRF studies, fact sheets and presentations are available on the County web site at: www.waukeshacounty.gov/mrfstudies .

To discuss with County staff, call the Waukesha County Department of Parks and Land Use at 262-896-8300 and ask for Rebecca Mattano, Solid Waste Supervisor, or Perry Lindquist, Land Resources Manager.



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