Plano City of Excellence | Memorandum

Date: October 7, 2019

To: Mark D. Israelson, City Manager

From: Rachel Patterson, Director of Environmental Health & Sustainability

Subject: Recycling Education Update

At the October 14, 2019 City Council meeting I will give a brief presentation on the recycling education programs we are proposing in response to the increase in recycling contamination we have experienced.

Background

Prior to 2017 the recycling contamination rate was between 8-15%. At the last audit conducted in June 2019, the contamination rate was 31.82%. This increase is due to two significant events. The first was the 2017 fire at the Materials Recovery Facility (MRF). At that time our recyclables had to be diverted to an outdated MRF in Garland without the technology to process all the materials the Plano facility had. This resulted in an increase in contamination as materials that were acceptable before were no longer acceptable at the alternate facility.

During this time, China made the decision to no longer accept materials from the U.S. for recycling causing a steep drop in the value of recyclables, including materials such as glass and paper. To give an idea of the impact, in 2016-2017, the City received $603,570 in revenue from recycling after processing costs were paid. Revenue dropped significantly in 2017-2018 to $39,271. Currently, the processing costs are higher than revenue resulting in payments to Republic Services.

Education Campaigns

In order to address the contamination issue, we propose two educational campaigns be added to our current portfolio.

1. *"Know What to Throw"*
   This campaign is primarily distribution of educational materials through multiple outlets. It will provide education on what is acceptable and not acceptable in the recycling cart, focusing on the most valuable commodities (paper, plastic, aluminum). We plan to begin this program in November 2019.
2. *"Feet on the Street"*
   This pilot program would provide curbside feedback at the recycling cart. It is designed to reduce contamination in the recycling stream and help control program costs with the goal of improving residents' understanding of how to recycle correctly. It provides direct and friendly feedback on what is acceptable to place in the cart. This program has had great success in multiple cities nationwide. We plan to begin this 6-8 week pilot in February 2020.

This presentation will go into greater detail about "Feet on the Street" and the pilot we are planning, including how the program will be communicated to residents within the pilot area and implementation. Should you have any questions or require further information prior to my presentation, please contact me.