



# ARLINGTON, VA

## CONVENIENT SERVICES FOR EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE

Already a statewide leader in reducing waste—with the goal of a recycling bin at every home, business and apartment—Arlington County still wanted to do more. In 2015, the County became the first community in Virginia to pass a Zero Waste resolution, citing the action as a way to “deepen their commitment to reduce, reuse and recycle,” as well as a way to protect the County against escalating disposal costs.

| POPULATION | MEDIAN INCOME | LARGEST EMPLOYER | LOCATION | TRASH/RECYCLING SERVICE |
|------------|---------------|------------------|----------|-------------------------|
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County provides curbside collection for single-family residences; commercial services are contracted with private haulers.



## A Deep Commitment to Zero Waste

A densely-settled suburb of the Washington, DC metropolitan area, Arlington has been long hailed as a progressive community where environmental initiatives are popular—in a 2012 survey, more than 94% of residents supported the County being “green.” The County already recycles nearly 47%, which was the established goal for 2024. This strong commitment to the environment, coupled with a looming increase in trash rates, ignited the County’s movement toward Zero Waste.

### COMPREHENSIVE CURBSIDE SERVICES

Arlington County government has been a leader in providing comprehensive residential recycling and waste collection services. In addition to weekly collections for recycling, yard trimmings, and trash, the County also offers leaf collection in the fall and curbside pick-up services for electronics, appliances, metal items, and brush by request. This comprehensive list of services is provided at the lowest household solid waste rate in the region. **Making recycling so accessible for residents is key to Arlington’s high diversion rate.**

The local government also leads by example when it comes to waste reduction. The County banned the use of municipal funds to buy single-use water bottles and instituted an internal program for eliminating junk mail. They also installed color-coordinated, consistently-located recycling and trash containers throughout their government buildings, with plans to add composting containers in the future.





## SUPPORTING BUSINESSES AND MULTI-FAMILY PROPERTIES

While the County government provides comprehensive services for single-family homes, over 65% of residents live in apartments and more than two-thirds of the County's waste is estimated to come from multi-family properties and businesses. Private haulers provide trash and recycling services to businesses and apartments, so Arlington County had to take a different approach with this sector to ensure that everyone would have easy access to recycling, both at work and at home. The Arlington County Code has had a mandatory commercial recycling requirement since 1994. Building and/or individual business owners must submit a trash and recycling plan to the County that details their program, including container sizes, collection frequency, and the education materials that will be given to tenants.

In 2016, the County Code was amended to require every business and multi-family property to provide a recycling bin next to trash containers in areas that are reasonably expected to generate recyclable materials. Nearly 60% of buildings inspected in 2017 are in full compliance, thanks to dedicated outreach specialists and a warning and compliance system to enforce action.



## CITIZEN CHAMPIONS FOR ZERO WASTE

Most local governments don't embrace a big idea like Zero Waste overnight. It helps to have citizens and groups speak up at public meetings to re-affirm that environmental sustainability is an important community value.

Arlington County has several citizen-led groups who have shown support for Zero Waste. Members of the Sierra Club and Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment (ACE) wrote letters, attended meetings and voiced their support for waste reduction. Additionally, the Solid Waste Committee—a subcommittee of Arlington County's Environment and Energy Conservation Commission, who advises on environmental and energy conservation issues—formally endorsed the Zero Waste Resolution.



## THE PUSH FOR ZERO WASTE

In 2015, as Arlington prepared to start a new weekly yard debris collection program, the County Board wanted to put this action into a larger context. Board Chairman Jay Fissette introduced a Zero Waste resolution with a goal of 90% recovery by 2038. The resolution was unanimously adopted and directs County staff to work in cooperation with the community and the citizen-led solid waste committee to draft a Zero Waste Plan. The Zero Waste Plan could serve as a revised Solid Waste Management Plan aimed at increasing waste diversion to at least 90 percent by 2038 for both the County government and for Arlington County as a whole.

Arlington County also had a compelling economic reason to pursue Zero Waste. Waste in Arlington goes to a local waste incinerator where the County pays a negotiated rate of \$43/ton for disposal. As part of this contract, the tipping fee will drop to \$0/ton in 2025. Upon the contract's expiration in 2038, however, rates will return to market value, which could be \$100 per ton or more. This could mean significantly higher rates for both the County and residents beginning in 2038, thus creating a strong incentive to prioritize waste reduction and recovery.

## NEXT STEPS

Composting food scraps is the next priority on Arlington's Zero Waste journey, as it makes up an estimated 25% of Arlington's waste. County staff are actively seeking a new organics facility that can accept food scraps to augment their current yard debris programs.

## HIGHLIGHTS:

- Requires recycling bins at every home, business, apartment and school
- 50% recycling rate
- Zero Waste goal by 2038
- Year-round yard debris collection
- Convenient, comprehensive, and cost-effective curbside collection services

## TIP FOR OTHER COMMUNITIES

Check out [Arlington's Recycling Toolkit for Property Managers](#) for a comprehensive list of signs, templates, tenant letters and more to see how they promote recycling at multi-family properties.

Ready to launch a program like this in your community? Find the tools, inspiration and support you need at [ecocyclesolutionshub.org](https://ecocyclesolutionshub.org).



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