

2023 Teaneck Resident Survey Report Summary: Trash Collection, Recycling, and Composting

This study was conducted by a graduate class (PADM 6606, Analytical Methods / Decision Making) at Fairleigh Dickinson University, at the behest of the Environmental Commission, to follow through on a 2020 study and to explore attitudes regarding recycling, composting, and trash pickup. It was conducted under the oversight of the course instructor, Dr. David Zatz, who has 25 years of experience in surveys and data-based decision making.

The 2020 study found that Teaneck residents paid an average \$34 per month on trash pickup, while Hackensack residents, with municipal pickup, paid \$18. Roxbury, which contracted with a single vendor for three years at a time, had an \$18 per month cost.

The primary source of information for 2023 was a survey publicized via Nixle town-wide emails and other means. There were 594 usable responses though the survey was only open for 10 days. Questions were skippable. The results exclude non-residents and people in apartments with central “dumpsters.”

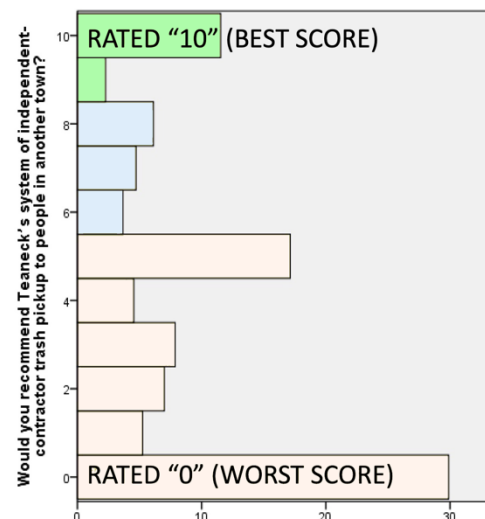
Trash pickup

Satisfaction. On a 0-10 scale, where 10 is most likely to recommend the system, the average score was 3.9 out of 10. 75% of residents would not recommend the current system to a friend; 30% assigned the lowest possible number (0).

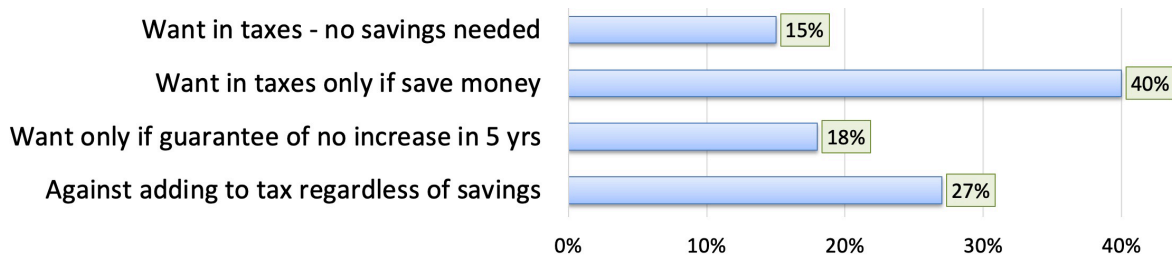
Cost. Teaneck residents pay a mean rate of \$44 per month. The town issued an RFP for single-vendor trash pickup as this project began; the team expected bids to be shared, and therefore did not explore costs at other townships. In 2020, single-vendor townships paid roughly half of what Teaneck residents did.

Bulk pickup. One fifth of respondents had weekly bulk trash pickup; 10% had pickup monthly or every other week, while a third had it by arrangement only. Over a third (37%) had no bulk pickup. Bulk pickup was a concern in the open-ended questions in 2020 and again in 2023.

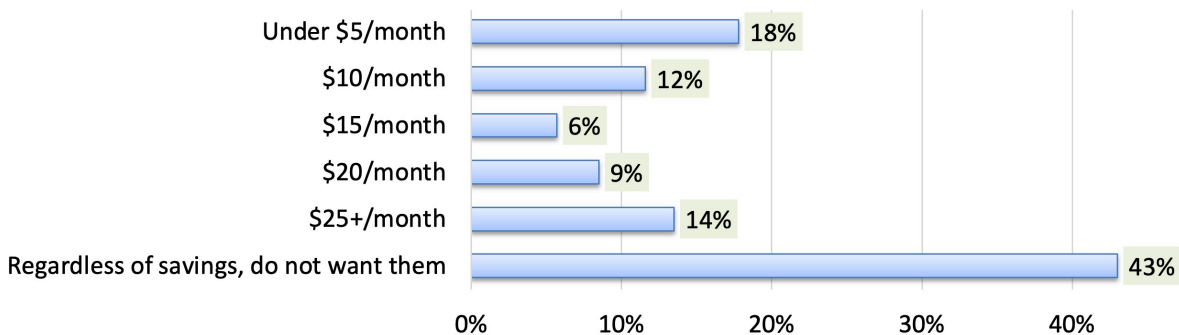
Concerns. Of the concerns listed on the survey, the chief issue was fuel use / pollution. Comparing 1-2 star results against 4-5 stars (ignoring 3 star ratings), 55% expressed serious concern (4-5 stars) about fuel use/pollution, followed by noise (51%), traffic (46%) and pavement wear (43.5%). Over a third of residents were extremely concerned (five stars) about fuel use and noise.



Single payments. We asked if people wanted to have trash included their taxes, with options addressing concerns from 2020. Nearly three quarters wanted trash pickup in their taxes if there is a savings *or* a guarantee that costs will not rise; around a quarter do not want it added to their taxes. The open ends suggest that many believe the cost must go up if included in taxes, despite the experiences of other towns. Some people seemed to assume that single-vendor meant municipal pickup (not a contract with a private company), or that this pickup would be every two weeks because that is how recycling is done.



Curbside vs house-side pickup. Teaneck has trash picked up from anywhere the homeowner wishes, but many towns require larger trash containers (with wheels) to be moved to the curb. 43% do not want “wheelie bins” regardless of savings, but many would use them for a tradeoff in cost.



Trash Pickup Open Ended Question

313 people answered the question, “Is there anything you’d like to add about the current garbage collection system, or possibly having the town arrange for a single-vendor system paid in taxes, most likely at a lower cost?” Of those related to single-vendor systems, 117 were “for” and 77 were “against.” With the caveat that a single comment might contain more than one theme, the top themes were:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wants a single vendor system (59) • Does not want curbside pickup (38) • Do not want changes to system (35) • [More / free] bulk pickup is needed (33) • Pickup should already be in taxes (27) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports single-vendor if price drops (22) • Dislikes waste of current system (20) • Recycling/composting comment (19) • Distrusts government (17) • Likes competition (15) |
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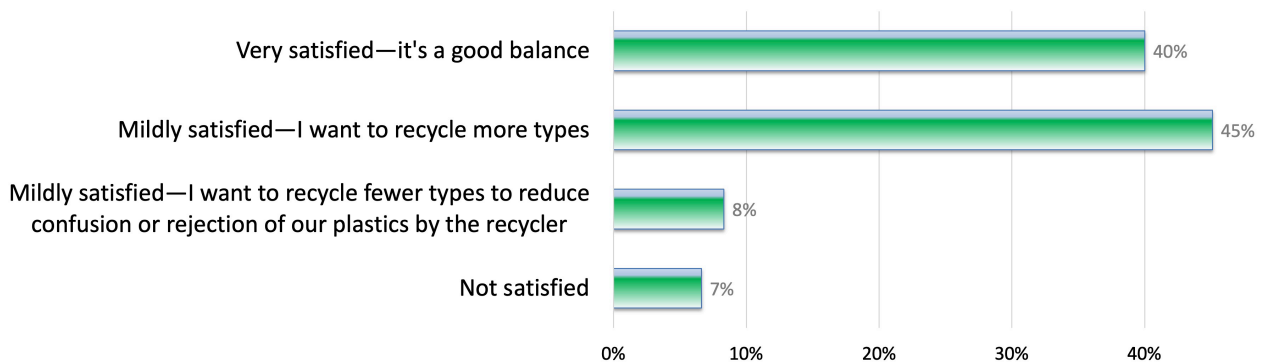
These questions can show why people answered multiple-choice questions as they did. For example, some believed that single-vendor programs required pickup every other week since that is how recycling works. Some implied they thought competition was only possible when individuals chose vendors, rather than when the town chose a vendor. Some expressed distrust of the process; this could change if there were clear savings.

Recycling and composting

The first question asked whether residents wanted to increase the frequency of recycling pickup from every other week to every week, knowing that the cost would rise. The majority of residents showed their preference to keep the current schedule.



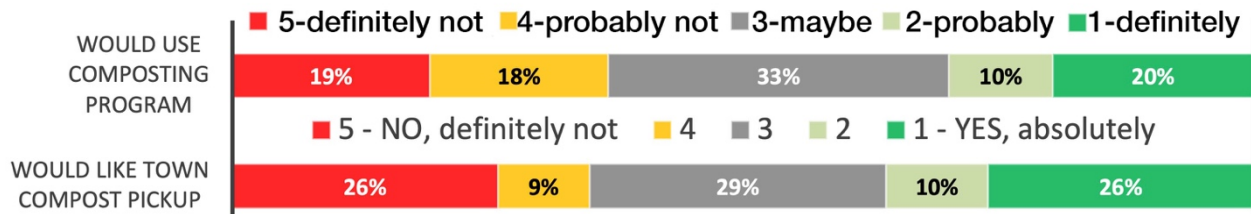
Most residents were satisfied or mildly satisfied with the current recycling system. Nearly half of people (45%) wanted the town to pick up more types of material, while some (8%) wanted fewer types recycled to avoid confusion or rejection of the town’s plastics. Only 7% were dissatisfied overall, and 40% thought the town had a good balance.



Only 12 people provided a rationale for their dissatisfaction. Of these, 60% do not believe the town recycles (largely due to the co-mingling), and 20% claim the system is too difficult. Co-mingling of recyclables is a temporary measure, according to the town manager.

72% of residents were interested in learning more about the recycling program (38% definitely interested, 34% mildly interested). Residents preferred to get information by email, web sites, and the calendar pages.

When asked if they would use a town composting program, the most common answer, cited by a third of residents, was “Maybe – depends on what is involved” (coded as 3 on a 1-to-5 scale). Nearly two thirds of residents (63%) expressed possible interest in composting, with 20% saying they would definitely use a township program.



When asked whether compost pickup would be desirable, 26% said “yes, absolutely” and 27% said “no, definitely not”—a nearly even split (see graph above).

114 residents said they would definitely use a township composting program; 150 said town-arranged composting pickup would definitely be desirable. The most common issues (chosen from a randomly ordered list) were ease of storage (23%), ease of separating material (16%), ease of pickup (15%), and cost to the town (14%).

A final question asked whether there was anything else people wanted to say about recycling or composting. This yielded 22 concerns about recycling, including frequency and co-mingling of paper and plastics/glass/cans; 8 general recycling comments; and a number of comments on composting—9 opposed to a town program, 6 wanting a town program, 7 people composting already, and 6 with concerns. There were also a number of other comments on various topics, without any commonality, which have been supplied to the EC.