Development of Best Practices in Public Space Recycling
Eureka Recycling, based in the Twin Cities of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, is the only organization in Minnesota that specializes in zero waste. The organization’s services, programs, and policy work present solutions to the social, environmental, economic and health problems caused by wasting. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, Eureka Recycling’s mission is to demonstrate that waste is preventable, not inevitable. Because this mission is realized by any person or group that chooses to prevent waste, Eureka Recycling provides opportunities for everyone to experience firsthand that waste can be prevented.

Perhaps most well-known for its $9 million annual recycling operations, Eureka Recycling has provided curbside and apartment recycling services, education, and advocacy since 2001. Eureka Recycling also has a wide range of other initiatives designed to prevent the needless wasting of our discards through reuse, recycling, composting, waste reduction, producer responsibility and more. These initiatives directly provide over 100 jobs for the individuals who work here and demonstrate our mission every day in the work that they do.

By its efforts in programs, services and advocacy, Eureka Recycling aspires to help individuals, organizations, and communities understand the significance of zero waste and to achieve their own zero-waste goals.

**Acknowledgements**

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Eureka Recycling would like to recognize the support and enthusiasm of Saint Paul residents and the vision and commitment of the City of Saint Paul that have been central to Saint Paul’s successful waste reduction initiatives. As we set out to study public space recycling and its implication as a zero-waste strategy, we had a great number of supporters who attended meetings, provided vision, and even helped to sort garbage. We would like to thank the following people for their contributions to this project and their dedication to public space recycling.

**The City of Saint Paul**, for its commitment to zero waste and community-based recycling:

- City Councilmembers Russ Stark and Lee Helgen for their ongoing support of recycling and waste reduction initiatives in the community

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• Como Park Zoo & Conservatory Green Team members: Stan Szulim, Vicki Scheunemann, Arta Cheney, Jen Gleason, Dave Patsche, Megan Elder, Lorrie Jonas, Ruthie Schneider, Adam Nigon, Geoff Jungheim, Reva Kos, Deb Ahlborg, Justin Buchs-Hammonds, Kelly Billig, and Kate McNulty
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• Christine Podas-Larson, president of Public Art Saint Paul
• Marcus Young, artist
• Seitu Jones, artist

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• Marcus Young in collaboration with local artists Justin Olson, Robyn Priestly, and Janna Schneider, with additional help from Elinor Auge and Anna Carlson
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• Brooks Stevens for contributing their time and expertise to the collaboration that lead to the design of the Mears Park recycling containers

Lowertown businesses around Mears Park that displayed posters about the Mears Park recycling program in their establishments and answered questionnaires to help us better understand the impact of the recycling program in the community:
• Black Dog Coffee & Wine Bar
• The Bulldog Lowertown
• Christos Greek Restaurant
• Executive Coffee & Tea
• Golden’s Deli & Market
• Great Northern Bistro
• LoTo Life Café
• Rumours & Innuendo
• R.S.S. Convenience Store
• Station 4
• Trattoria Da Vinci

The incredible Lowertown community that embraced the Mears Park project

Musicians Irv Williams and Steve Blons, who joined us to celebrate the launch of the recycling program in Mears Park

The design experts, who we call upon to help us in our many education efforts:
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We especially acknowledge and appreciate the work that has been done by numerous cities and entities to implement public space recycling programs. We hope that our learning can support them as their programs grow, and encourage new communities in their efforts to expand their recycling opportunities for residents on-the-go. This work is ongoing.

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You may be reading this because you are a recycling coordinator working on implementing a public space recycling program. You know that part of the process involves getting recycling containers out in public spaces, but may not be sure what else is involved or what to watch out for. You know the community really wants to have recycling available in public spaces because you hear it all the time. But, at this point, you may have more questions than answers, such as:

• What is the best place to start?
• What challenges can you expect?
• How do you identify staff support for the program?
• How do you build community support and awareness?
• How do you choose containers and provide education?
• What are the best ways to measure success?

In 2007, the City of Saint Paul, MN, and its partner in waste reduction, Eureka Recycling, were in just that situation after hearing from the community how much it valued public space recycling. At that time Saint Paul, a city committed to become a zero-waste city by 2020, was looking at launching and expanding public space recycling as the next step in waste reduction. Nonprofit Eureka Recycling, the City’s longstanding partner in recycling, looked around the country for examples and best practices for public space recycling and found little. This began Eureka Recycling and the City of Saint Paul’s learning about the best practices in public space recycling.

Unlike curbside and other well established recycling programs, public space recycling has only recently
emerged on the recycling scene. In 2005, when the community asked Eureka Recycling and the City of Saint Paul to focus on public space recycling, there were few models throughout North America of successful public space recycling programs. In fact, few large public space recycling programs existed, and those that did offered little information about program costs and effectiveness. Communities around the country have since begun to implement public space recycling programs as the next expansion of their recycling work. In the Twin Cities metro area alone, these communities, organizations, and government entities include Ramsey County, Dakota County, and Anoka County; the cities of Minneapolis, Bloomington, Edina, Fridley, Hastings, and Shorewood; and the Recycling Association of Minnesota, to name just a few. The list grows each year.
About Eureka Recycling

Our intention with this report is to provide our perspective of public space recycling as a zero-waste strategy, and to share what we have learned about public space recycling through our work in Saint Paul. We hope this information contributes to your knowledge about developing a public space recycling program in your community, and that it answers some of your questions about collaborating with stakeholders, involving the community, building a recycling collection infrastructure, and articulating the environmental benefit for your public space program. What follows are our lessons learned, best practices discovered, and questions uncovered during this project.

Eureka Recycling is the only organization in Minnesota that specializes in zero waste. The organization’s services, programs, and policy work present solutions to the social, environmental, and health problems caused by wasting. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, based in the Twin Cities of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, MN, Eureka Recycling’s mission is to demonstrate that waste is preventable, not inevitable. Because this mission is realized by any person or group that chooses to prevent waste, Eureka Recycling provides opportunities for everyone to experience firsthand that waste can be prevented.

Perhaps most well-known for its $9 million annual recycling operations, Eureka Recycling has provided curbside and apartment recycling services, education, and advocacy since 2001. Eureka Recycling has a wide range of initiatives designed to prevent the needless wasting of our discards through reuse, recycling, composting, waste reduction, producer responsibility and more. These initiatives provide more than 100 jobs for individuals who demonstrate our mission every day in the work that they do.

By its efforts in programs, services, and advocacy, Eureka Recycling aspires to help individuals, organizations, and communities understand the significance of zero waste and to achieve their own zero-waste goals. An essential part of Eureka Recycling’s mission is to create models for other communities and demonstrate the best practices of waste reduction. By solving and investigating hard problems, Eureka Recycling develops model programs to bring us closer to zero waste. As communities across the country face steep budget deficits and are pressured to cut programs, replicable models for economically sound recycling and waste reduction programs are in demand. Eureka Recycling has completed grant projects resulting in nationally recognized best practices for curbside collection and processing, as well as multifamily (apartment) recycling. Eureka Recycling puts these practices into place to demonstrate the qualities and advantages of zero-waste strategies, and actively disseminates information about its programs.
The Beginning of Public Space Recycling in Saint Paul

As you work to develop a public space recycling program, it is important for you to know the environment in which we did this work. The support and interest of Saint Paul residents and the vision and commitment of the City of Saint Paul have been central to Saint Paul’s successful waste reduction initiatives.

Eureka Recycling has been Saint Paul’s partner in waste reduction for more than 20 years. Saint Paul’s uniquely strong commitment to zero waste has provided a supportive atmosphere and important perspective for our work together on curbside and multifamily recycling. Saint Paul, which boasts one of the highest recycling rates in the county, is also home to one of the first and largest multifamily recycling programs. The City recognizes public space recycling as an important step in not only improving recycling, but as an important strategy in getting to zero waste. Together, Eureka Recycling and the City of Saint Paul have successfully launched recycling initiatives, as well as education, programs and services to address other strategies to move the city toward zero waste, such as composting, reuse, waste reduction, producer responsibility and more.

Saint Paul Environmental Roundtable

In 2005, Eureka Recycling, convened the Saint Paul Environmental Roundtable to provide an effective way of gaining valuable citizen participation in policy creation around environmental issues for the City. More than 500 residents of Saint Paul came together between September 2005 and April 2006 through community meetings and forums. This community-based process helped set Saint Paul’s policy direction on six environmental issues: zero waste, food systems, cleaner energy, green building, open space, and water stewardship. As part of the zero-waste recommendations, Saint Paul residents voiced an overwhelming desire to see the City establish recycling in public spaces.

In response to the Environmental Roundtable, the City of Saint Paul adopted the goal of being a waste-free city by 2020 and created the work group Sustainable Saint Paul to address environmental issues for the city based on the prioritized recommendations from the Roundtable members. Since that time, Eureka Recycling has worked side-by-side with the City to craft zero-waste policies and strategic plans to achieve zero waste on many issues, but especially public space recycling.

Zero-waste recommendations

One of the first recommendations that came out of the Roundtable Zero Waste working group (see www.eurekarecycling.org/environmentalroundtable for full Zero Waste recommendations) was that the City adopt a zero-waste goal for 2020:

Saint Paul has been recognized as a national leader in the reduction of waste, setting and meeting aggressive goals. In 1995, Saint Paul set a goal to recycle 50% of the waste stream by 2005, which we are only 5% away from achieving. This is no small accomplishment—in just ten years we successfully reduced and/or recycled almost half of the waste we generated!

While we celebrate these successes, environmental concerns about sustainable energy, growing trash volumes and global warming are on the rise, and it is time to push forward with more aggressive and optimistic goals for the future of Saint Paul. Cities,
 counties, countries and businesses all over the world have already adopted zero-waste goals, and now is the time for Saint Paul to put forth a visionary initiative.

Included in the specific recommendations to achieve this goal was a clear call for increased public space recycling. Residents carry out the ritual of recycling at home with great dedication—Saint Paul has one of the highest recycling rates in the country. They wanted the same opportunity to recycle when gathered together as a community in public spaces. The community also wanted public space recycling, especially in the city’s treasured public spaces, because it highlights the City’s commitment to the environment and deeply held tradition of recycling for residents and visitors alike.

With this in mind, the Environmental Roundtable recommended the City put time and resources into determining some best practices for public space recycling so a citywide program would have better chances for success:

Before implementing a public space recycling program, Saint Paul should understand the best practices for public space recycling, including what containers to use, what education is best (like using several commonly spoken languages and/or basic pictures), and how to cost-effectively incorporate the containers into a collection system infrastructure.

Learning about successful public space recycling

The City of Saint Paul and Eureka Recycling have a long tradition of leading on challenging recycling issues (such as apartment recycling) and protecting the valuable materials that residents entrust to the program for the greatest environmental benefit. Before launching blindly into public space recycling, the City and Eureka Recycling committed to first learning more about how to make public space recycling successful, cost-effective, environmentally beneficial, and consistent with the values reflected in the diverse public spaces throughout the city. We set out to learn what it takes to implement an authentic recycling program in public spaces, to ensure the materials really get recycled. Como Park Zoo and Conservatory and Public Art Saint Paul joined this partnership to launch and test public space recycling in Saint Paul.

In 2007, Eureka Recycling received grants from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to support this work. Meanwhile, the nonprofit Public Art Saint Paul had initiated a Beyond Green program and received funding from the Saint Paul Cultural STAR program to support a series of initiatives encouraging sustainable art-making and developing demonstration projects related to environmental values, including recycling in public spaces. At Como Park Zoo and Conservatory, conservation is part of the mission. The established Green Team provided a strong base and momentum for a partnership in this project.
Public Space Recycling: A Path to Zero Waste

Eureka Recycling uses a zero-waste approach in all of its work and is grounded in the belief that there really is no waste. Public space recycling is part of the path to zero waste by providing the opportunity to capture the recyclable materials we dispose of on-the-go and creating awareness that waste is also generated away from home.

In 2006 in Minnesota, 3.6 million tons of municipal solid waste (the trash we generate every day) were buried in landfills or burned in incinerators, while 2.5 million tons of our discards were captured for recycling. More than half of what we still throw in the garbage can be recycled through curbside and other types of collection.

After all the recyclables are captured, the next step to zero waste is composting in our homes and public spaces. Approximately 25% of our trash is composed of food wastes and other materials that could be composted.

The little bit of garbage that remains after we recycle and compost can be thoughtfully addressed through a zero-waste approach (which includes extended producer responsibility) to prevent waste altogether.

The environmental need for public space recycling

One reason we waste resources by throwing them away instead of recycling them is because more and more items are consumed on-the-go to accommodate our busy lifestyles. According to the Beverage Packaging Environment Council, 31% by amount (34% by weight) of all beverage containers are consumed away from home. It’s easy to recycle at home in cities with established programs, after more than 20 years of education and building the infrastructure for residential recycling. However, it is still difficult to find recycling containers in public spaces, so most of what we take on-the-go ends up in the trash.

Take a look at water bottles, for example. According to Fast Company Magazine, Americans went through about 50 billion plastic water bottles—or 167 for each person—in 2006. About 40 billion of these bottles were wasted, becoming either litter or garbage. Burning garbage in an incinerator or burying it in a landfill contributes to global warming and releases toxic substances into our air and water. Without proven producer responsibility legislation in place (like a “bottle bill,” or container deposit
law) to increase the capture rate of these beverage containers, communities look to the convenience of public space recycling.

Recycling is an effective way to reduce greenhouse gases. When we recycle, we avoid the greenhouse gas emissions from landfills and incinerators. We also reduce the need to extract new resources from the Earth and replace logging, drilling, and mining of virgin materials with recycled materials that we no longer want. This greatly reduces the energy it takes to process and manufacture new goods.

About 94% of the materials extracted for use in manufacturing durable products become waste before the products are manufactured, and 80% of what we make is thrown away within six months of production. For every rubbish bag placed at the curb, the equivalent of 71 rubbish bags worth of waste is created in mining, logging, agriculture, oil and gas exploration, and the industrial processes used to convert raw materials into finished products and packaging. This doesn’t even include the extra energy usage and climate change impacts resulting from resource extraction and processing.

Every product we use has embedded energy, which is the energy it took to extract, transport, and transform the materials needed to produce the product. Every single item we recycle results in significant energy savings because recycling takes advantage of this embedded energy. For some items, like an aluminum can, the energy savings are tremendous. Making a new aluminum can from old cans results in 90% to 97% energy savings compared with making a new can from bauxite and other raw materials. Similarly, it takes 30% less energy to make a glass bottle from recycled glass than from silica, sand, soda ash, limestone, and feldspar. Virtually every recycled material uses less energy than its virgin component.

**Recycling as the foundation**

By creating opportunities to recycle in public places, we not only capture more materials for recycling, but also create and support a culture of recycling and demonstrate the value of recyclable materials—elevating recycling above wasting. With the dawn of recycling about 30 years ago, people have a fairly long history of participating in the ritual of recycling in their homes. Support for curbside recycling is strong and there is a movement to see it grow to places beyond our homes. Public space recycling builds on the foundation of curbside recycling and creates opportunities for additional waste reduction in public spaces through event recycling and composting.

Public space recycling introduces the opportunity for recycling at public events, as many events take place in public spaces. Although public space recycling generally cannot accommodate the large amount of recycling that is generated by some events and does not account for the materials that can be composted (which is often the majority of what is wasted) it lays the important groundwork to bring zero-waste event services to these events in the future. Public space recycling increases visitors and maintenance staff’s exposure to sorting practices and it begins to transition the collection infrastructure to manage recycling. The reservation systems at some public spaces can also be used as a conduit to coordinate event recycling with event organizers and vendors.

Public space recycling also sets the tone for future composting efforts. Without first tackling recycling in public spaces, it is unlikely composting in public spaces will be developed or successful. As composting services become more widely available in cities—via events, curbside programs, and commercial services—the public will eventually be prepared to compost in public spaces too.
The economic need for public space recycling

Public spaces are perceived by the public as linked to the city/municipality infrastructure in which they are located. These spaces are touted by tourism departments as the unique features that add significantly to the livability of a place. They include parks, indoor and outdoor attraction centers, and highly visible commerce areas. They can be located in downtowns, in the outskirts, or they can be a feature of a specific neighborhood. Wherever they are, they attract the public and are frequented by travelers and tourists from places near and far, as well as people who regularly work and play in the area.

Public space recycling provides an important addition to the infrastructure as a public amenity that impacts the overall quality of life in a community. According to Partners for Livable Communities, a national nonprofit organization working to restore and renew America’s communities, “Every community and city has some form of an amenity infrastructure already in place. Livable Communities stand out because they identify their amenities, enrich them, develop a strategy to maximize them, and implement a plan to put them to work.”

Cities are serious about livability standards and how their community ranks. “The World’s Most Livable Cities” is a title given to cities based on their ranking in any number of surveys about the living conditions of a city. The two best-known surveys are the Mercer Quality of Living Survey and The Economist’s World’s Most Livable Cities.

The annual Mercer’s Quality of Living Survey is based on ten categories, five of which are directly improved by public space recycling efforts: natural environment, political and social environment, public services, recreation and the socio-cultural environment. The Economist’s livability rating considers qualitative and quantitative factors across five broad categories: stability, health care, culture and environment, education, and infrastructure. Public space recycling not only improves the city’s infrastructure but can be a powerful statement about a city’s cultural and environmental stewardship.

Cities vie for the title of “Most Livable City” primarily because it can stimulate economic growth. The results of “livable” city surveys are published widely in business media outlets such as Business Weekly, The Wall Street Journal, and, of course, The Economist. They are also reported in The New York Times and used in travel and entertainment feature segments throughout print, television, and radio media outlets. Not only does the title garner media attention and enhance tourism efforts, companies that operate in the international marketplace use these lists to determine where they open offices or plants and how much they pay the employees.
Saint Paul, the Most Livable City in America

In 2004, Saint Paul was formally recognized as “America’s Most Livable” by Partners for Livable Communities. According to the Partners organization, this award “differs from other popular awards in that it is more exclusive and is only offered once every decade. Our criteria is also completely subjective where we evaluate each community individually rather than rating them or comparing them to one another. Partners’ ‘Most Livable’ award is bestowed on those places we have determined most deserve the award.”

(see http://www.mostlivable.org/most-livable-program-2004.html)

Saint Paul has wisely branded itself as the Most Livable City in America, evidenced by its presence on the City’s website and in the design of the City logo.

This important title is one that Saint Paul will continue to seek and public space recycling is one of many steps the city is taking to maintain this status. Public space recycling will certainly aid this effort:

“Communities that continue to excel and whose leadership creatively adapts to changes in the world and new economy may be honored again. Partners criteria over the years has always reflected the current state of the world, and communities are evaluated on how they embrace innovation and change at the present time while also planning for the future.”
Public spaces are diverse and include a host of places such as:

- Parks
- Stadiums
- Convention centers
- Airports and other transportation hubs
- Sidewalks in commercial areas
- Permitted picnic areas and areas with picnic tables
- Tot lots and playgrounds
- Beaches
- Recreation centers and wildlife/nature centers
- Sports centers such as swimming pools, hockey arenas and baseball fields

Eureka Recycling conducted initial research of existing public space recycling programs in 2005 and 2006 to determine what methods were being used to collect recycling in spaces such as these around the country, and what challenges were being encountered. This research indicated that at the time there were no models, best practices, or benchmarks in place nationally for public space recycling. Only a handful of entities were managing public space recycling, with mixed results. Two common challenges with these programs were a lack of best practices and a lack of tracking or documentation of the startup and ongoing costs of implementing a public space recycling program.

Based on these findings, Eureka Recycling set out to quantify the cost and diversion rates of public space recycling, to test education pieces, and to explore the perimeters for creating effective public space recycling stations. From 2005 to 2009, there was an explosion of public space recycling programs that involved piloting and testing various facets of this work. Because public space recycling is an emerging project for cities, the landscape is ever-changing.

While Eureka Recycling’s review of public space recycling is in no way intended to be a complete review of all existing programs, it provides a snapshot of current challenges and successes and highlights the areas in which best practices are most needed.

As we developed our pilot projects, we considered the successes and challenges we were seeing in the current landscape of public space recycling, and decided to focus on learning in-depth about recycling in three specific types of public spaces: a zoo, a park and park pavilions. We elevated recycling beyond just being a city service by incorporating public art and emphasizing education and community involvement, and included structured tracking methods to measure diversion.

**Designing our pilot projects**

Based on what we learned from reviewing other programs as well as our own mission and values, we considered the following when prioritizing and designing these three pilot projects.

1. **The community wants public space recycling, as do government entities that are the stewards of public spaces.**

Eureka Recycling heard from the community during the Saint Paul Environmental Roundtable process that residents expect to see recycling in their city’s public spaces. Public spaces are a reflection of the municipality. A first step toward prioritizing initial locations is to evaluate public perception and visibility of your city’s public spaces. By beginning a recycling program in a prominent space with...
support from the community that uses that space, you can nurture a culture of recycling that spreads to the rest of the city, building the potential for further diversion in the future, such as composting or recycling for city events.

Now more than ever, cities are aware of their environmental image, and support from constituents in this political environment can greatly influence the feasibility of a recycling program. As cities build sustainability plans or host significant tourism events, the investment in public space recycling can be reflected back as an investment in a livability standard and efforts to mitigate climate change. This attention to the environment and the image that public space recycling provides can prove invaluable for communities. For example, in 2008, Saint Paul hosted the Republican National Convention. This created greater motivation on all levels—city, county and state—to direct resources and attention to the implementation of recycling in public spaces in Saint Paul. Similar circumstances have motivated other communities, such as recent Olympics host cities Vancouver and Salt Lake City.

2. The community wants to be involved.

The public has opinions about how public space recycling should work and how it should look, and if people are involved in the creation of a program, they are more likely to be invested in its success long-term. Any program will be more supported by the community when its members are able to provide their feedback and express their values and concerns from the beginning of the process. The public also keeps an eye on how the program is working once it is in place. In the worst case, if the recycling containers are full of garbage and materials are not being recycled, public space recycling can actually serve to decrease community support by creating or exacerbating skepticism about the materials really being recycled.

Eureka Recycling observed several examples of programs that did not first seek community involvement and resulted in negative feedback from the community in the end.

Some entities have used paid advertisements on their collection containers to generate funding for their programs. For example, in Toronto, Ontario, public space recycling containers incorporated tall billboards used to sell advertising space (above, left). The launching of this program caused a backlash from the community, which is generally supportive of public space recycling, but strongly—and publicly—objected to the containers because the advertising and the size of the containers created what many believed to be a community eyesore. The community objected to the lack of community involvement in the process to design and site the containers.

In contrast, the town of Great Barrington, MA, in conjunction with the Center for Ecological Technology (CET), incorporated art and community involvement
in its public space recycling program. Artists from the community were recruited to design recycling containers, and local businesses sponsored the containers. The town welcomed the recycling containers, and the CET’s director of recycling services reported that the containers were filling up quicker than expected.

3. The public sees recycling happen at the container, but there is much more to the process.

Because public space recycling is an emerging recycling program, the infrastructure in most public spaces is not currently set up to accommodate recycling collection. (The “infrastructure” encompasses the whole process from the point of collection in the park, to delivering the materials to end markets for recycling). In fact, nearly all public spaces have an infrastructure designed for only trash collection.

Most programs are able to make adjustments quickly to the beginning point of the infrastructure by simply putting out containers for recycling. But challenges later in the process (with collection, contamination, transportation, servicing costs, etc.) quickly present themselves and in many cases result in programs being discontinued and labeled a failure. When designing a program, it’s important to plan ahead and account for materials all the way from container to market.

Reviewing characteristics, addressing common challenges

Municipalities and counties may define their public spaces differently. For example, Saint Paul’s Department of Parks and Recreation defines their public spaces with these categories:

- Neighborhood Park: A park within a particular neighborhood usually has a tot lot (a children’s play area), ball field or tennis court or other amenity.
- Community Park: A larger neighborhood park with several amenities, it may have a restroom building within the park or a larger building onsite.
- Regional Park: A park that is being preserved for its natural beauty, it usually falls under government authority.
- Mini Park: A very small park, usually land which has been donated to the city. These parks have no amenities.
- Traffic Park: A traffic island maintained by the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Though there are many different types of public spaces, there are certain universal, general characteristics and challenges that cross all types of public spaces. Characteristics are defined as the things that we likely cannot change. Different characteristics pose different challenges, which are defined as the things that we can change and must address in order for our programs to operate and be successful. It can be easy to misdirect our resources by focusing on what cannot be changed and it is wise to focus first on public spaces that pose challenges that can be addressed.

Addressing contamination

A characteristic of public space recycling containers is that most are unsupervised drop-off sites and, unlike the containers for curbside programs, they often look just like trash containers. It is also often impossible to determine who has caused the contamination because usage is communal and anonymous. This poses some significant (and
predictable) challenges, including the need to clearly differentiate the recycling containers from the trash containers, keeping the carts clear of contamination, and communicating clearly with everyone who may use the program to increase awareness and a sense of ownership of the program.

Contamination of trash in the recycling containers was the most common challenge reported in existing public space recycling programs and is often cited as the main reason to discontinue a program.

**Education at the “moment of discard” and beyond**

Like public recycling drop-off programs, public space recycling containers are all unsupervised, and contamination is usually best addressed with education at the point of discard—right on the container itself. In public space recycling programs, this may be the only place to educate people because it is difficult to distribute public education materials to visitors of public spaces.

If proper and comprehensive education for its users is missing, the presence of public space recycling programs alone will not change behavior. In order to participate, the public needs to be aware of the recycling program and needs education on how to use it. When we create a reason for people to pause and think about their choice, we can influence their “moment of discard,” the seconds in which they choose to toss materials into a trash or recycling container.

Education must be appropriate for users’ ages, familiarity with recycling, and native language. Providing text in multiple languages and making use of the recycling arrows and images of recyclable material can help eliminate contamination. Placing large, easily read signage increases the chances of proper use and also minimizes contamination. While the majority of education happens at the point of collection, community awareness is also key.

Recycling programs around the country have tried many different education strategies to bring attention to their recycling containers. With the exception of New York City in which mascots were used to promote the public recycling program, there were no examples (or reported results) of extended education beyond the container signage to increase ownership or interest in the public space recycling programs we reviewed.

In Sweden, a program called The Fun Theory introduced an element of fun to trash and recycling containers in an effort to change behavior.

- “The World’s Deepest Bin” was tested in a park to see if a simple sound effect could decrease litter and encourage the use of a public trash container. The container had a sound mechanism installed so when park visitors discarded something they heard an object falling deep into the container and crashing at the bottom. After discarding their trash and hearing the sound, visitors were observed picking up litter nearby and putting it in the container. In one day, nearly twice as much trash was collected in the container with the sound mechanism than in a conventional container nearby. You can see a video about the project at [http://www.thefuntheory.com/worlds-deepest-bin](http://www.thefuntheory.com/worlds-deepest-bin).
• A “Bottle Bank Arcade Machine” was tested on a public sidewalk to encourage glass recycling. This interactive recycling container recorded points as residents placed their glass bottles in the receptacle. Over one evening, the flashing lights and sounds of this recycling container drew nearly 100 people to use it, while a nearby conventional container was used only twice. A video about the project is available here http://www.thefuntheory.com/bottle-bank- arcade-machine.

Measurement of public space recycling costs and benefits is critical to the success of the program.

Of all the public spaces we surveyed, little information was available about the cost and effectiveness of their recycling programs.

In order to advocate for the continuation or growth of a program, the costs and benefits need to be carefully weighed. This can only happen if they are tracked. By carefully tracking time, money, and capital invested as well as the weight and composition of material collected, program managers can celebrate successes and gain more support. As we found from our survey, programs that have no information about how much (or if) materials are being recycled have a difficult time justifying long-term support.

You can’t measure what you can’t count. However, measuring participation, the quantity of materials, and the quality of materials can be extremely difficult. Many public space recycling programs face this challenge. Most haulers that pick up recycling and trash do not track the volume they collect at each pickup unless they are contractually required to do so. Instead, it is standard practice to weigh loads at the end of a route, making it difficult to obtain information about a specific location unless additional tracking is implemented with collection staff or estimated at the point of collection by the hauler.
Choices We Made in Designing and Implementing Public Space Recycling

When we set out to learn about public space recycling programs, we selected three public spaces with different characteristics to give us broad learning about public space recycling.

- Como Park Zoo and Conservatory is a controlled public attraction space, with staff, specific hours, and educational programming.
- Mears Park is a highly visible urban public park, encompassing one city block in downtown Saint Paul.
- Park pavilions, our third pilot project, are used by the public through a reservation system, making them a controlled public access environment.

These different characteristics provided a variety of learning opportunities, including: different current infrastructures for trash collection, different levels of public access to the spaces, and different recyclable materials present in the public spaces. We took this approach to deepen our learning in a variety of public spaces, but this may not be the most efficient way to implement a program.

While our pilot programs do not represent all types of public spaces, and how you build your programs may be different than the ways we did, it is likely you may encounter similar decision points, opportunities, and challenges along the way. As we built our three pilot programs, we considered the values we have for community involvement and education, collaborations and partnerships, and measuring success beyond diversion.

While our choices may not be the best to broadly apply to the implementation of all public space recycling programs, we made these choices based on our values and the values of the community. Throughout design and implementation, we revisited these values and used them to help guide our decision making and problem solving. The following are choices we made and the rationale behind our decisions. Regardless of how you decide to take on public space recycling, your values should be reflected in the goals you set for your program and determine how you measure success.

**Clearly define the budget and scope of the program and identify phases of implementation**

Before launching an expansive public space recycling program throughout the City of Saint Paul, the City made the choice to first learn more through our pilots about how to make public space recycling successful, cost-effective, environmentally beneficial, and consistent with the values reflected in the diverse public spaces throughout the city. By starting small and building on what we learned we can now make adjustments and improvements as we add to the program.

We recognize that few cities are able to implement a public space recycling program throughout their city all at once and that phasing in allows them to build a stronger foundation to expand the program to additional public spaces. This foundation can include developing and stabilizing the recycling collection infrastructure and logistics over time as well as gaining buy-in and financial support.

For example, at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory, financial support was easier to obtain on a small scale, allowing for the program to be built into budgets over time. It was less challenging for the managers to secure funding for a small scale launch and get approval for the budget to allow for program expansions (additional containers) each year. The
managers also saw the benefit in starting with something they could measure and use results to get buy-in for additional funding, rather than seeking support and funding for a complete overhaul all at once.

**Consider prioritizing visible and popular public spaces first**

We selected three public spaces with different characteristics, but all were highly visible and popular. These spaces expose many visitors to public space recycling efforts. Media attention touches many more people who are exposed to and excited about the programs.

We made the decision to select popular places in part to help build public awareness and increase recycling opportunities in the city. We also knew that recycling adds value to the city’s treasured spaces and helps provide a platform to discuss and show the community’s environmental commitment. The City of Saint Paul provides strong support to increase public space recycling. As Saint Paul continues to seek the title of “The Most Livable City in America”, the City is highlighting its environmental commitment and is responding to the public’s desire for recycling in public spaces.

**Build strong partnerships with stakeholders, including the community**

This approach was not only a choice we made for our public space recycling programs, but is also a value in all of our work. We have a longstanding history in partnership collaboration and experience in relationship building and involving the community. We took our expertise and applied it to our work on public space recycling. We recognize that ongoing communication and support from stakeholders and the community is critical throughout the planning, implementation and maintenance phases of a public space recycling program.

Public space recycling generally requires support from the city, the involvement of decision makers at the program level, collection staff who service the containers, and the community that utilizes the public space. We selected public spaces where there was a strong indication for partner involvement. Beyond vision and commitment from the City of Saint Paul, launching public space recycling at our pilot locations required a considerable investment and commitment from our partners at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory and Public Art Saint Paul (a local nonprofit that engages artists in shaping the form and experience of Minnesota’s capital city).

Selecting public spaces with strong partners also allowed for more community involvement because it provided access to the larger community already maintaining and visiting the public spaces. This was especially critical in our Mears Park pilot project where we specifically tested an artistic, community process that reflected and involved community members. This would have been impossible without motivated community partners.

An in depth discussion of building strong partnerships with stakeholders can be found in the section “Collaborating with stakeholders for public space recycling” on page 17.

**Design the program around both diversion potential and ensuring that the materials really get recycled**

We value authentic recycling in all of the work that we do, making sure that the materials we collect really get recycled. We design all of our programs to achieve the greatest environmental benefit. We chose to apply this value to our public space recycling programs to help us target materials to collect and educate the public on how to participate.

In addition to the visibility and popularity of a public space, we also considered the *diversion potential*, how much recyclable material is regularly
discarded at that space. Because Saint Paul didn’t have public space recycling prior to our pilot projects, there was diversion potential in all the public spaces we could have considered. However, it was important to know exactly what recyclable materials were present and what could actually be recycled through our program. Identifying the types of recyclable material present helped us to prioritize where to begin with implementing public space recycling.

We made the choice to work with **controlled public access areas** (attraction areas such as zoos, amusement parks, airports, and community centers) because they provide greater opportunity for control and oversight than **open, unsupervised areas** (such as open city parks, sidewalks, highway rest areas, and walking paths). Many **indoor** public spaces, such as locked pavilions or recreation centers, tend to be more controlled, providing greater oversight than **outdoor** public spaces such as beaches, picnic areas, and urban parks open to the public 24 hours a day. However, there are exceptions. Some outdoor spaces, like amusement parks and zoos, have more controlled access than some indoor spaces. Establishing public space recycling in spaces with controlled public access can give you traction before tackling the more complicated open, unsupervised areas. Selecting public spaces with similar characteristics or controlled public access can also help to gain efficiencies.

An in-depth discussion of designing a program around both diversion potential and authentic recycling can be found in the section “Building recycling collection infrastructure for public space recycling” on page 22.

### Develop systems to track and measure diversion, and communicate results

We have more than twenty years of experience in tracking, measuring, and analyzing the results of our programs. When we applied this expertise to public space recycling, we recognized that tracking the specific results of recycling in public spaces might be one of the most challenging parts of developing a recycling program. However, this information can provide immense benefits and support the growth and longevity of a program.

We applied and would recommend considering three types of tracking when developing a new program: ongoing permanent tracking of materials collected, occasional detailed material analysis, and tracking of staff time to support the program. For a detailed explanation of these tracking methods and communicating results, see “Building recycling collection infrastructure for public space recycling” on page 22.
Collaborating with Stakeholders for Public Space Recycling

Public space recycling is a community event and needs the attention, energy and involvement of the community to succeed. Collaborating on a shared goal such as public space recycling leads to more meaningful, long-term, sustainable solutions. Establishing new partnerships takes time and attention, but paying attention to this important work up front lays the foundation for success for the project at hand as well as future projects and expansions. There are benefits and challenges to this approach, and two layers of stakeholders that are important to address—the working group, and the community.

Getting grounded in a stakeholder working group

The members of a stakeholder working group should be people who are invested and involved in the success of the program over the long haul. The working group holds the responsibility and has the power to
- make decisions about the direction, budget, and logistics of the program;
- envision the full design of the program;
- launch the program;
- service, maintain, and tweak details of the program long after the launch;
- facilitate the broader community process and external communication.

The members of a public space recycling working group could include a wide range of community and government representatives but at the least needs to include representatives from the governing body, the “host” of the recycling program, the implementer (boots on the ground), and the designer of the program.

Bringing key stakeholders into the process early on gives them the opportunity to participate in a way that fosters buy-in for the project and investment in a successful outcome. Rather than being presented with new work that has been imposed on them, playing a role in the creation of that work makes most people more interested in actually doing the work, and doing it well!

Identifying, bringing together, communicating with, listening to, negotiating, and working with all the right stakeholders in the

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Some of the most important stakeholders involved are the “boots on the ground.” While the support and input of program managers is necessary and invaluable, we found that only by working closely with people who actually service the containers were we able to get accurate data and feedback regarding the structure of the program. For example, we tapped into the knowledge of maintenance staff at Como to help select containers, design tracking methods, and identify adjustments to improve the program.
process of establishing a new public space recycling program takes time. It is not always readily apparent day-to-day why this kind of collaborative work is worth the time and money, and it can be easy to lose sight of why it is worthwhile under pressures of timelines and budgets. However, the benefits are worth the effort.

- When a working group has broad representation, it has more resources in terms of information, press, community relations, and legwork to contribute to the success of the project.

- Establishing public space recycling is a long process, and many of the same players will need to be in communication over a period of several years. Taking the time to establish a working group provides the forum to do this work together over the long haul.

- It takes many people, often coming from different perspectives, to make public space recycling a success, so maintaining focus on the goals of the project is crucial. It is someone’s job to make sure that the materials get from point A to point B, and it is someone else’s job to make sure the park isn’t sullied by the recycling containers. These individual objectives can sometimes seem at odds, but most often the solution lies in a greater understanding of each perspective and the working group can provide a format for gaining this understanding.

- There will be many bumps in the road, there will be challenges that need to be addressed, and there will be compromises that need to be made. Giving each of these stakeholders a formal place at the table throughout the project—not just when their “job” is most affected—establishes trust, formal communication channels, and decision-making processes.

Navigating conflict and staying focused

To navigate all of the assumptions and competing needs, you need the right tools and the commitment to address these challenges directly, keeping all partners on the same page and moving in the same direction. Based on past experiences, Eureka Recycling used the following two tools to build collaborations around this project and keep the working groups moving forward:

*Working Together: A Toolkit for Cooperative Effort, Networks and Coalitions*, published by the Institute for Conservation Leadership. This manual lays out models of how to structure collaborations, and provides useful exercises that bring to light groups’ assumptions and motivations: Why are we all involved with this public space recycling? What do we all expect to get out of it? What do we expect to give as part of the working group to make it happen? Overlaps and commonalities in the answers to these questions may be easy to spot, and even if not, you will have at least gained a more realistic understanding of how much work it will take to come to an agreed path.

*Human Action Framing Tool.* The Humphrey Diamond is a “human action framing tool” that uses the conceptual framework of the Action Wheel outlined in Robert W. Terry’s 1993 book *Authentic Leadership: Courage in Action*. It is designed to give a framework for how to address project limitations while maintaining meaning and relationships in our work. The general principal relies on organizing our work into four areas—Mission, Power, Structure, and Resources. When a challenge arises, we tend to want to address it at the Structure and Resources level (throwing more money or staff at a problem, for example) when oftentimes the root of the problem is actually coming from Mission or Power (Do all project partners still hold the same goals and objectives? Can the whole group articulate a similar mission, or have we drifted?).
Involving the community

In general, a community process can be anything from a series of meetings to an online survey, but the ultimate goals are to get to know who is using this space, what level of involvement or investment there is and from whom, so you can bring those invested community members along in the process and cater your program and communications to the right audience.

1. Broadening your process to involve the community is going to take time. You’ll need to be prepared to manage opinions (positive and negative), and this can be a drag on the initial momentum on the front end of the project. However, because you have given people an opportunity to be heard and contribute their ideas, this will help temper backlash and criticism on the back end after you’ve launched the program.

2. Community input will also allow you to design a program that reflects the values of the community it’s serving, which creates a culture of ownership and care around it. If you know your audience, you will be able to design more effective education, and those residents can be extremely helpful in getting the word out and spreading awareness.

3. The park’s community stakeholders can also be a network for extended education—education that goes beyond the label on the container. Where else you can talk to the users of the park beyond when they are actually in the park? What kind of groups use the park? Church groups? School groups? Business people on their lunch break? Is there a reservation system for the park that can remind people that there is recycling available (and encouraged) in the park?

4. Most everyone is motivated to recycle for similar reasons even though the community around each public space may value different things about that particular space (art, sports, music, etc.). Said simply, people recycle because it is good for the environment. Digging a little deeper, we’ve learned that people value their green spaces and want to see recycling there because it reflects health, happiness, and a more livable city. And all recycling programs should represent that.

The value of public art

Public art throughout the world has proven to stimulate environmental renewal and propose new ways to co-exist with our environment. Public art has a way of garnering ownership and excitement from the community, and when paired with recycling, we believe it can inspire people to participate and take ownership of the program.

For this project, we were interested in exploring questions such as:

- What role can artists play in promoting behavior change among an urban population?
• Why can’t public space recycling be functional and beautiful, too?
• Can we create a public space recycling model that is consistent with the aesthetic of landscape design and the beauty of the natural environment?
• Can we elevate the act of recycling to clearly distinguish it from wasting?
• Can artists not only create a better more artful container but also foster the “ritual” of recycling too?

In partnership with Public Art Saint Paul, we created a process for a team of artists to work with us and the City to design and create a recycling program that would reflect the community in and around Mears Park. Mears Park is in the Lowertown area of Saint Paul, where many artists work and live. Involving local artists in the creation of the bins and the education was appreciated by the surrounding businesses and community members who frequent the park, and increased their sense of ownership and support of the program.

The artists were engaged from the recycling program inception, and their contributions went far beyond the artistic bin and public engagement strategies. As part of the team, their artistic sensibilities led them to creatively problem-solve, ask provocative questions, and define (and redefine) the role art and artists can play in public space recycling programs. You can read more about this process beginning on page 46.

A word from the artists

“I’ve always maintained that public art informs and inspires. Our artwork in Mears Park was designed to inspire recycling of bottles and cans. Our recycling containers convey a message of hope and personal responsibility while integrating artwork into infrastructure. It is our collective vision that our sculptural installation can be used to inspire and promote public recycling in St. Paul. I hope that this project will also inspire the City of St. Paul and others to use art to improve the urban landscape.” —Seitu Jones, artist

“It was an honor to be a part of this project. The artist in residence for New York City’s Department of Sanitation [Mierle Ukeles] taught us that dealing with waste is to deal with the daily survival and maintenance of lives. I take inspiration from her.

As an artist working in the medium of behavior and the realm of the inner life, I ask what is in the hearts of the people who want to recycle. How do I transform our longing, responsibility, excitement, and hope for a better world into tangible behavior change? As an artist more familiar with systems and time than with objects, I look at the complex factors and lived moments of our current circumstance that needs repair and new health. As an artist interested as much in next century as in this year, I try to keep unabashed idealism close by as we create the immediate and practical solutions we all need. It is a joy to know I am helping do this necessary work and contributing to our collective dream.” —Marcus Young, City Artist in Residence, Saint Paul
A word about green teams

Green teams are emerging in institutions, companies, municipalities, schools, and communities, so it is likely that there will be a green team (or two) that will be involved in any new public space recycling program. It is important to understand how any green team (or other kinds of existing working groups such as sustainability teams, etc.) can play a role in the implementation of public space recycling. It can be tempting to think of an existing green team as a working group that can implement public space recycling, but that may or may not be the case.

“Green team” is a loose term—but usually it consists of employees or community members who share a common interest or have expertise in environmental issues in addition to their current position. The most common structure includes representatives from various departments within an organization or government. Unless the group truly has decision-making power, and has members of leadership and maintenance at the table, and focused time to dedicate to the project, it will most likely not be within the capacity of a green team to implement a new public space recycling program.

If there are green teams working in your organization, you will need to tap into them appropriately for the greatest success. Green teams can be a great asset to the development of a program, especially when their role is clearly defined. They can be invaluable for their direct lines to the extended stakeholders in the process, and for helping to set direction and scope for a project that will accurately represent the environmental goals of the institution. In fact, if you leave them out of your process, you may be working at odds. In terms of community process, green teams can often provide access to larger community groups and are a community in and of themselves that should weigh in on public space recycling. Be aware, however, that they do not represent all of the stakeholders within the community.