

FOOD SCRAPS DIVERSION

Method: Community Engagement

Multi Family Buildings

Greenest City Goal: Zero Waste

Final Report

The Compost Collective is a project designed to contribute to the Zero Waste Goal by supporting Multi Family Buildings to divert their food scraps from the landfill.



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PRESS RELEASE

November 26, 2012

THE COMPOST COLLECTIVE LAUNCHES 3 PILOT PROJECTS IN VANCOUVER

The Compost Collective, CityStudio's team of four motivated 4th year design students at Emily Carr University have infiltrated three multi-family buildings in Vancouver in Yaletown, the West End and Gastown with the purpose of diverting food scraps from the landfill.

The team, industrial design students Andreas Eiken, Katie Mah, Maia Rowan and interaction design student, Jesi Carson was formed in September to address a challenge posed by Amy Fournier of the City of Vancouver's Sustainability Group to engage residents of multi-family buildings in implementing a food scraps collection program.

Early on, the Compost Collective decided that they wanted to create change by working directly with residents of multi-family buildings. "We wanted to find out first hand what it takes to implement a functioning food scraps system in a building, and we wanted to do this in a tangible, measurable way", says Mah. The Compost Collective developed three 'living' pilot projects in Vancouver, projects intended to be molded and shaped by the responses they received. The goal? To find out how close they could get to implementing a functioning food scraps system in three multi-family buildings in 3 months. Getting residents to put food scraps in a compost bin instead of the garbage seems like it should be a simple thing, but "it's much harder than one would think", reflects Rowan.

What the students found was that every solution needs to be customized. Every building has vast differences which affect success rate: age of building, cultural background of residents, rental buildings vs. owned, accessibility to a Drop Spot, space for bin, level of anonymity in a building, and more. The Compost Collective presented their findings to the City on November 27th, 2012.

CityStudio Vancouver is an energetic hub of learning and leadership where students design and implement Greenest City projects. CityStudio is co-led by Duane Elverum (Emily Carr University of Art and Design) and Dr. Janet Moore (Simon Fraser University – Centre for Dialogue). The project is a collaboration of the City of Vancouver, Vancouver Economic Commission (VEC), British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT), Emily Carr University of Art and Design, Langara College, Simon Fraser University (SFU), University of British Columbia (UBC) and Vancouver Community College (VCC). The project is supported by Vancouver's Campus City Collaborative (C3).

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Project Title:

Compost Collective: Multi Family Food Scraps

Project Description:

The Compost Collective is a project designed to contribute to the Zero Waste Goal by supporting Multi Family Buildings to divert their food scraps from the landfill.

City Staff:

Amy Fournier, The Sustainability Group

Student Team:

Andreas Eiken, Emily Carr University, Industrial Design
Jesi Carson, Emily Carr University, Interaction Design
Katie Mah, Emily Carr University, Industrial Design
Maia Rowan, Emily Carr University, Industrial Design

Project Summary:

To contribute to the Zero Waste Goal, the Compost Collective intends to support the City of Vancouver in overcoming the challenges related to diverting food scraps in multi-family buildings. The strategy known as “community based social marketing” calls for the identification of “early adopters”. Out of 105 people surveyed at two Food Scraps Drop Spot locations, 12 Champions participate in a community dialogue hosted by the Compost Collective.

Of those participants, 10 express interest in taking the next step of contact with their building manager or strata, with particular interest in a fact sheet about food scraps. The fact sheet is sent out to our Champions with a request for them to let us know how the first point of contact is received, and the Compost Collective anxiously awaits their response.

Meanwhile, personal connections to multi-family homes in downtown Vancouver lead the Compost Collective to launch a three-building pilot project; an experiment intended to discover the real-life process of what it takes to be a food scraps “champion”. The three buildings are very different in character.

First, we have the Rookies; a building equipped with garburators and a strata that thoroughly enjoys process. Second, we have the Keeners. Out of 18 suites, only about 10 are occupied at a time, half of which are strata members who want food scraps collection. Lastly, we have the Next Gens; Fully equipped with a rooftop garden and on-site composting system. What’s missing? Management, education and participation, a perfect starting point for the Compost Collective.

And so our pilots projects begin...

An opinion poll in the lobby of the Rookies building shows that residents would use a food scraps system simply because “it’s the right thing to do”. However, the Compost Collective discovers that actually implementing a system requires a proposal and thorough budgeting. The manager of the Rookies current waste hauling contract will speak to no one but the Property Manager, but other haulers willingly provide quotes. The level of support services – such as site visits and information sessions to reduce contamination – varies considerably between companies with some providing next to no support, such as the Rookies current hauler.

At the Keeners building, a waste audit is conducted and composting makes it onto the agenda for the first time at a strata meeting. A committee begins to assemble. Given the transient nature of residents and the small number who want collection, hiring a hauler is not cost effective. The nearby Drop Spot becomes a bright spot in the Compost Collective’s scheme, providing an alternative for food scraps diversion. Furthermore, it will help residents iron out the kinks for when they do get a system. But will residents be willing to walk to the Drop Spot every week?

In the meantime, the Next Gens Building is keen to re-vamp their unused onsite composting system and reinstate food scraps collection. The Compost Collective prepares to host a weekend information session for residents, with the goal of forming a compost committee to steward the ongoing use of the system. An unexpected email from a concerned resident brings up some issues; pests, mismanagement and expressed dislike for the idea of being used as an experiment are all valid concerns that must be addressed during the session. Will the Next Gens overcome these barriers and start composting on-site effectively?

So what happens to our three champion buildings?

Well, it turns out that the Rookies are locked into an exclusive contract with their existing hauler for ALL non-city pickup. However, an interview with the sustainability manager for an alternate hauler puts our champion in the position to negotiate a low cost pilot project, provided it is operated via the City of Vancouver – a loophole in the exclusive contract! But questions remain: Is this something that the City of Vancouver is interested in pursuing? And what is the long-term solution for buildings like the Rookies who are locked into a contract with a hauler that does not provide sufficient support?

In the Keener building, a member of the Compost Collective creates a two week pilot project for Drop Spot Delivery and after a round of door-to-door pitches, 6 units agree to collect their food scraps and pay the small donation fee. One unit in the building has collected food scraps for 3 weeks now. Interest in a backyard composter is also expressed and may be a great next step for the Keeners.

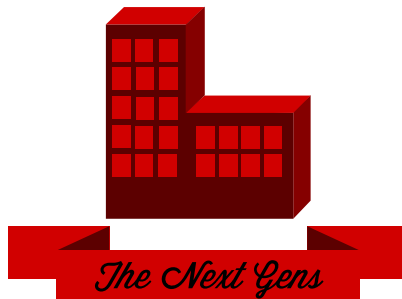
The Next Gens strata council votes down an initial proposal to re-instate food scraps collection, claiming that an added cost of \$50/month is too much! Later, the compost committee calculates that each suite would pay only \$6.41 per year, and the information is sent to the strata in hopes that it will have an impact. The good news is, the Next Gens successfully form an active compost committee who takes turns maintaining the on-site composter. Diversion has begun, and the second compost meeting has been scheduled for December 9th.

The final chapter of our story lies with the illusive early adopters. Three completed surveys help the Compost Collective update the Fact Sheet and develop a full information package for Compost Champions, designed to help understand building management, form a committee and get food scraps diversion implemented.

The Compost Collectives unique journey results in an anticipated 46 buckets of food scraps diverted from the landfill by the end of the semester. A seemingly small accomplishment, but the journey doesn't end there. Our champions are at large in the City of Vancouver, and we intend to inform a process that can be multiplied by 5000 buildings to help achieve our Zero Waste Goal.

Methodology:

We began with initial research into food scraps diversion methods and solutions for multi-family buildings both locally and globally. We found that cities such as Seattle and Berlin have high success rates because of city-funded initiatives and that single single-family homes trump multi-family in food scraps diversion because of the lack of anonymity. We identified barriers and preliminary solutions. Following the Community Based Social Marketing model, we began to identify 'early adopters'. We surveyed 105 Drop Spot members at the Trout Lake Community Centre and the West End Farmer's Market to gain a better understanding of who they are and why they devote time to food scraps diversion. This resulted in the recruitment of 12 Champions who attended our Community Dialogue, people who we believe have potential to be food scrap diversion leaders in their buildings. After the dialogue, we created the tools the Champions had asked for so they could take action. Simultaneously, we initiated customized pilot projects in three buildings in the West End, Gastown, and Yaletown. In one we established a food scraps committee, in another we helped facilitate Drop Spot use, and in the last building, we negotiated support programs with private haulers. We designed our pilot projects to be flexible and accommodating of challenges. Our aim was to overcome as many challenges as we could in a period of three months.



Project Outcomes and Impact:

Our project has involved three multi-family buildings in the process of recycling food scraps. Each of the buildings started at a different part of the process and all three are at different stages as the project draws to a close. The rookies building is still at the beginning of the food scraps recycling process. Their building needs more long-term support to get weekly collection. They need more education, more people on the committee, and some buy in from the strata, as well as a more cooperative hauler. The champion of that building will continue to work on the project, although she recognizes that her efforts may be more effective closer to 2015. The keeners building is in a place of trying out the concept of recycling their food scraps via the drop spots. They will continue this as long as possible, with one key family initiating the Saturday drop spot walks. Their building hopes to get food scrap collection as soon as possible, but it may be put on hold due to other circumstances. The missing links building has had the kick-start they needed. They now have 10 people who have identified themselves as interested in taking the project on, and they have found the other people who will be working on this endeavor together. Their building has the opportunity to start composting immediately because of their roof top compost bins. An enormously helpful part of getting this building diverting food scraps is the infrastructure that is already in place. If all buildings had this luxury each building would be fast-forwarded to 3 to 5 steps ahead for getting food scraps recycling started.

46 Buckets Diverted!



Key Challenges:

Our key challenge in this project was that barriers were relatively easy to identify, but many of the solutions to these barriers required several layers to navigate. Early on, we found that what supports change best in multi-family buildings is face-to-face conversation; however, as we discussed with our City contact this requires a great amount of time and funding. We put up posters in elevators and mail rooms, sent out emails to building residents/strata members and flyers under doors, but in each pilot, what was most effective was when we engaged with people in person or held building meetings. Navigating policy in multi-family buildings was also complicated in many buildings, as each building functioned in a slightly different way. Through our pilot projects, we learned that a customized approach and human support was most effective to reach residents.

Current project status:

As the semester draws to a close we find that our project is at various stages. Each of our three pilot buildings are at a different part of the process for recycling their food scraps. The ten champions from our dialogue have been inspired by seeing others working towards food scrap recycling, although we have not yet heard from any of them to say they are pursuing the project further. Over the past 4 months we have managed to divert 46 buckets of food scraps by using many methods of food scrap diversion.

Stewardship plan:

The Compost Collective planted many seeds for food scrap diversion over the course of the semester. We have been able to provide inspiration and support for getting the process started. We recognize that we will likely not be involved for the entire process, which is why we have identified and recruited champions in each building we work with. The agreement between the compost collective and the respective buildings is that we would help to provide education, strategies, and methods for recycling food scraps, and help the building to form a committee. They in return will see the process through and work with their building to get food scraps recycling implemented. We will be in touch with the buildings (we either live in them, or have family in them) after the project is done and will provide support where needed. We will also be giving our recommendations and findings to Amy Fournier in hopes that they will help her in advising the City on next steps to take. We will also be presenting our project to the solid waste group with Amy in January.

Acknowledgements:

We would like to acknowledge the City of Vancouver staff, our City Contact, Amy Fournier with the Sustainability Group and the three buildings and residents that participated in our pilot projects. We would also like to thank Duane Elverum and Lena Soots from CityStudio, Liliana Segal and Nicky Casley with Green Chair and Ian Lai, LC Roy Elementary School for their support.



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