

CHICAGOLAND

# Buildings & Environments

SPRING 2023

## CAPITAL PROJECTS REPORT 2023

### FEATURES

How LiDAR is Changing Building Inspection and Structural Engineering

Understanding Vintage Architectural Cast Iron Facades

Preserve Your Insurance Coverage... Perils of Known Losses

E-bikes in Your Community Association: 10 Potential Rules and Regulations

Composting Programs Made Easy

The Weather and Your Landscape

Presort Standard  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Permit #533  
Schramburg, IL 60173



by Mary Beth Schaye, Collective Resource Compost

# Composting Programs Made Easy

Though the law that made commercial composting legal in Illinois was passed in 2009, most municipalities have created composting programs for just single-family homes leaving multi-unit dwellings and businesses out of the conversation.

**S**maller organic waste hauling businesses have sprung up to fill this gap with container-swap services that make composting easier and cleaner.

## Why Compost?

When food scraps go to landfills, they create methane, a greenhouse gas more potent than CO2. In this scenario, the nutrients in the food scraps are truly wasted. They don't break down because landfills were built for storage, not decomposition.

Not so when food scraps are given the proper environment at a commercial composting facility. Those nutrients break down into a rich soil amendment that can help grow more food and make the soil more robust, resilient, and better able to absorb and retain moisture.

Just as EV infrastructure is being incorporated into new buildings, composting infrastructure must be considered as well. The good news is it is a lot easier to incorporate.

## How do composting programs work?

Smaller (organic waste) hauling businesses generally have two sizes of containers: 5-gallon buckets with snap-on lids and bagged 32-gallon totes with hinged lids. The totes can accommodate the composting needs of 24 people a week. The buckets accommodate 4. Pickups are scheduled regularly depending on how quickly the containers are filled. The relatively small size of the buckets and totes compared to the size of dumpsters makes them easy to add to existing waste programs and fit into different spaces. Totes and buckets can be used indoors because they are swapped, replacing the full container with a clean, empty one. Conversely, dumpsters are tipped, meaning their contents are emptied out, but the dumpster itself is left

## BUILDINGS & ENVIRONMENTS

onsite and rarely washed out by the hauling company.

Some buildings choose to use 5-gallon buckets stacked two-high in the trash rooms on every floor. Building maintenance crews switch these out when they are full. Alternatively, a building might choose to use the bigger 32-gallon totes placed in central, convenient locations for the residents to access, like in garages or recycling rooms.

## Who Pays For It?

In most cases, it is paid for out of the operating budget like other building-wide expenses. In small HOAs, an interested resident might pay for the start of the program and then often the cost is folded into the next year's HOA budget.

## What Are The Benefits?

Residents, particularly those who may have downsized from a house with a garden, appreciate the opportunity to continue to compost their food waste. Potential buyers concerned about climate change might choose a building that has green infrastructure like composting and electric car chargers. If enough residents are composting, the building will be able to reduce the number of landfill dumpsters it is filling and either reduce pickups or eliminate a dumpster. Management companies, particularly in vintage buildings with older plumbing, notice that they have far fewer calls to fix kitchen sink garbage disposals when composting programs are implemented.

*Clear signage helps residents to learn what is compostable at Central-Bennett East.*





**Small Building Example**

David Sutton, President of the board of Central-Bennett East, a vintage 18-unit co-op, began using a small hauler's container-swap composting service at his own unit in December 2012. When others in his building expressed interest, their board of directors agreed to begin a program to compost communally with one 32-gallon tote swapped out every two weeks. The program has expanded to three totes, one in each six-unit tower. He suggests that you can start small with just a few units composting and expand when interest grows. The residents are encouraged to compost but not forced to do so. As part of the composting program, residents are able to choose a small 2-gallon countertop compost collection container to use in their kitchens that the co-op pays for.

At their building, they choose to keep the totes inside, in a small nook under the stairs, on the basement level. This location helps reduce contamination from passersby because the only people who can access the totes are residents. Previously, residents had to go outside to dispose of all of their waste. Keeping the compost tote indoors means that residents don't have to go outside to remove organic waste from their apartments, a particularly nice benefit in the winter. Signage reminds residents what can be composted in the program.

Because of the composting program, the building has been able to eliminate one of the landfill dumpsters from their parking area. "We feel good about doing our part to help our city meet its zero waste goals as outlined in the city's Climate Action and Resilience Plan," says Sutton.



*Optima Horizons with Trash Room sign: 5-gallon buckets fit easily into trash rooms.*

**BUILDINGS & ENVIRONMENTS**

**Large Building Example**

Ashley Abbott, CMCA, Property Manager of Optima Horizons, a modern, 16-story, 248-unit condo building, helped to implement a composting program in 2016, when building residents expressed their desire to add this service to their waste disposal options. It worked best to use 5-gallon buckets in the trash rooms on every floor. The buckets are stacked two-high to make them a more comfortable height for filling. Maintenance crews make sure that these buckets are replaced regularly so there is always room for more food scraps in them. They found that having several backup buckets on hand created a better user experience. Maintenance crews would always be able to quickly switch out a bucket if, for example, a resident put something particularly smelly into one. Maintenance crews also ensure that all of the food scraps get to the first-floor pickup area.

Before the composting program was implemented at Optima Horizons, a special box had been designated in each trash room for cardboard pizza boxes because they do not fit easily down their trash chutes. They were collected by the maintenance crew and deposited directly into the landfill dumpsters. Since residents were already accustomed to separating them, this made it very easy to collect them for composting.

The composting program is often a marketing point for the building and gives prospective buyers a sense of the community's approach toward sustainability. Everyone who moves in is given an orientation that includes how waste is handled. "As an early adopter of this program, our building has served as a model for the implementation of programs at similar high-rise condo buildings," says Abbott. 🍃



*A designated container for pizza boxes ensures that these bulky items are also composted.*