
West Hartford Department of Public Works

Trash Reduction Readiness Survey

Informative Report

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Research Objectives & Methodology

Research Objectives

The West Hartford Department of Public Works (WHDPW) commissioned a survey to assess the town's readiness to adopt a town-wide "pay as you throw" (PAYT) waste reduction initiative. The survey results will help inform a recommendation on whether the West Hartford Town Council should proceed with a yearlong, grant-funded trash reduction initiative.

This survey provided an opportunity to be open with residents about waste management challenges and a potential solution, to assess the town's readiness to move forward, and to build understanding for waste reduction initiatives in the future.

Key questions that guided the survey development:

- Do residents understand and appreciate the town's current waste management challenges and potential solutions?
- Are residents ready to adopt a town-wide usage-based pricing initiative?
- What are key barriers to participation and what will it take to overcome them?

Research Methodology

The Town of West Hartford invited residents to take an online survey in May 2024. Most of the 1,560 residents who responded were homeowners; 55 were renters.



Research steps included:

- ✓ Conversations and input with WHDPW, the State of CT Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP), and the town's consultant, Waste Zero, guided the development of the survey.
- ✓ The online survey was fielded to West Hartford residents from May 17 to May 23, 2024.
- ✓ Survey design, fielding, and analysis of findings conducted by an independent research firm.

Measures of Readiness

Measures of Readiness

Are West Hartford residents ready to proceed with a yearlong trash reduction initiative? The 1,560 completed surveys represent residents across ages, incomes and household sizes. Respondents also provided over 3,000 comments and suggestions.

The survey looked at three measures of readiness:

- 1) How important is it for the town to take action to reduce costs and to offer food scrap collection?
- 2) Which do residents prefer: paying for their households' share of trash (a pay-as-you-throw or PAYT approach) (with no separate charge for food scrap recycling) or making no changes now?
- 3) What is the degree of support and opposition for a PAYT approach?

The summary results:

- 1) The importance measurements are strong: 85% say it's moderately to very important for the Town to lower waste disposal costs; 74% say it's moderately to very important to offer food scrap collection.
- 2) Of the two options presented, a majority (61%) prefer to make no changes now.
- 3) The degree of support for a PAYT approach is split:
 - 22% strongly support
 - 23% somewhat support
 - 9% neither support or oppose
 - 12% somewhat oppose
 - 34% strongly oppose

Findings by Survey Question

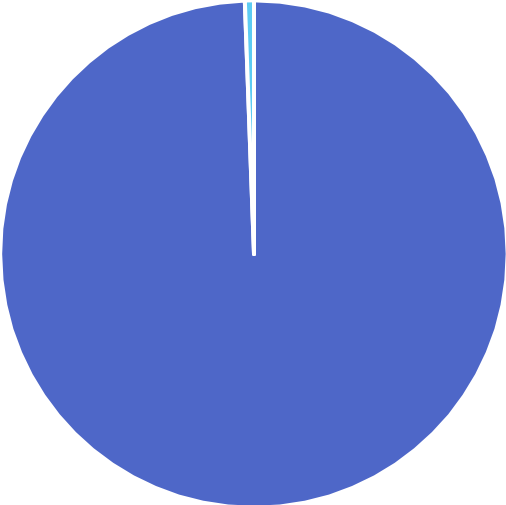
Who Responded

- Owner or Renter
- Full or Part-time Resident
- Current Waste Management Practices
- Satisfaction with Current Services

Q1. Are you a current resident of West Hartford, CT?

99% of respondents reside in West Hartford full-time.

Full and Part-time Residents

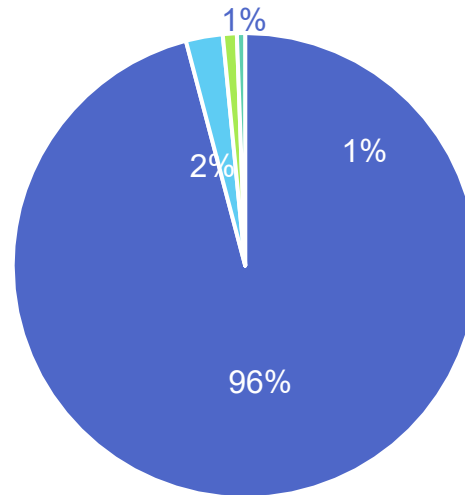


■ Full-time ■ Part-time

Q2. Which of the following best describes you? (Select one.)

Nearly all respondents (96%) own homes or condos, and a small minority (3%) rent.

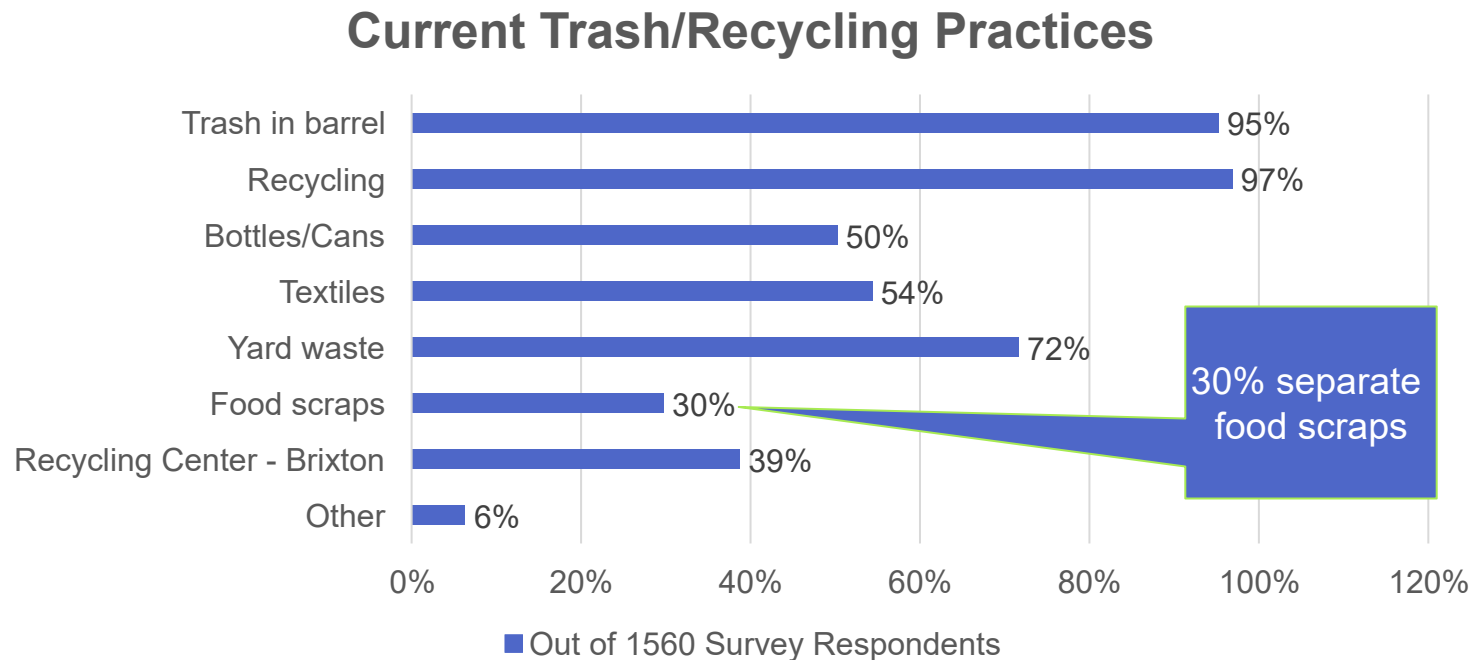
Owners vs. Renters



- Owner - Home or Condo
- Renter - 3-family or smaller house/complex
- Renter - Apt complex or 4+ multi-family
- Other

Q3. How do you typically manage your household's trash and recyclables? (Select all that apply.)

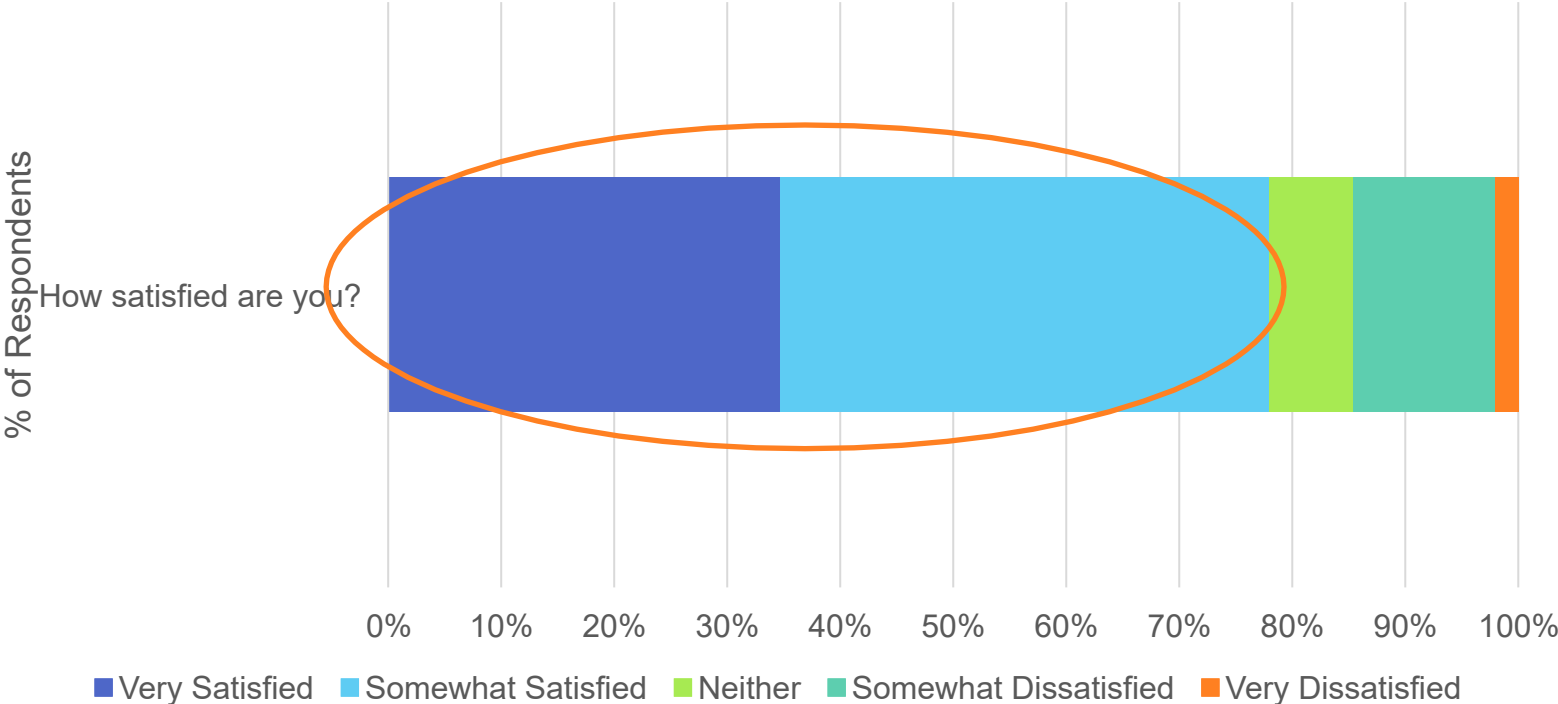
Nearly all respondents recycle (97%). About 30% are separating food scraps.



Q4. How satisfied are you with the current trash and recycling options available in West Hartford? (Select one.)

A majority of residents (78%) are satisfied with West Hartford’s current trash and recycling options. More than a third (35%) are Very Satisfied.

Satisfaction with Current Trash/Recycling Options



Q5. What, if any, recycling or waste removal needs are not being met?

Residents want a weekly recycling pickup, expanded recycling and waste disposal options, and lower costs.

Common requests included:

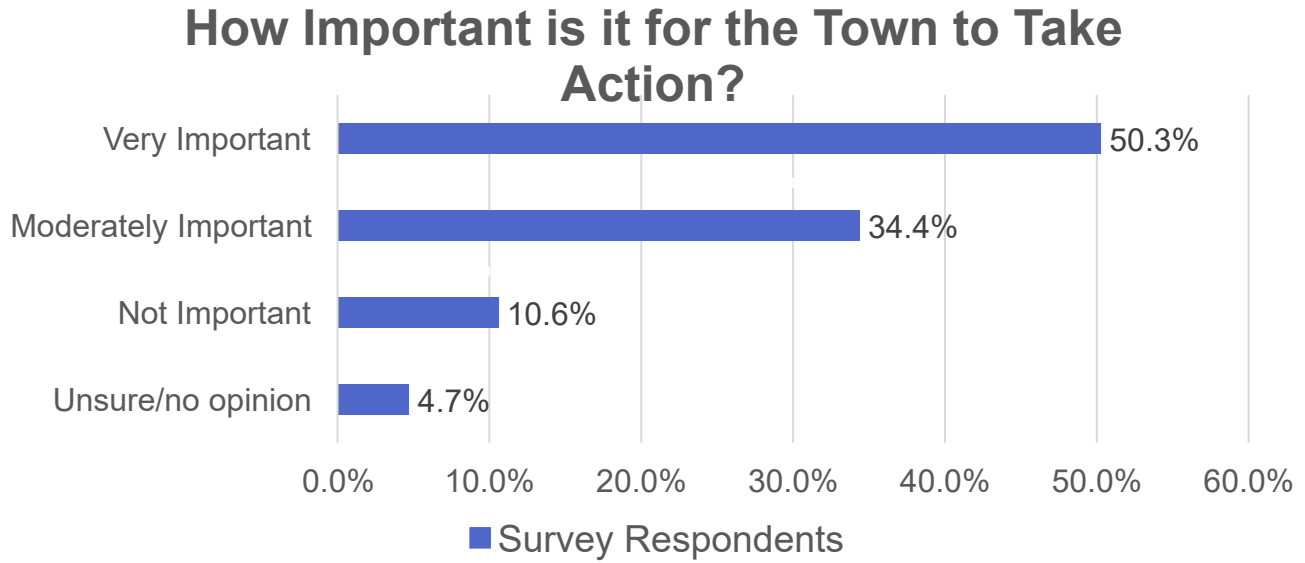
- Weekly recycling pickup
- Food scrap composting
- Bulky waste disposal
- Yard waste pickup
- Textile recycling – without having to purchase a special permit
- Leaf collection
- More education on recycling
- Electronics recycling
- Plastic recycling
- Hazardous waste disposal

Readiness Questions & Comments

- Degree of Importance to Address Waste Challenges
- Preferred Approach (No Changes Now or Pay for Share of Household Trash)
- Degree of Support for Two Food-Scrap Collection options

Q6. How important do you think it is for the Town of West Hartford to take action to lower its waste disposal costs? (Select one.)

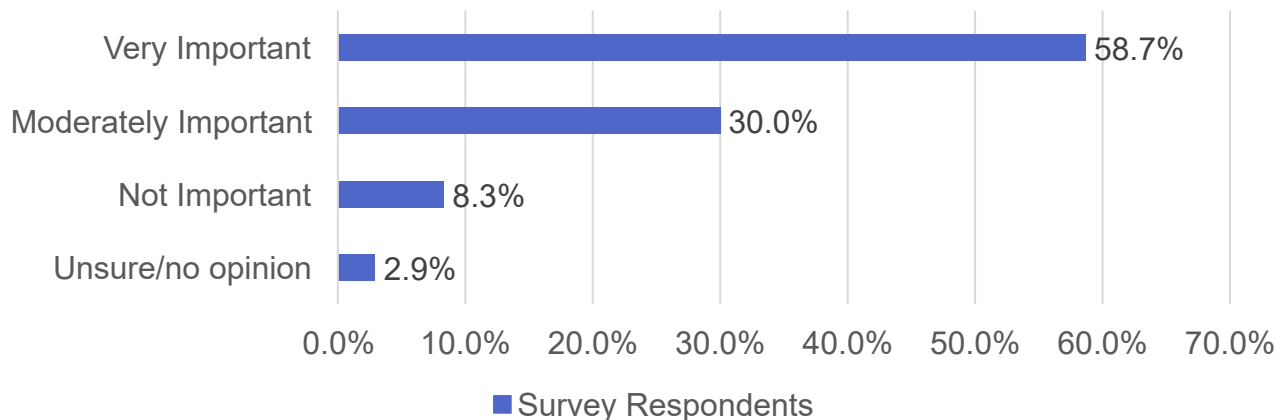
Most residents (85%) say it's at least 'moderately important' for the Town of West Hartford to take action to lower its waste disposal costs. Half (50%) say it is 'very important.'



Q7. How important do you think it is for residents to take action to reduce the amount of waste their household generates?(Select one.)

Most respondents (89% of them) say it is important for residents to take action to reduce the amount of waste their household generates. 59% think it is 'Very Important.'

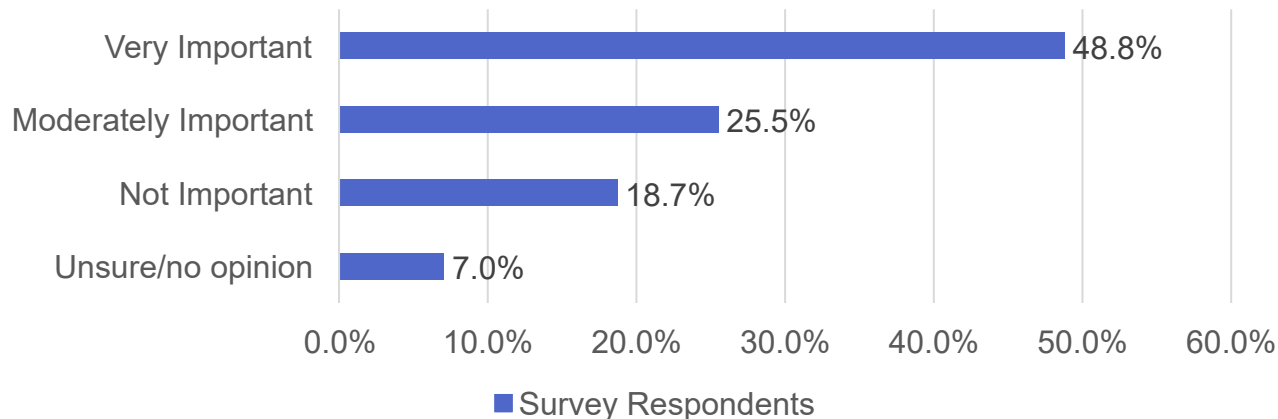
How Important is it for Residents to Take Action?



Q8. How important do you think it is for the Town of West Hartford to offer curbside collection of food scraps to residents? (Select one.)

Nearly half (49%) think it is 'Very Important' for West Hartford to offer a curbside collection of food scraps. Overall, Nearly three in four (74%) say it is at least 'Moderately Important.'

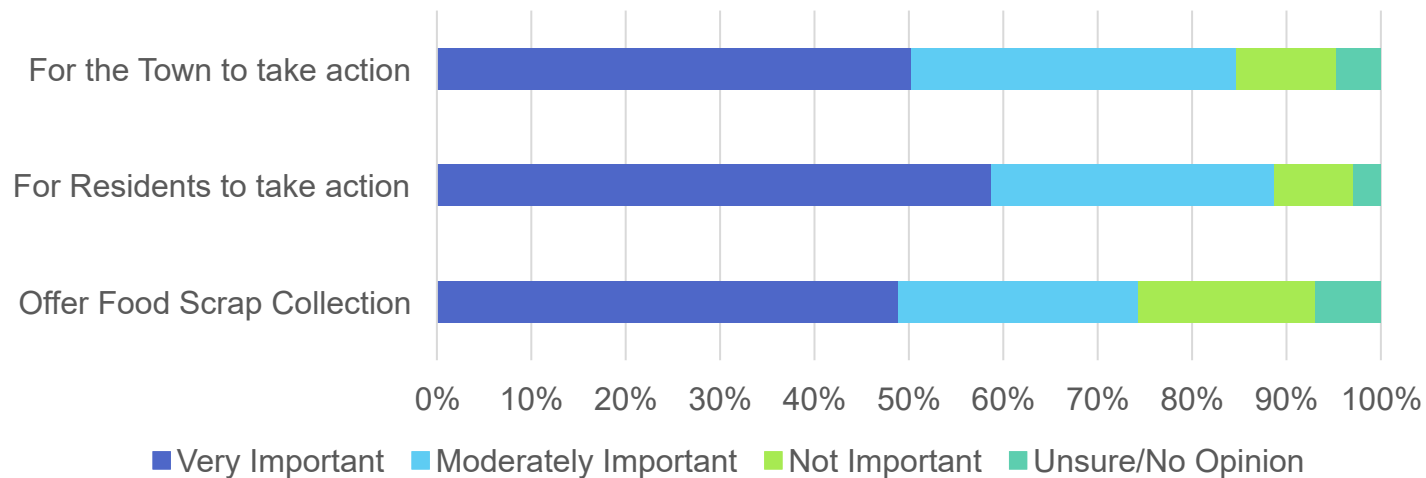
How Important is it to Offer Food Scrap Collection?



Comparison View: Q6, Q7, and Q8. How important do you think it is for...

Most residents (85%) think it is important for the **Town of West Hartford** to take action to lower its waste disposal costs. Slightly more (89%) think it is important for **residents** to take action to reduce their household waste. A majority (74%) say it is important to offer **curbside food scrap collection**.

How Important is it to Take Action?



Q6. How important do you think it is for the Town of West Hartford to take action to lower its waste disposal costs? (Select one.)

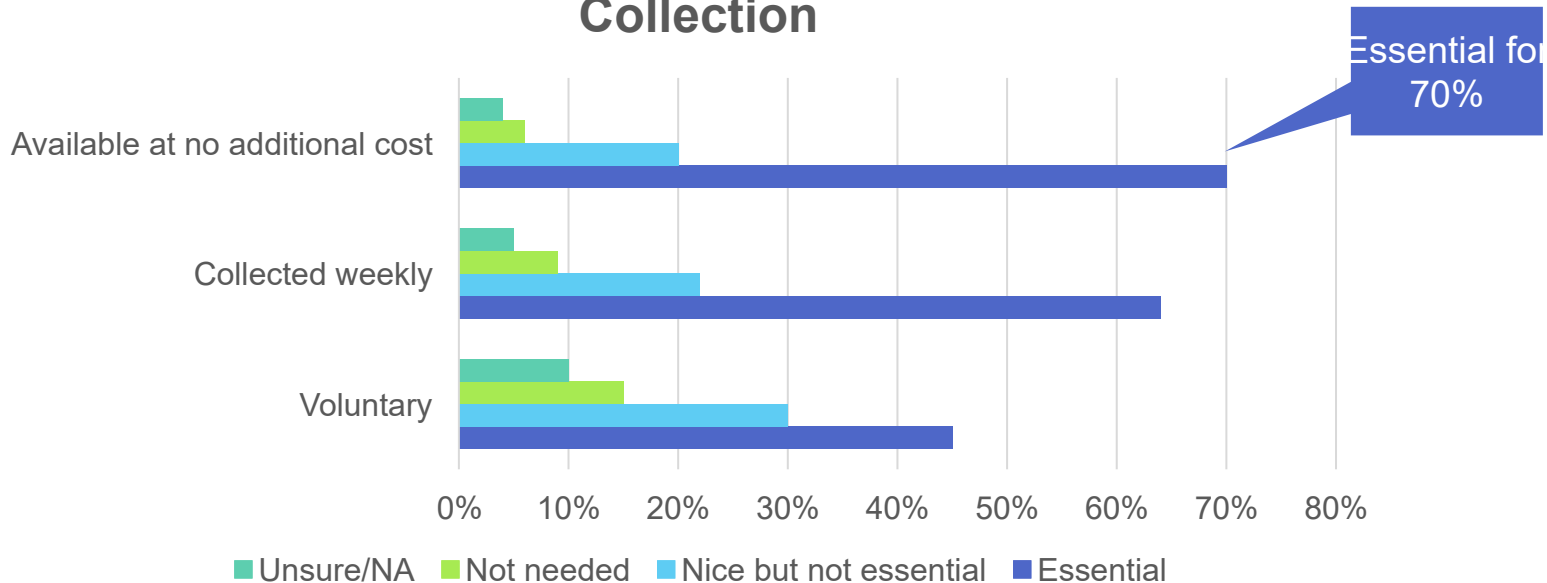
Q7. How important do you think it is for residents to take action to reduce the amount of waste their household generates?(Select one.)

Q8. How important do you think it is for the Town of West Hartford to offer curbside collection of food scraps to residents? (Select one.)

Q9. What is essential for you to support curbside collection of food scraps? (For each item, select whether it is Essential, Nice to have but not essential, or Not needed.)

A majority (70%) say that no additional charge for food scrap collection is essential for their support. Also essential: weekly collection (64%). Less essential: voluntary participation(45%)

Essential for Support of Curbside Food Scrap Collection



Q10. What else might be essential for you to support curbside collection of food scraps?

Themes that surfaced include concerns about attracting rodents, hiring a quality contractor, overstated savings, and the economics of PAYT resulting in contaminated recyclables and pinching already tight household budgets. Residents suggested ways to incentivize participation in lieu of charging for trash.

Residents worry that food scraps will attract rats, bears, bugs, and smells. They want to see those concerns translated into a more efficacious program and/or container design.

Some worry that the economics of paying for trash will incentivize their neighbors to contaminate recyclables.

Others suggest better education on recycling and composting, whether as an alternative to food scrap collection or to make all recycling more effective.

Residents fear that the cost savings and environmental benefits are overstated. They don't want to pay more and suspect that the benefits of asking schools and restaurants to participate would outweigh the net benefits of a curbside program.

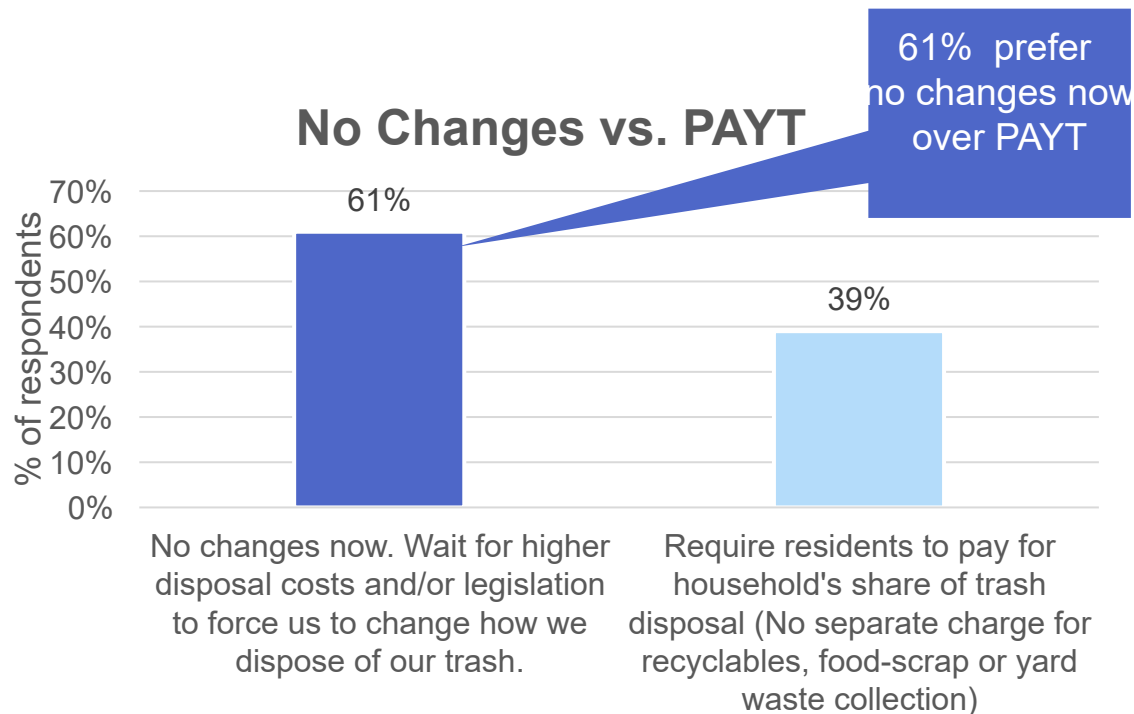
Some suggested using the program's cost savings to incentivize participants. Suggested incentives included access to the composted soil, lower property taxes, convenient access to drop-off locations (rather than curbside collection), and gamification.

If instituted, residents want food waste collection to be environmentally sound and with a quality contractor, such as Blue Earth.



Q11. Which approach do you prefer the Town of West Hartford take to address its rising waste disposal costs? (Select one.)

When asked to choose between two options, a clear majority of residents (61%) prefer 'no changes now' over requiring residents to pay for their household's share of trash disposal (39%).



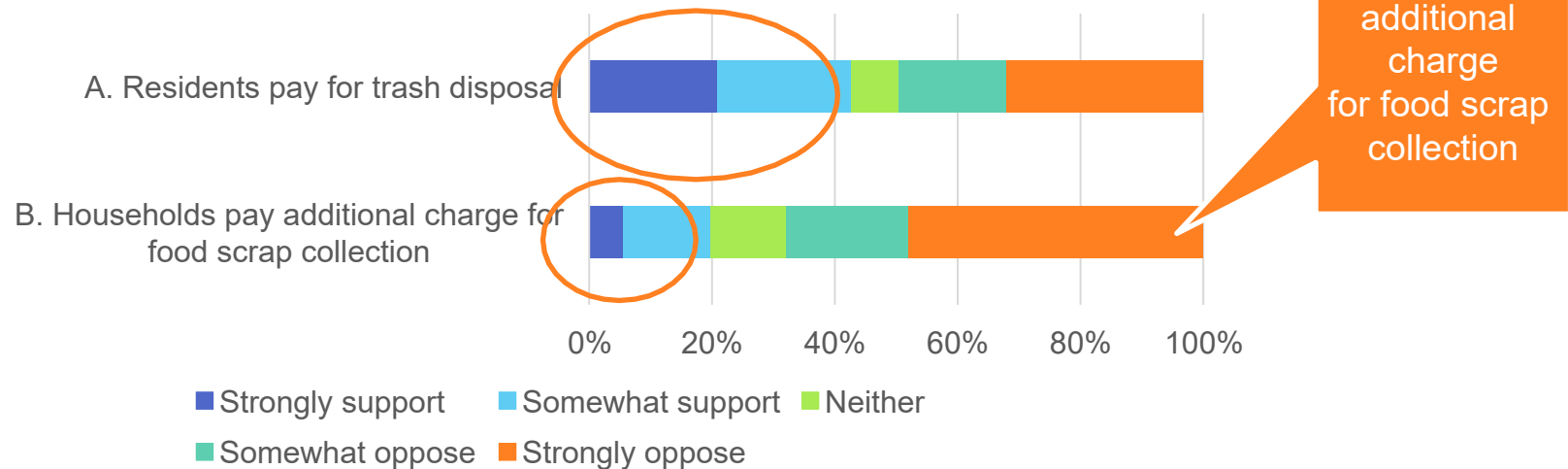
Q12. To what extent do you support or oppose the following:

A. Residents pay for the volume of trash their household generates. (Curbside recycling including food scraps is provided at no additional charge.)

B. All households pay an additional charge for curbside food scrap collection. (No change to how residents pay for trash removal.)

Less than half of residents (45%) support PAYT. Fewer residents (20%) support paying an additional charge for curbside collection. Opposition to both payment schemes is strong.

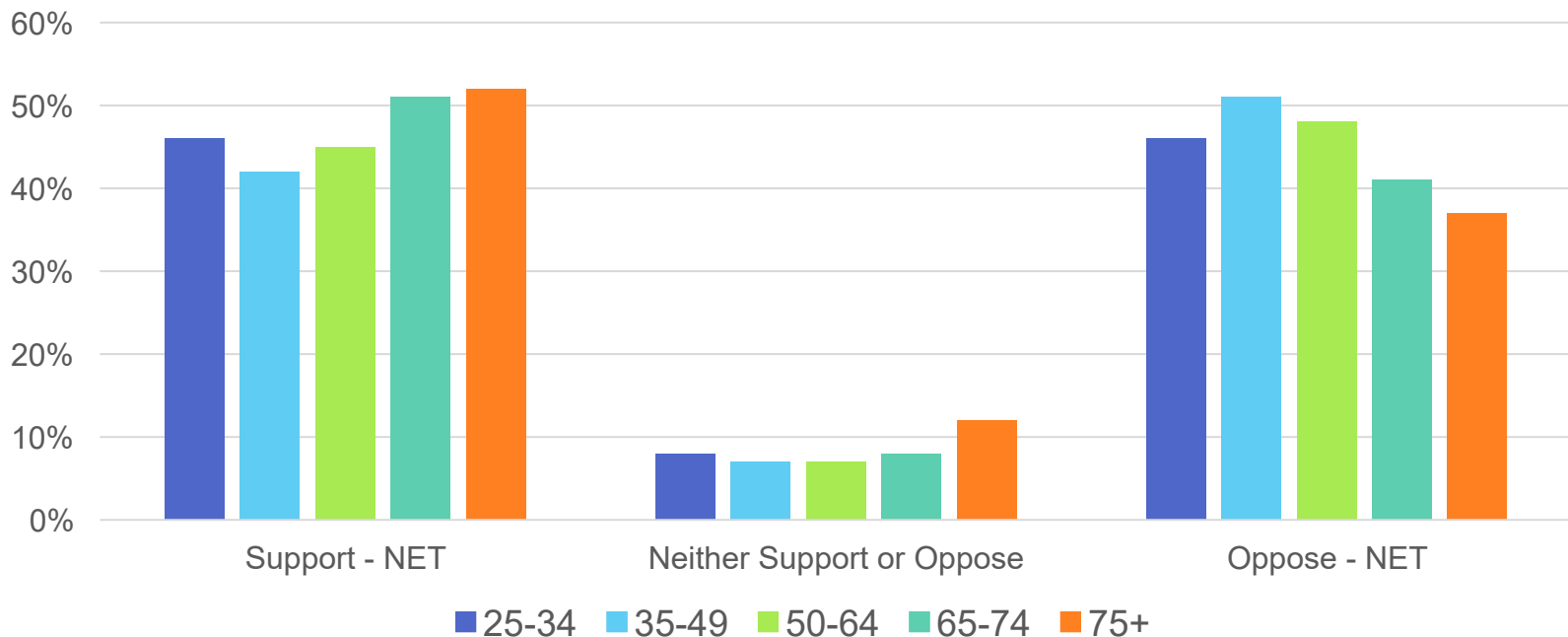
Support for Paying for Waste Services



Q12A. To what extent do you support or oppose the following: Residents pay for the volume of trash their household generates. (Curbside recycling including food scraps is provided at no additional charge.)

Views are generally consistent across age groups, with slightly more support for PAYT among residents 65 and older. About half of residents ages 65-74 (51%) and 75+ (52%) support PAYT vs. 42% of residents ages 35-49.

Support/Oppose PAYT – by Age



Q13. What would it take for you to support a trash reduction program in which you pay for the disposal of the non-recyclable trash you generate (and the town adds curbside food scrap recycling)?

Residents shared their concerns about the additional financial burden and attendant worries that residents will compensate through illegal dumping or contaminating recycling bins.

The majority of responses were **opposed to the idea of paying for trash disposal**. Many expressed dissatisfaction with the proposal, citing reasons such as:

- High taxes, which have increased as waste management services have declined
- Unfair burden on large families or low-income households
- Potential for illegal dumping or contamination of recycling bins
- Lack of trust in town leadership
- Preference for other waste management solutions

A minority of responses were positive or **open to paying for trash disposal**. Some indicated they would support the program if it were accompanied by:

- Reduction in property taxes
- Increase in recycling options
- Clear explanations of costs and benefits
- A fair and convenient payment mechanism with exceptions and policies in place

Q13. continued. What would it take for you to support a trash reduction program in which you pay for the disposal of the non-recyclable trash you generate (and the town adds curbside food scrap recycling)?

Residents said they might be more supportive with further clarity and potential ‘tweaks’ to the program. Some believe that expanding other recycling services would have more of an impact on the volume of their trash than food scrap recycling.

Requested improvements to curbside recycling included:

- Access to the compost generated by the collection program
- Plans to manage odors and pests at both the curbside and indoors
- Plan to mitigate contaminated recycling
- Some way to reward (or at least not charge) residents who are already separating food scraps

Expanded recycling could make it easier for residents to reduce their trash load and complement the goals of food scrap recycling. They want:

- Weekly blue-bin recycling
- More accessible (and/or cheaper) textile, bulky items, and hazardous items recycling
- A way to dispose of or reduce the volume of unrecyclable plastics

Q14. Feel free to share any other thoughts or suggestions.

Many of the comments reinforced what surfaced in the other open-ended questions. To read all the comments, refer to the Word documents delivered with this report.

Many respondents are opposed to paying for trash removal. Reasons include:

- Already pay high taxes
- Unfair burden on large families or low-income households
- Potential for illegal dumping or contamination of recycling

Some respondents support food scrap recycling or PAYT programs, including those who:

- already compost or reduce their waste
- see the environmental or financial benefits of these initiatives

Suggestions included providing incentives, education and enforcement to encourage recycling and waste reduction.

Concerns and questions about waste reduction include:

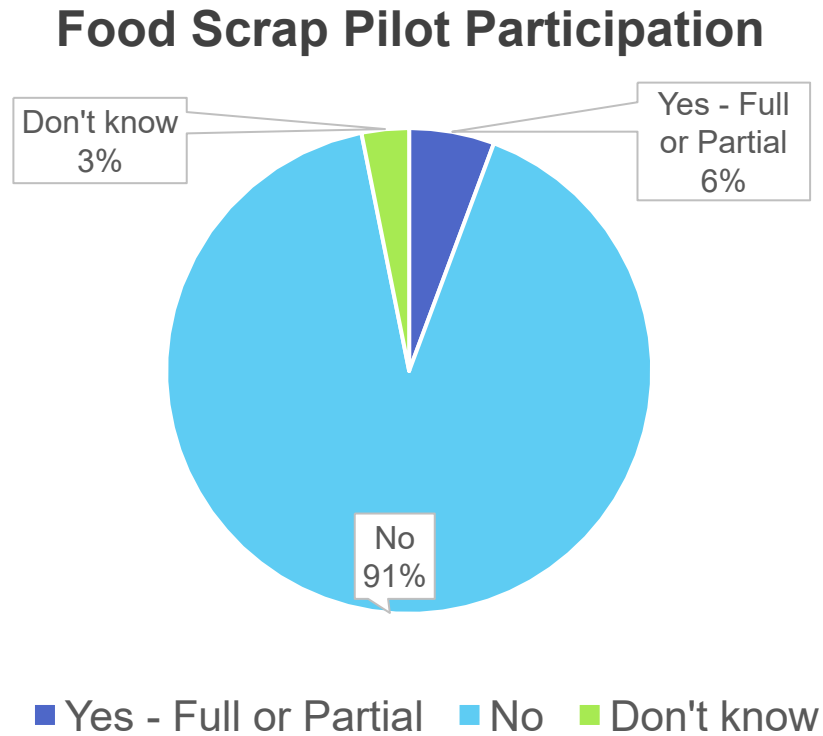
- Issues with bears, rodents, bugs and other wildlife
- Availability and accessibility of the recycling center
- Enforcement of recycling rules
- Role of manufacturers and businesses in reducing packaging and waste
- Comparison of West Hartford's practices with other towns or states

Demographic Details

- Pilot Participant?
- Ages of Respondent
- Household
Demographics
(Ages, Number,
Income)

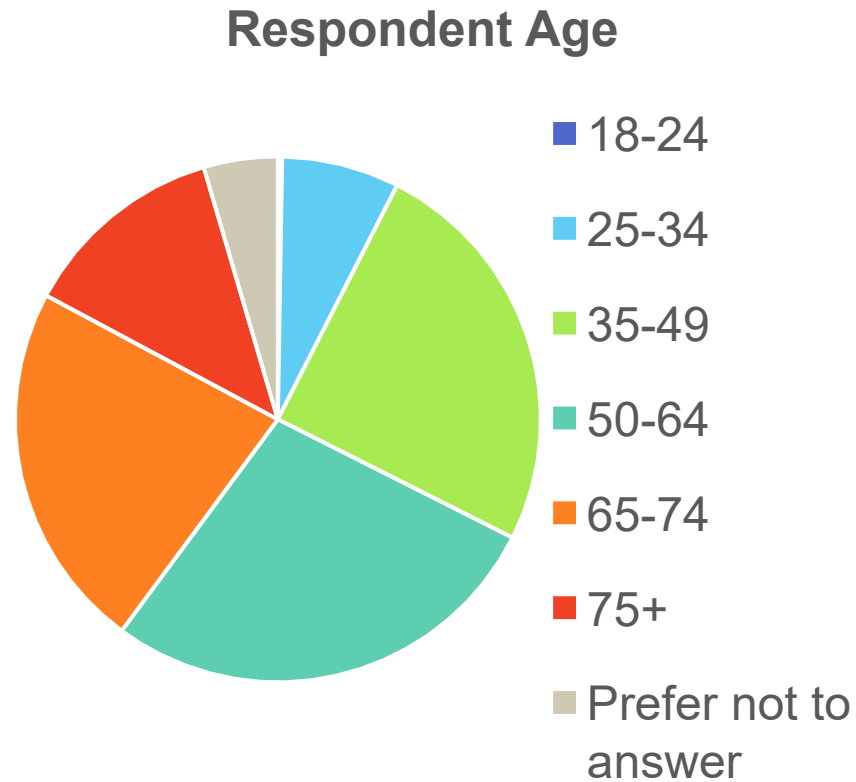
Q15. Did your household participate in the Food Scrap Pilot program (in the Morley neighborhood)?

90 respondents (6%) participated in the Food Scrap Pilot Program in the Morley neighborhood.



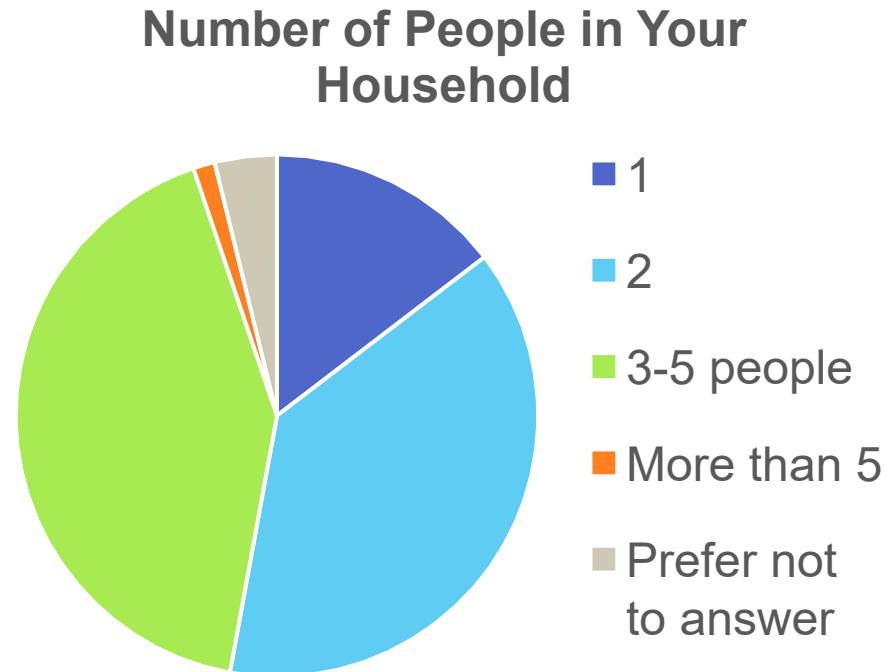
Q16. Which of the following ranges includes your age? (Select one.)

Respondents represented a mix of ages. Most were between 35 and 74.
(Only four responded in the 18-24 category).



Q17. Including yourself, how many people currently live in your household? (Select one.)

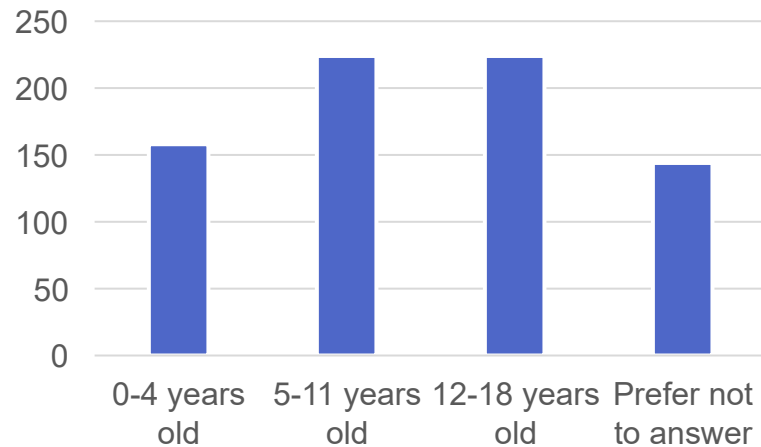
Respondents represented a range of household sizes. The majority (80%) had 2-5 people in their household. Just over 40% represented households with three or more.



Q18. In what age ranges are the members of your household? (Select all that apply.)

We heard from residents with a mix of children's ages in their households.

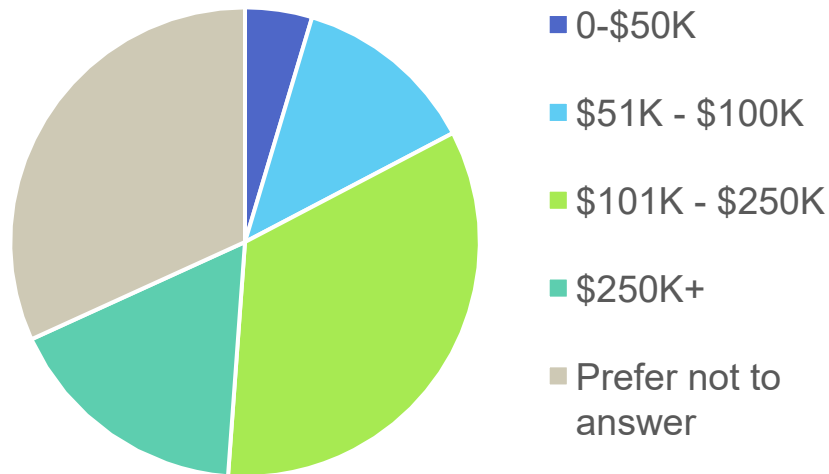
Children's Ages in Household



Q19. Which range below includes your household's income? (Select one.)

Respondents represented all income groups. Nearly one-third (32%) declined to answer.

Household Income



List of Supporting Documents

List of Word and Excel documents that supplement or underlie the survey report.

List of Supporting Documents

Word Documents:

- ✓ Survey Questionnaire – Ready for Programming
- ✓ Comments from Open-End Questions: Q5, Q10, Q13, Q14

Excel Document:

- ✓ Banners with supporting statistics