



28 May 2014

Yarra Climate Action Now (YCAN) appreciates this opportunity to comment on the City of Yarra's *Draft Waste Strategy 2014-18*. We trust Councillors and staff will take the time to read our submission. We have made some suggestions which are marked and indented.

Rethinking Waste

The aims and aspirations of the new Waste Strategy for the next five years are admirable. We are in agreement that we need change from being a throw-away society and while still recycling waste, focus much more on waste minimization — reusing and repairing, and more importantly reducing the amount of disposable items that we use and generating less waste in the first place.

Commendable Actions

There are many items in the action plan that look exciting and innovative. Such as:
1.1.3 Increasing the number of recycling drop-off as points. This is something we have advocated for before. We are sure that there are many residents who live at a distance from the existing one who are not aware of its existence or the range of items that can be left for recycling. One for each ward would be a good starting point.

1.2.1, 3.3.2 Liaising with real estate agents and body corporates to devise ways to reduce waste in medium density developments (MUDs), investigating food waste diversion etc. Since there is a large number of MUDs in Yarra, they it makes sense to focus on this type of housing, which often already has an area for rubbish collection and storage, and a policy for how residents must use it.

- ❖ With the multicultural make up of Yarra's population, and many new arrivals and overseas students living in MUDs, we think there should be more materials about recycling and waste disposal in other languages.

1.4.1, 2.2.1, 4.2.1 Partnering with trade associations to facilitate more efficient waste management by commercial properties, extending the Food Know How Program to cafes etc. It is good to see Council endeavouring to improve waste management in this area, even though Council is not responsible for collection of all commercial rubbish.

4.2.3 Developing a network of businesses that displace consumption of new goods through repair, recycling and reuse. This is an excellent idea. Though detail is sparse, we hope that this will include repurposing of items from the hard rubbish collection.

the Food Know How program to the commercial sector is also a welcome idea.

5.1.2 YCAN supports the introduction of container deposit legislation, which not only recycles resources (in particular valuable aluminium) but also keeps them out of our waterways. We are pleased to see that Council is an advocate for this legislation.

5.3.3 Collaborating with organisations who undertake “food rescue” programs. This redistribution of unwanted food is a great idea, helping people in need as well as reducing waste.

Green Waste

Item 3.1.4 is to investigate the Green Waste Service. YCAN feels that this is an area that can be improved. People with small inner-suburban gardens often undertake frequent small amounts of weeding and pruning. For those who do not have a compost bin for whatever reason, these handfuls of weeds, small piles of twigs do not justify booking an on-call green waste collection and so they often go in the general rubbish bin.

- ❖ Council is willing to collect a person’s green waste if they put it in a cardboard box or bundle, so why not give them a bin for the purpose? We believe that much more green waste would be put out for collection if residents had a designated green-waste bin which they could fill over a period of time and then book a green waste collection when it is full. We suggest a pilot scheme where interested residents apply for a green bin for this purpose.

If the collection system is tailored to make it easier and more appropriate for the inner-suburban gardener, then the level of green waste diverted from landfill will increase.

YCAN is firmly opposed to the idea expressed in point 5.4.1 of the action plan of bringing in a local law to make it illegal to put green waste in domestic bins.

Punishment is not the way to encourage good waste habits.

Waste management in Yarra has improved in many ways over the past five years, however there are two items that appear to be still stuck firmly in the too-hard basket. These are hazardous waste and food waste.

Hazardous Waste

In our submission for the previous waste plan we expressed our concern about the lack of a facility in Yarra for collection of hazardous waste (see *Waste Management Plan 2009-14*, Attachment 2, p.39). Five years later, we could restate that position word for word because nothing has happened. Council is still adamant that it is each resident’s responsibility to dispose of their own hazardous waste. This involves finding out where the mobile toxic waste collection is at that particular time and then, if it happens to be at a time when it is possible to achieve this, driving across Melbourne with the hazardous waste in the back of the car. This is inconvenient and dangerous. And what about the ever-growing number of people without a car (something that Council is advocating)? How are they supposed to transport hazardous waste to Altona or Frankston? Even the best-intentioned resident would find this process challenging.

In 2010, Council arranged for a one-off Detox Your Home drop-off to be held at the Roseneath St Depot. This was a great success with residents delivering in excess of 20 tonnes of hazardous waste (*WMS* p. 29). One can only imagine the quantity that could be collected if there was a permanent depot for these items, while wondering what has been happening to hazardous waste in Yarra since that initiative.

YCAN is firmly opposed to the idea expressed in point 5.4.1 of the action plan of bringing in a local law to make it illegal to put hazardous waste in domestic bins. Punishment is not the way to encourage good waste habits.

- ❖ There should be a permanent hazardous waste drop-off point in the City of Yarra.

Food Waste

There are many positive statements about the way to reduce food waste in the Waste Strategy. For example, there is the aim to “continue to innovate to improve waste management” (*WMS* p.10), acknowledgement that a “localized tailored approach to processing food organics” is desired (*WMS* p.5), and a statement that one of the pathways to delivering outstanding waste services is to “continue to work towards eliminating organics from the waste stream (*WMS* p. 10). And yet, we can find no real actions in the strategy to reduce domestic food waste.

Projects such as Compost Mates, linking existing composters with cafes, though worthy, are not going to make any noticeable dent in the 50% of our waste stream that is food waste.

As Council’s own community consultation has proved, residents are willing and eager to participate in recycling of food waste (*WMS* p.33). What we need is the means to do so. And Council must provide it.

In the previous Waste Management Plan, the solution to the organic waste problem was all about waiting for the state government to build Advanced Resource Recovery Technology (ARRT) facilities that would, as we understand it, separate food waste from general rubbish. There is no mention of ARRTs in this new waste strategy. So what is Council’s plan for reducing food waste in residential bins?

The weak reduction target of 10% by 2020 (*WMS* p.9) is an indication that this issue is still in the too-hard basket. Five years have passed, nothing has been done and the tonnage of food waste to landfill continues to climb.

Council’s only proposed action is to continue to encourage residents to compost. This is not sufficient to make a meaningful reduction in the amount of food waste going to landfill. Not all residents have the space for a compost bin or a big enough area of garden to utilise the compost they produce. Not all residents have the time, the energy or the inclination to produce and distribute compost.

The level of recycling in Yarra is high. The reason for this is because Council has made it easy for people to recycle. It provides bins for the purpose at home and in public places. It provides a drop-off point for items that can’t go in the recycling bins. If Council wants similar success with food waste it must provide the facilities for residents.

- ❖ There are municipalities around the country and around the world already doing this. We don’t have to reinvent the wheel. Research and consultation with experts should help us find the system that works best for our situation and modify it to suit our needs. There would be volunteers in the municipality (who are already knowledgeable about these issues) who would be willing to give their time and energy to assist staff in researching and designing a program. This is what happened with the design of the original recycling programs back in the 1980s, which over time have evolved into the excellent service today. This is an inexpensive action, which might lead to the very solution we are looking for.

Although a food waste collection service might be costly, it is linked to savings made in a potential halving of rubbish taken to landfill.

Council is either unwilling or unable to put in place the obvious solution, which is to have a three-bin system, claiming that the footpaths are too narrow for each household to put out three bins. There must be other municipalities who have dealt with similar issues.

- ❖ Could we, for instance have three bins, but only put out two each week, each household choosing which ones need to be emptied?
- ❖ Once there is a facility that can accept food waste, could it be included in the Green Waste Service (as it is in Adelaide)?
- ❖ At the least, couldn't there be a place where residents can deposit food waste?

Conclusion

While there are many commendable actions in the Waste Management Strategy, food organics remains the biggest problem. The cost for Council to take it to landfill is huge. It is an enormous waste of resources. It results in production of methane, a potent greenhouse gas. It is a problem that must be solved.

It is time to move beyond investigations, pilots and trials and find an effective and permanent solution suitable for the City of Yarra.

Thank you for your attention.

Carole Wilkinson
YCAN Local Action Coordinator
On behalf of YCAN members