

RECYCLING PROGRAM

Recent global disruptions in the international market for recycled commodities have created challenges for municipal recycling programs nationwide. Arlington's recycling program remains both environmentally and economically beneficial, especially when compared to other recycling programs across the country. But there are near- and medium-term challenges:

- Plans to rebuild recycling infrastructure and markets in the United States, including regional composting and material recovery facilities;
- Changing market over the past five years where costs have outpaced original expectations;
- Upcoming competitive procurements for expiring collection and recycling processing contracts that could impact the County's household solid waste fee;
- Transitions in the County's partnership with Alexandria at the waste-to-energy facility that will result in lower to no tipping fees for a period and resulting trade-offs to consider when the [Covanta](#) agreement expires in 2038;
- Opportunities to improve commercial recycling rates;
- Exploring new ways to recycle glass and review the single-stream recycling model;
- Opportunities to reduce the waste stream in cost-effective ways, such as food waste collection; and
- Continued education of County residents and businesses on the recycling market changes.

The County is required to update its Solid Waste Management Plan (SWP), an element of the Comprehensive Plan, every 20 years; it was last updated in 2004. In the intervening time, we have successfully implemented major changes, including the introduction of yard waste and overall improvements in our recycling rate, which grew from 31% in 2004 to 50% in 2018. We have also proven to be agile and a regional leader with our rapid response to eliminating glass from residential single stream recycling in response to international markets, while standing up three additional drop-off locations for glass.

As a first step toward the more comprehensive update to the SWP, the Department of Environmental Services (DES) will perform an initial high-level assessment of the market and contractual opportunities and challenges. This analysis will help inform the policy framework and environmental and economic trade-offs as we enter into the longer-term update of the SWP. I anticipate this work to be completed this

year. Initial results will help us reprioritize existing funding and allow us to determine the best approach for implementing food waste collection as the next step in our solid waste planning.