



Olmsted County

Environmental Resources Department

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Recycling Center Plus Now Accepting Paperboard Boxes

The Olmsted County Recycling Center Plus is now accepting paperboard boxes (no frozen food boxes) mixed in with newspaper, magazines, flyers, and pamphlets. The facility has established reliable end markets for this mix of fibers.

Examples of paperboard boxes include:

- cereal boxes
- cracker boxes
- macaroni and cheese boxes
- tissue boxes
- shoe boxes

The facility is not accepting frozen food boxes (e.g., TV dinner boxes). The paper mills we sell this material to do not want them. Freezer boxes can create challenges during the pulping process as they are more water resistant than the food boxes you'll find in your pantry.



Flyers/Pamphlets
Colored Paper
Newspaper
Magazines

Paperboard
Non-Corrugated Cardboard
(empty & flattened)

- Cereal & cracker boxes
- Shoe boxes
- Tissue boxes
- File folders

NOT ACCEPTED

- Frozen food boxes
(TV dinner boxes, ice cream cartons, etc.)
- Egg cartons / drink holders

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YMCA Deconstruction Diverts Recyclable Material From Landfill

The Rochester YMCA was much more than just a place to exercise. For nearly 60 years, the "Y" served as a fixture of health and community to thousands. This made news of the facility's closing in January of 2022 all the more difficult for many long-time members.

Fast forward two years and the Y was again making headlines, this time for its demolition. Excavators began knocking down walls on January 2, 2024. Images of the project circulated across formal and social media outlets, providing platforms for residents to commiserate over the building's demise.

As sad as this day was for many, a silver lining could be found in the manner in which the building was taken down.



An excavator tears down a wall at the YMCA; photo credit: Joe Ahlquist / Post Bulletin

Don Wickenhauser—of Wickenhauser Demolition and Excavating—has been tearing down buildings for over 30 years. In that time, he and his team have

perfected the art of deconstruction, which places an emphasis on salvaging materials for future use.

According to Don, the YMCA was one of the strongest, well-built buildings his team has worked on. "If there was a tornado, that is the building I would have gone to."

Expanding upon the process, Don explained that you "basically start from the roof and work your way down to the bottom floor, separating the material as you go into piles of steel, concrete, and landfill material."

In total, Wickenhauser salvaged/recycled 430 tons of steel/aluminum and over 6,000 tons of concrete! The concrete was taken to Leitzen Concrete Products to be crushed into class 5 aggregate, which is used to provide a foundation for roads, new buildings, and more.



An excavator salvages recyclable material at the YMCA; photo credit: Joe Ahlquist / Post Bulletin

When asked why more companies don't deconstruct buildings in the same manner, Don explained that a lack of experience along with the extra time required to separate materials usually makes the project cost more. However, he and his company appreciate the importance of keeping materials in circulation and minimizing the amount of material sent to a landfill.



An excavator salvages recyclable material at the YMCA; photo credit: Joe Ahlquist / Post Bulletin

We're Hiring: Communications Intern

We are currently accepting applications for a paid spring/summer internship within our communications team!

Nature of Work

Under general supervision, this position will:

- Assist recycling and waste management related education projects, such as research and data collection
- Assist in implementing a multi-family recycling program and outreach events
- Assist in development of informational materials for public consumption

More information can be found on [Olmsted County's website](#).



2023 communications intern, Audrey Cloft, stands next to the Environmental Resources booth at the Olmsted County Fair; photo credit: Anthony Wittmer

Service and Education: Meet Maggie and Michael

Maggie Ludwig - MN GreenCorps

Maggie is a GreenCorps worker placed in the Olmsted County Environmental Resources Department. Her service began in October 2023, and will continue through August 2024. Maggie is here to work with community partners to improve recycling and reduce waste by providing recycling information to residents, businesses, and institutions in Olmsted County. Her focus is on multi-family facilities and areas of environmental justice concern.

In addition to recycling, she is supporting food rescue projects, organics recycling, and reuse options within the county. Throughout the first half of her term, Maggie has been able to visit multiple Materials Recovery Facilities (MRFs) to see the recycling separation process, a postconsumer plastic processing facility, and many food rescue organizations in Olmsted. By being a GreenCorps member Maggie

hopes to learn about waste reduction, recycling, and organics management, and share what she has learned with her community.



Maggie poses in front of aluminum UBC bales at Eureka Recycling in Minneapolis, MN; photo credit: Sharon Schriever

Michael Abbing - Exchange Student, University of Muenster

Michael Abbing is a student at the University of Muenster in Germany. He has an undergraduate degree in environmental engineering and is close to finishing his master's degree in water science. His term at Olmsted County began in October 2023 and will finish in March 2024.

He spends much of his time with projects that support research regarding the current greenhouse gas emissions of Olmsted County's Integrated Solid Waste Management System. Michael got connected with Olmsted County through involvement in a program called "Climate Smart Municipalities," that focuses on sustainability work between Minnesota and his state in Germany. Prior to his work in Olmsted County, this program connected him with an opportunity to work at the University of Minnesota, Morris in 2022.



Michael stops for a picture in front of the Olmsted Waste-to-Energy Facility, photo credit: Anthony Wittmer

Volunteer Salvages Yarn for Residents in Need

The Recycling Center Plus salvaged a large container of new blankets, household goods, and yarn that was dropped off from a customer. Rather than process this material as garbage, it was set aside to be donated to Olmsted County's Family Services Department for their clients. A volunteer used the yarn to knit hats and blankets for their clients' community cold weather rack in the 2117 Building.



Yarn dropped off at the Olmsted County Recycling Center Plus; photo credit: Sharon Schriever

Through an effort that began in January 2023, Environmental Resources (ER) and Health, Housing, and Human Services (HHHS) staff work together on a materials rescue program. Recycling Center Plus staff rescue usable household items that come in for disposal. ER staff coordinate with HHHS and the Sentence to Serve (STS) program to pick up and transport items to a building, where they were available for social workers looking for specific items for clients and newly housed residents.



Hats, mittens, and blankets knitted from yarn that was destined for the garbage; photo credit: Sharon Schriever

New Work Group to Provide Input on New Reuse and Recycling Center

Planning is beginning for a new Community Reuse and Recycling Center. A citizen work group is meeting with Olmsted County Environmental Resources staff to provide community input. A future building is being proposed to be constructed on the east side of the existing resource recovery campus just south of the current Recycling Center Plus. The work group will identify ways to improve the customer experience and provide ideas for the layout of the new building as well as suggestions on signage and facility flow.

"The new building will expand upon the county's integrated solid waste management system, and advance sustainability goals," said Tony Hill, Director of Environmental Resources. Additional space will allow further processing of residential and business waste and increase reuse and recycling.

The Olmsted County Recycling Center Plus was built in 1986 and has outgrown its original purpose. The operation of the facility has changed from collecting only glass, aluminum cans, newspaper, cardboard, steel cans, and office paper for recycling. The current facility additionally handles self-haul garbage and collects scrap metal, appliances, electronic waste, and mattresses for recycling. The number of customers using the facility has more than doubled in the last 15 years. The facility currently averages around 120,000 customer visits per year.



A rendering of the proposed Community Reuse & Recycling Center located to the east of the Olmsted Waste-to-Energy Facility and proposed materials recovery facility (MRF) via RRT Design & Construction

Leadership Greater Rochester Tours Olmsted Waste-to-Energy Facility

On Thursday, February 15th, representatives from [Leadership Greater Rochester](#) (LGR) toured through the Olmsted Waste-to-Energy Facility (OWEF). Participants got to see how the facility processes garbage to create steam and electricity for buildings on the Olmsted County District Energy System.

The LGR team also learned that the OWEF is just one component of Olmsted County's Integrated Solid Waste Management System. This system includes the Recycling Center Plus, Hazardous Waste Facility, Compost Site, OWEF, and Kalmar Landfill. Effective waste education helps us all to become stewards of our environment.



Members of Leadership Greater Rochester pose for a picture in the OWEF Control Room; photo credit: Anthony Wittmer

Disposal Discussion: Paper Plates & Napkins

Throw paper plates, napkins, and plastic cutlery in the garbage. Materials recovery facilities (MRFs) in Minnesota do NOT want these items in your recycling cart.

It's a bit misleading to print the recycling symbol and the word "RECYCLABLE" on a product that also states (in small font)..."May be recycled if you have access to a recycler that accepts paper products containing food residue. Such facilities may not exist in your area."

[Visit our website](#) to learn more about the items that can and cannot go in your recycling cart.



A soiled paper plate and napkin; photo credit: Anthony Wittmer

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