



## Streets Division

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To: Warren Hansen

From: George Dreckmann

Subject: Recycling/Composting and Food Carts

I was happy to see that you and the Vending Oversight Committee have been discussing recycling and composting in relations to Madison's outstanding food cart program. I want to share some thoughts I have on the topics and offer my services to the Committee as you plan a path forward.

As you may know, the Streets Division is working on a program to divert organic material, including food waste, for composting. We have been conducting a pilot program for 18 months and are in the process of planning the construction of an anaerobic digester to handle the material we collect. We certainly want to make sure that we include material from our food carts in the program.

A key to a successful composting program is the elimination of contaminants from the composting stream. Packaging and take out containers are a significant source of this contamination. Currently most vendors use Styrofoam containers for their products. There are compostable containers available but they cost significantly more than their plastic counterparts.

Right now the waste that we collect in the downtown area is landfilled. Any compostable containers that are used find their way to the landfill and do not degrade significantly due to the lack of air, sunlight, and moisture. I do not believe that the added expense of compostable containers for our food cart vendors is justified at this time because the containers are being landfilled.

I do believe that once we have established a source separated organics program and have a digester to compost this waste it would make sense to take action on noncompostable containers and cups. It is my intention to seek an ordinance banning restaurants, delicatessens, and food carts from using Styrofoam and other noncompostable containers when we have our program up and running. Until then, I don't see any advantage to requiring compostable take out containers.

The issue of requiring the use of recyclable containers for food cart vendors is an easy one to tackle. Since we now accept most types of plastic food containers for recycling (we can even recycle clean Styrofoam take out boxes at our drop off site) we should be able to develop a list of acceptable containers for our vendors to use. I also think it would be appropriate for the Vending Oversight Committee to require that all containers sold by vendors be acceptable in our recycling program.

I think that it would be important for us to work on signage that will link the food carts to the recycling containers on the Mall/Concourse so customers know what they can recycle and where to do it. The

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universal signage issue is part of a larger project I will be working on as part of the City's Sustainability plan and I think coordinating our efforts downtown would be a logical place to start.

I will be happy to come to a committee meeting or discuss these issues with interested Vending Oversight Committee members. I look forward to working with you and the Committee on these or any other waste related issues.