

## Zero Waste Potential in Dorchester and Roxbury: The Boston Recycling Coalition Community Survey

With an eye towards public health, climate emissions reduction, economic development and litter reduction, the Boston Recycling Coalition (BRC) has been active for several years in a campaign to promote a comprehensive Zero Waste plan for Boston. We aim to include all stakeholders in a planning process that delivers a Zero Waste Master Plan meeting the needs of residents, contractors, municipal officials, workers and the environmental community.

The City of Boston’s Environment and Public Works Departments have described Dorchester and Roxbury as neighborhoods with low rates of participation in existing waste diversion programs. To better assess the potential of Zero Waste in these communities, we developed a nine-question survey protocol designed to solicit rich data about experiences and perceptions of recycling and composting among Dorchester and Roxbury residents. BRC representatives administered the door-to-door survey over a four-month period from April to July 2015.

### Boots on the Ground: Outreach and Survey Methodology

During our survey campaign, **BRC representatives knocked on roughly 400 doors in Dorchester and Roxbury.**

The City’s Public Works Department provided us with doorhanger fliers with information about recycling, which were left at each home. Residents who answered the door were surveyed about their waste diversion practices, challenges, and awareness.

Representatives from the BRC also collected surveys from Dorchester and Roxbury residents at the Codman Square Farmers Market; from walk-ins to the Boston Workers’ Alliance office in Dorchester; and via online distribution tools.

<b>Dorchester + Roxbury Community Recycling Survey Protocol</b>
1. How often do you put out any recycling (recycling bin/barrel) on pickup day?
2. How familiar are you with the City’s recycling program rules?
2.1 Do you need more recycling information in another language?
3. Does the recycling truck come to your street for pickup every week?
4. Would you recycle household scraps if the City provided that service?
4.1 Do you compost now?
5. Have you ever contacted City Hall about recycling problems?
6. Do you need anything to help you recycle more?
7. Would you or anyone you know like to take advantage of jobs or other economic opportunities in the Zero Waste industry?

**A total of 139 Dorchester and Roxbury residents completed the survey.**



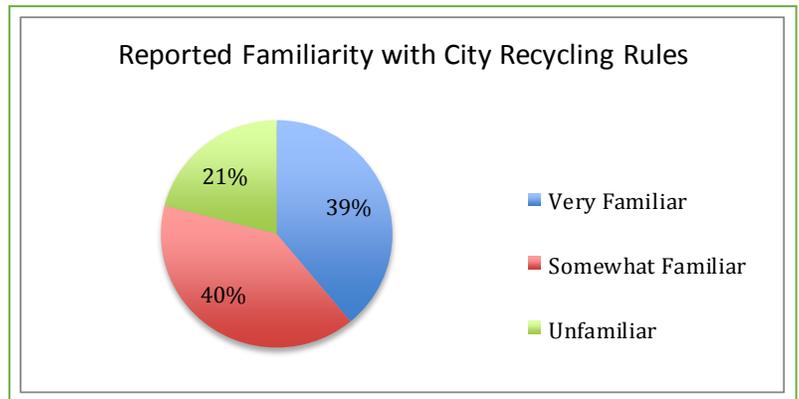
## Waste Reduction Needs and Opportunities in Dorchester + Roxbury: Survey Results

Q1: How often do you put out any recycling (recycling bin/barrel) on pickup day?

**Sixty-nine percent of survey respondents reported always putting out their recycling on pick up days.** Another 16.5% reported putting out their recycling every other week, while an additional 8% of survey said they rarely put out their recycling and 6.5% said they never put out recycling.

Q2: How familiar are you with the City's recycling program rules?

**The majority of residents we surveyed reported being very familiar (39%) or somewhat familiar (40%) with City recycling rules.** Twenty-one percent said they were unfamiliar with the rules.



Q2.1: Do you need more recycling information in another language?

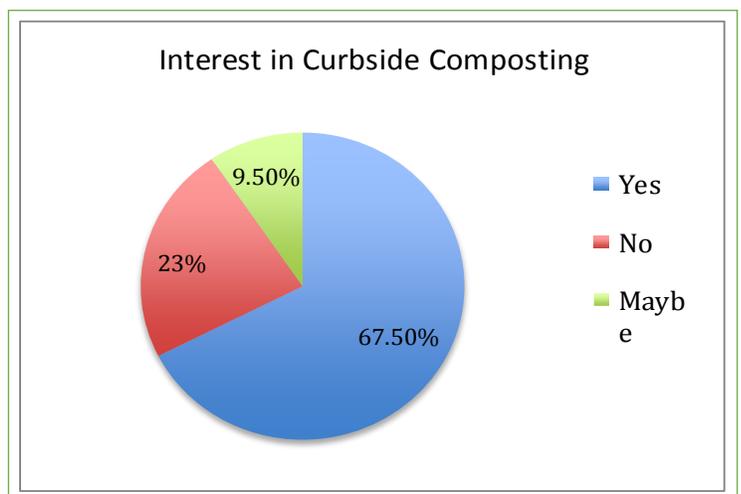
Recycling information was requested in Spanish (3 respondents) and in Haitian Creole (1 respondent).

Q3: Does the recycling truck come to your street for pickup every week?

Seventy-two percent of residents reported recycling trucks coming to their streets every week; 6% reported trucks coming every other week. Several people mentioned that the trucks occasionally miss their streets for pick-ups, but not often enough for them to answer "every other week" instead of "always". Some residents said the truck came only sometimes (6%), rarely (1%), or not at all (2%). Finally, 13% of respondents indicated they did not know whether the truck came to the street for pickup.

Q4: Would you recycle household food scraps if the City provided that service?

**A large number of residents (67.5%) reported that they would compost household food scraps if the City provided that service, and an additional 13% of respondents said they would maybe participate. Only 23% of respondents said they would not participate.**



Q4.1: Do you compost now?

**Of the residents we surveyed, 20% currently compost at home, while 68% do not.** Another 12% use a kitchen sink garbage disposal for food scraps. No residents reported bringing food scraps to city collection sites.

Q5: Have you ever contacted City Hall about recycling problems?

**Most survey respondents (82%) said they had not contacted City Hall about recycling problems.** However, 18% reported that they had contacted City Hall about recycling problems to report missing or stolen bins, report animals in their bins, request additional bins, request special pickups, or deal with a fine related to bin placement.

Q6: Do you need anything to help you recycle more?

Residents specifying that they needed additional support to be able to recycle more requested more bins (13) and information (8), Styrofoam recycling opportunities (2), and food waste pickups (2).

*Public housing just has dumpsters out back --  
no blue bins.*

-Public Housing Resident and BRC Community  
Recycling Survey Respondent

Q7: Would you or anyone you know like to take advantage of jobs or other economic opportunities in the Zero Waste industry?

**Just over half (53%) of the residents surveyed said that they or somebody they knew would like to take advantage of opportunities in the Zero Waste industry.** The remaining 47% of respondents reported they did not.

## Dorchester and Roxbury Have Zero Waste Potential: Analysis

Our outreach and survey efforts demonstrate great potential to expand recycling, composting, and other Zero Waste efforts in Dorchester and Roxbury. The City of Boston has characterized these neighborhoods as places where recycling practices are poor. Yet, a large number of the community members we engaged with reported recycling regularly, said they would like to participate in a food scraps curbside collection program, and expressed interest in economic opportunities and jobs associated with a growing Zero Waste industry.

Here's what we learned:

- **Residents who are recycling or composting are doing so despite expressing obstacles.** Public housing residents in particular have a lack of access to information about recycling. The Boston Housing Authority planned to put recycling opportunities in place at every public housing development in Boston by September 2014, but at least one public housing resident reported their development had no bins.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Boston Housing Authority. 2014. "Recycling." Available at: <https://www.bostonhousing.org/en/For-Public-Housing/Your-Healthy-Home/Recycling.aspx>.

- **Landlords are struggling with the municipal recycling program.** We heard from landlords that they have concerns about the reliability of e-waste pickup and the potential to be fined if recyclable materials build up. Concerns like these discourage landlords from providing their tenants with resources for recycling: especially when they also believe their tenants will not take advantage of waste diversion opportunities even if they provide them.
- **Dorchester and Roxbury residents are participating in civic groups that keep streets clean and neighborhoods beautiful.** Alaska Street, for example, has won recognition as the cleanest in the city, and several residents we spoke with mentioned taking the initiative to remove trash from their streets.
- **Dorchester and Roxbury are prime locations for a food scraps curbside collection program.** Over 3/4s of the residents we surveyed indicated they'd be likely to participate in such a program – and over 2/3s of the residents we surveyed are not currently composting. These numbers indicate huge potential to grow a curbside composting program in these communities.
- **People want Zero Waste jobs.** Dorchester and Roxbury community members are extremely excited by the prospect of jobs associated with the growing Zero Waste sector. In these communities, recycling, composting, and other waste reduction programs are about much more than the environment.

## Tapping Into Zero Waste Potential in Dorchester and Roxbury: Recommendations

Dorchester and Roxbury residents are untapped partners in the City of Boston's waste reduction work. The City must find appropriate avenues for these neighborhoods to participate as Boston moves toward Zero Waste. As that happens, Zero Waste messaging needs to articulate the economic, environmental, and community health benefits of waste diversion and reduction.

**1. Educate landlords.** Landlords are essential to the success of waste diversion and reduction in Boston since fully two thirds of residents are tenants. They should be a key target group for educational campaigns about Boston's municipal recycling program.

**2. Give public housing residents information about waste diversion.** These residents need better information about how recycling works in their homes.

**3. Prioritize Dorchester and Roxbury as pilot communities for curbside composting.** The enthusiasm for composting is high among Dorchester and Roxbury residents and most of them aren't currently composting.

**4. Capitalize on existing neighborhood networks.** Dorchester and Roxbury residents who are already civic and environmental stewards are ideal ambassadors for the City of Boston's recycling program. Their energy and social capital should be channeled into Boston's municipal waste reduction efforts.

**5. Include jobs and reuse in zero waste planning.** Boston has an opportunity to develop a thriving Zero Waste workforce, with workers participating in innovative, local ventures for reuse and remanufacturing and serving as ambassadors of the City's waste reduction programs in their own communities.