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**BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL
PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT
COMMITTEE**

Mission Statement

On behalf of the Citizens of Baltimore City, the mission of the **Public Health and Environment Committee** is dedicated to safeguarding the well-being of Baltimore's residents by advancing policies that promote health equity, environmental justice, and sustainability. Recognizing the deep connection between public health and the environment, the committee works to reduce health disparities, improve access to essential services, and address climate-related challenges that impact communities.

**The Honorable Phylicia Porter
Chair**

PUBLIC HEARING

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2026
10:00 AM**

COUNCIL CHAMBERS

RECONVENING HEARING

Legislative Oversight #LO25-0017

Zero Waste

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CITY OF BALTIMORE

Brandon M. Scott – Mayor
Zeke Cohen – Council President



Office of Council Services

Nancy Mead - Director
100 Holliday Street, Room 415
Baltimore, MD 21202

BILL SYNOPSIS

Committee: Public Health and Environment

Legislative Oversight: LO25-0017

Zero Waste

RECONVENING HEARING

Sponsor: *Councilmembers Porter, et al*

Introduced: *March 24, 2025*

Purpose:

For the purpose of assessing the City of Baltimore’s progress toward achieving its Zero Waste goals, as outlined in the Baltimore Sustainability Plan, examining the effectiveness of current waste reduction, recycling, and composting programs; evaluating challenges in implementation and enforcement; and exploring opportunities for improvements and investment in sustainable waste management infrastructure.

Effective: Upon enactment.

Background

On April 30, 2025, the committee held its first hearing on this legislative oversight topic.

Following are notes taken during the hearing:¹

Major Speakers

Ava Richardson, Office of Sustainability
Sophia Hussein, Department of Public Works
Matt Garbark, Department of Public Works
Tierra Brown, Department of Public Works
Brad Rogers, South Baltimore Gateway Partnership

¹ Notes taken by **Deontre Hayes, Analyst**, during the April 30th committee hearing

Major Issues Discussed

- 1. Zero Waste Progress & Strategy:** Evaluation of Baltimore’s progress toward zero waste goals as outlined in the Sustainability and “Less Waste, Better Baltimore” plans.
- 2. Waste Diversion Performance:** Discussion around reduced residential diversion rate (from 18% in 2017 to 16% in 2024) due to increased waste generation.
- 3. Organics and Composting:** Focus on expanding composting efforts, current programs, future infrastructure at Bowley’s Lane, and the limitations due to funding.
- 4. Recycling Contamination & Public Perception:** Concerns over public distrust that recycling is truly being recycled; calls for stronger education and messaging.
- 5. Enforcement and Behavioral Change:** Need for better education and stronger coordination across agencies to encourage compliance and recycling practices.
- 6. Legislative & Policy Opportunities:** Advocacy for extended producer responsibility, bottle laws, right-to-repair legislation, and other zero waste-related policies.
- 7. Urgency of Landfill & Incinerator Planning:** Warnings about landfill capacity (4 years remaining) and costly expansion (\$100M), with the Wheelabrator incinerator contract expiring in 2030-31.
- 8. Funding & Timeline Concerns:** Multiple councilmembers requested a clear implementation timeline and tracking mechanism for the zero waste initiatives.

Further Study – Was further study requested? **YES**

Committee requests with specified timelines where applicable:

1. **Council President Zeke Cohen** requested a field trip for council members to visit the Waste Management recycling facility in Elkridge to observe the recycling process firsthand. He emphasized the importance of organizing this trip as soon as possible to help council members better understand the process.
2. **Vice Chair Conway** requested more regular reporting and public tracking of progress on the Less Waste Better Baltimore plan, particularly to track and share waste diversion statistics publicly on a more frequent basis. He emphasized that this should be done on a regular basis moving forward, with more consistent updates and clear visibility for the public.
3. Council President Zeke Cohen further requested a better communication plan to ensure the public understands that recycling is being properly processed and not just thrown into a landfill. He also requested a video documentary showcasing the city’s recycling process, to help dispel myths and ensure public confidence. He requested that the video be released soon, with a clear timeline for its completion.
4. **Vice Chair Conway** inquired about the timeline for implementation of the Less Waste Better Baltimore plan and specifically asked for more detailed information on the timeline for waste diversion projects, including the expansion of composting and recycling infrastructure. He requested clear

- milestones and deadlines for these projects, emphasizing that a structured timeline is crucial to ensure progress toward the city's zero waste goals.
5. **Chairwoman Porter** requested a formal update on the status of the city's landfill expansion project at Quarantine Road and the status of the incinerator contract, as both are closely linked to the city's waste management and zero waste goals. She requested that this update be tracked throughout future hearings, with regular updates on the status of the expansion project and the incinerator contract.
 6. **Councilman Mark Parker** requested quantifiable data on the residential waste diversion rate from 2017 to 2024, particularly how much of the material from single-stream recycling is actually processed as recycling and not dumped in landfills. He also requested more specific metrics on diversion, especially at the district level, to ensure proper tracking and accountability in recycling programs. He requested that this data be provided within the next two weeks for review.
 7. **Councilman Mark Dorsey** requested information on yard waste diversion efforts, especially funding for separate yard waste collection. He also wanted clarity on whether the requested funds had been approved for the program's implementation. He asked for a follow-up within one month to confirm the status of the requested funds and to outline the next steps in the yard waste diversion process.
 8. Councilman Dorsey requested a formal update on the requested funds for yard waste diversion and questioned whether the city was making progress on implementing yard waste collection as part of the broader waste diversion plan. He requested regular updates on this initiative and asked for specific details on any timeline adjustments as the project evolves.
 9. **Councilwoman Ramos** requested that recycling data be broken down by district, so that the committee could track recycling performance by area and promote friendly competition among council districts. She asked for the data to be available for the next meeting, so it could be used to help motivate residents and council members.
 10. **Councilman Torrence** requested that DPW provide more information on the enhancement request for the yard waste diversion program, including details on the funding request for FY 2026, the scope of the program, and the anticipated impact of the program. He requested that DPW provide this information by the next legislative oversight hearing.
 11. **Councilman Parker** specifically asked for detailed information regarding the enhancement request for yard waste collection in FY 2026, including how much was requested, what the program entails, and how it impacts overall waste management. He requested that the details of the enhancement request be provided within two weeks for further discussion at the next committee meeting.

On February 25, 2026, the committee will reconvene the hearing.

Additional Information

Fiscal Note: None

Information Source(s): Notes taken by Deontre Hayes, Analyst, during April 30, 2025, committee hearing.

Marguerite Currin

Analysis by: Marguerite Currin
Analysis Date: February 23, 2026

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