**2016 PROGRAM EXCELLENCE AWARD NOMINATION ENTRY**

**CITY OF PHOENIX, AZ**

**MARCH 8, 2016**

**The Reimagine Phoenix Initiative: Transforming Trash Into Resources**

The city of Phoenix has provided trash and recycling services to more than 390,000 households for 25 years. The city owns two transfer stations, each with a Materials Recovery Facility, as well as a 2,600-acre landfill located in Buckeye, Ariz., 60 miles away from the downtown core. Yet, despite the city’s investment in waste management infrastructure and services, the 6th largest city in the nation has a below-average waste diversion rate of 20 percent.

As it stands, city staff travels 7 million miles each year picking up 2 billion pounds of residential trash that is buried in the landfill. With a projected population increase of three to five million by 2050, Phoenix leaders realize the city’s current waste management practice will soon be unsustainable. City leaders agreed that the city’s overall sustainability goal needs to be clear and that it will require a behavioral shift in residents.

That is why in 2013, the city launched its sustainability initiative, Reimagine Phoenix, with a clear goal of increasing the city’s waste diversion rate to 40 percent by 2020. The initiative uses a three-pronged approach to reaching the 40 percent waste diversion goal: **enhancement or implementation of new solid waste programs for residents; expansion of community and educational outreach; and, development of key public and private partnerships.**

Since Reimagine Phoenix’s launch in 2013, the city has made significant strides in these three focus areas, bringing Phoenix closer to its waste diversion goal.

**ENHANCEMENT OR IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW SOLID WASTE PROGRAMS**

Waste diversion must be convenient for residents. Phoenix currently offers a weekly, single-stream recycling collection service, as well as a quarterly bulk trash/uncontained collection. Additionally, nine times each year, the department hosts a Household Hazardous Waste and Electronics weekend event, held at various locations throughout the city.

A year after the Reimagine Phoenix initiative was launched, a new pay-as-you-throw program was introduced to solid waste customers, called “Save as You Reduce and Recycle (SAY R&R).” This program offers a monthly savings of $3 on solid waste fees for switching from a large trash container to a medium. Customers who receive curbside recycling service are eligible to enroll. The objective is to incentivize customers to throw less waste and to take the time to sort out their recyclable materials.

Also in 2014, the first phase of a green organics/yard waste weekly curbside collection service was introduced. Since many Phoenix residents have adopted desert or xeriscape landscaping, the city identified households in areas with large properties and lush vegetation that could benefit from this waste diversion program. The Green Organics Curbside Collection program offers a tan-colored container for yard waste or green organics for an additional $5 in monthly solid waste fees. It provides about an $8 savings to customers who are accustomed to paying a monthly $13.60 fee for every trash can they normally fill with yard waste – with some filling up to seven trash cans every week. The green organics materials collected are sent to the city’s mulching facility instead of the landfill.

By the end of 2016, the city plans to open a composting facility with the capacity to process 110,000 tons of green organics, with room for more in the future. According to a recent Phoenix waste characterization study, approximately 50 percent of materials found in residential trash cans are yard waste, food scraps and compostable materials. The construction of this facility is a crucial step in implementing a food waste collection program for residents and decreasing the amount of compostable materials and food waste sent to the landfill.

**EXPANSION OF COMMUNITY AND EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH**

To help residents better understand what they can do to help achieve the citywide goal of a 40 percent waste diversion rate by 2020, the city has a dedicated group of specialists who provide waste diversion presentations to schools, neighborhood meetings, church groups and other community meetings. This team provides more than 1,700 presentations every year. Furthermore, these presentations also are conducted in Spanish, with educational materials available in English and Spanish.

Recently, Phoenix has been in the spotlight as the venue for high profile major sporting events, such as the Super Bowl XLIX (49) in 2015 and the College Football Playoff in 2016. The city leverages these events to educate event-goers about the city’s commitment to waste diversion by adding a “composting” option to the usual “trash” and “recycling” receptacles. The city achieved a 73 percent waste diversion goal during the Super Bowl Central activities because of well-organized collection and disposal operations. Even more impressive, the recent College Football Playoffs resulted in an 81 percent waste diversion rate, thanks to staff who assisted event goers in sorting their waste.

In addition to person-to-person outreach, the city actively uses social media and digital marketing to reach a wider demographic. Social media helps promote Phoenix’s innovations in waste management to the Phoenix audience and beyond. Social media posts are robust, featuring waste diversion tips, a Q&A forum, employee features, contests, sustainability event information, latest news on solid waste program and how-to videos. The goal of each post is to increase awareness about the Reimagine Phoenix goal, and get residents to think sustainably in their everyday decisions.

In March, “recycling” will soon be on residents’ minds once again as the city, in partnership with Keep America Beautiful, launches the “Top 10 in the Bin” campaign to re-educate and refresh residents’ minds about recycling the right way. With many conflicting messages in the national media about recycling, this campaign’s message is concise and clear. Plus, it provides a simple reminder of the three materials that should not be placed in the recycling bin – clothing/textiles; plastic bags; and electronics. The city plans to use digital ads, social media, newsletters, inserts in the city services bill and traditional media throughout 2016 to promote the “Top 10 in the Bin” campaign.

In the near future, the city plans to contract with a company to assist in door-to-door educational outreach, conducting surveys, sustainability event planning and promoting an engaging program that incentivizes residents to divert more waste.

**DEVELOPMENT OF KEY PUBLIC ND PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS**

Arizona State University has been a staunch supporter of the Reimagine Phoenix initiative from its inception. Together with ASU’s Walton Sustainability Solutions Initiative, the Resource Innovation and Solutions Network (RISN), was formed giving the city and other organizations access to a global network of public and private organizations to businesses and municipalities that are committed to finding innovative solutions to current sustainability issues. Through the RISN partnership, ASU and Phoenix have hosted several quarterly meetings with other municipalities to discuss the current state of waste management in the state and collectively offer solutions to pressing issues. ASU offers research to study and complement the practical solutions and innovations being developed by the city of Phoenix.

In 2015, the Phoenix mayor and city council members approved the development of the Resource Innovation Campus (RIC) on a 50-acre site adjacent to the city’s 27th Avenue Transfer Station. The RIC invites waste-to-new product manufacturers to establish their businesses on the campus with direct access to the municipal waste stream. Additionally, the site will be home to the RISN Technology Solutions Incubator for start-ups and emerging technologies. Through an-ongoing series of Request for Proposals (RFP), Phoenix is identifying businesses, manufacturers and entrepreneurs to transform waste products into new products, as well as create jobs and stimulate the local economy. The most recent RFP process yielded a contract with Recycled City, LLC, a local company that will be collecting food waste on a bi-monthly basis from a handful of city -owned buildings in the downtown Phoenix area, for starters. The city has also entered into a contract with Goodwill of Central Arizona, who will be collecting the mattresses that are dropped off at the city’s transfer station. The core components of the mattresses – metal, wood and fiber – will be separated and recycled.

The next RFP in the works involves an opportunity to transform palm fronds, yard waste material often found in the city’s waste stream, into viable products. The city hopes to find a business willing to establish their palm fronds manufacturing headquarter in the RIC campus to be closer to the city’s waste stream and have direct access to this resource. The RFP is ongoing and is receiving interest from businesses nationwide.

Phoenix’s most recent development in fostering public and private partnerships that could help the city in reaching its 40 percent waste diversion goal by becoming the first U.S. major city to become a member of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation’s Circular Economy 100 program. This elite membership allows Phoenix to have access and learn from major corporations and global governments whose intent is to develop a circular economy. The networking opportunities this membership provides can help Phoenix identify focus areas to accelerate solutions that will transition the city to a circular economy. The city’s association and membership with the foundation also could be valuable to members of the community, especially to entrepreneurs seeking funding for their startup waste-to-product businesses.

Judging from the city’s accomplishments and future plans, Phoenix is positioning itself to be an industry leader in waste management and sustainability. Phoenix may have a current waste diversion rate of 20 percent, but the strides and improvements made in its solid waste programs, educational outreach and public-private partnerships could only increase the city’s waste diversion rate. The commitment and support from its leaders, as well as its employees’ dedication, hope to transition the 6th largest city in the nation into a circular economy model city that invites a variety of industries and opens doors for innovations and collaboration.