



Reuse and Recycling of Bulky Household Items Metro Vancouver Recycling and Waste Centres

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Executive Summary

Metro Vancouver contracted the Share Reuse Repair Initiative (SRRI), a project of Makeway Charitable Society, to conduct a study about how they can support member jurisdictions to enhance the collection, reuse, and recycling of bulky household items, such as furniture, mattresses, appliances, and other large items.

The researchers from SRRI conducted a survey of member jurisdictions, a review of existing programs, and an interview with Metro Vancouver Solid Waste Services staff to understand the baseline conditions for bulky household item collection and diversion in the region. Additionally, they conducted market research of reuse organisations and secondary research of local government programs to explore examples from beyond the region that support the reuse and recycling of bulky household items. Key findings from the research were brought to a workshop engaging staff from member jurisdictions and Metro Vancouver, where challenges, opportunities, and potential options for enhancing bulky item collection, recycling, and reuse were discussed.

Some Metro Vancouver member jurisdictions already engage in several reuse activities including:

- City-wide garage sales or give away events at civic facilities or throughout the cities with city promoted guidelines, promotion, and post-event clean up.
- Donation drop-off events for the recycling and reuse of household goods.
- Free swap events for clothing and household goods hosted at civic facilities.

Overall, the study revealed some of the complex challenges for municipalities posed by bulky household items, including servicing multi-family units and preventing illegal dumping. Participants in the study expressed broad approval for Metro Vancouver to support member jurisdictions in overcoming these challenges to enhance the reuse, repair, and recycling of bulky household items. Based on findings from the research and workshop, four short-term and nine long-term opportunities were identified for consideration by Metro Vancouver and member jurisdictions (Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of short-term and long-term opportunities

Short-term

1. Build reuse education and awareness into communication about bulky items
2. Identify more reuse organisations that take bulky items
3. Pilot bulky item reuse programs that build on established recycling behaviours
4. Establish metrics to understand the bulky items currently collected and their potential for reuse
5. Develop and expand reuse event capacity
6. Provide a regional platform for discussion on advancing bulky item reuse
7. Identify potential funders and funding models to advance bulky item reuse

Long-term

1. Contract a reuse partner to pick up reusable bulky items
2. Explore policies and programs to support bulky-item reuse opportunities in multi-family units
3. Explore technologies to improve ease of bulky-item reuse
4. Advocate for design for durability, care and repair for bulky items
5. Promote and coordinate bulky-item reuse programs at a regional level
6. Advocate for skills development programs for repair and refurbishment of bulky items

Introduction

Metro Vancouver is interested in determining how it can support municipalities across the region to enhance the collection and diversion of bulky household items from disposal towards recycling and reuse. Residents are responsible for properly managing furniture and other bulky items they no longer want, and arranging reuse, recycling, or disposal collection services. Some member jurisdictions support residents with bulky item pick up programs, and all members maintain clean communities by providing taxpayer funded illegal dumping clean-up services on streets, lanes and other public property. Metro Vancouver wants to explore options to improve the existing bulky item services, which vary from municipality to municipality, and to consider new approaches that would enhance their recycling and reuse rates.

Metro Vancouver plays a variety of roles regarding bulky household items. Residents can drop off mattresses, large appliances, and other large items for recycling and responsible disposal at Metro Vancouver recycling and waste centres. The “Waste in its Place” campaign provides messages to residents concerning responsible recycling or disposal of items. They also provide a [disposal cost estimator tool](#) for estimating disposal costs and the [MVrecycles.org](https://www.mvrecycles.org) website, which helps residents search for a place to recycle their bulky items.

KEY TERMS

BULKY HOUSEHOLD ITEMS: Any household item that is too large to be disposed of via regular household garbage and recycling pick-up programs. Bulky household items include, for example: furniture, large appliances (e.g., dishwasher, refrigerator), domestic construction materials, exercise equipment, and mattresses.

ILLEGAL DUMPING: Deliberate abandonment of waste on public or private property. Illegal dumping happens in both rural and urban environments (e.g., furniture left in back alleys, construction waste dumped on farmland).

For the purposes of this report, we are concerned with the illegal dumping of bulky household items, rather than of general household garbage.

SCOPE OF WORK

Metro Vancouver contracted the Share Reuse Repair Initiative (SRRI), a project of Makeway Charitable Society, to conduct a study about ways to enhance the approach to managing bulky household items in the region, with a primary focus on furniture and household appliances.

The purposes of this project are to:

- » Understand the current approaches towards managing bulky items across the region;
- » Identify options and opportunities for moving bulky household items up the waste hierarchy from illegal dumping and landfill to recycling and ultimately reuse, and;
- » Consider effective roles for Metro Vancouver to support member municipalities in this effort.

The project was organised into three phases of work:

Phase 1: Baseline Conditions

- » Establish the baseline conditions regarding bulky item waste collection, materials composition, challenges, and opportunities in the region.

Phase 2: Markets for Reuse and Best Practices

- » Understand the demand and reuse potential for bulky items in the current market.
- » Identify example approaches of bulky items reuse in municipalities beyond the region.

Phase 3: Workshops and Recommendations

- » Engage members in discussion of opportunities for enhancing reuse and recycling of bulky items.
- » Share key findings and options for consideration by Metro Vancouver and members.

This report presents insights from this three-phase engagement. Firstly, an overview of the current baseline conditions is presented, including strengths and challenges for current bulky item programs. Alternative approaches are considered based on examples from beyond the region. Finally, short-term and long-term options and opportunities are presented that Metro Vancouver and its members may consider for enhancing the collection, recycling, and reuse of bulky household items. The work undertaken in each phase is described in the section that follows.

Methodology

PHASE 1: BASELINE CONDITIONS

In Phase 1, the project team sought to understand the current approaches of member jurisdictions to manage bulky household items, as well the role of Metro Vancouver in this space, and their goals for the project. Program materials from Metro Vancouver and member jurisdiction websites were reviewed, as well as existing data on the volume and nature of illegally dumped materials. A two-hour group interview was conducted with Metro Vancouver solid waste staff.

A survey was also designed and distributed to members through Metro Vancouver's networks. The survey included questions to discern: what items are being collected; the nature of pick-up programs; information about where items go—reuse, recycling, or disposal; and how abandoned items are being managed. The survey also asked respondents to describe strengths and challenges for their current bulky item programs, as well as opportunities for improvement and resources needed. The survey received 17 responses, representing 12 municipalities (11 of which were from the Metro Vancouver region).

PHASE 2: MARKETS FOR REUSE AND APPROACHES TO BULKY ITEM REUSE

In Phase 2, primary and secondary research was conducted to understand current demand for reused bulky items. A market scan was undertaken through online research and phone calls with a sample of entities who resell a cross-section of bulky household items, such as furniture, household appliances, mattresses, and home DIY/construction materials. Some organisations were based in the region to provide a sense of the local market, and others selected were outside the region based on their innovative approaches, such as inclusion of repair, or their demonstrated scalability. Additional secondary research was conducted to understand the range of approaches taken by municipalities for the reuse of bulky items beyond the region; provincial, national, and international approaches were included.

PHASE 3: WORKSHOPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the third phase, preliminary findings from Phases 1 and 2 were brought into a half-day workshop involving Metro Vancouver and solid waste management staff from member jurisdictions. 22 municipal staff attended the workshop, along with two facilitators from the Share Reuse Repair Initiative, and five Metro Vancouver staff. **The goals of the workshop were to:**

- » Address knowledge gaps about member municipality approaches to bulky household items and illegally dumped items.
- » Discuss strengths and challenges of existing bulky item pick-up programs.
- » Identify opportunities to improve the reuse of bulky items.

The workshop was structured into two discussions. After presenting preliminary findings for the range of bulky items collection and management practices in the region, participants discussed the strengths, challenges, and opportunities of municipal bulky item pick-up and/or illegal dumping programs. In the second half of the workshop, the project team presented case studies showcasing municipal approaches to the reuse of bulky items. Participants then engaged in a second discussion to discuss what could be done to enhance the reuse of bulky items in the short and long term. A representative from each discussion group shared their key findings with the broader audience. A notetaker from the project team recorded notes of the discussion at each table, which were compiled and analysed to inform this report.

Findings

BASELINE CONDITIONS: STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES FOR BULKY ITEM SERVICES

Many municipalities in Metro Vancouver have programs in place to manage bulky household items in the region. Through education, residents are encouraged to donate items or drop them off directly at municipal or regional facilities. Residents are responsible for properly managing furniture and other bulky items they no longer want, and arranging reuse, recycling, or disposal collection services. Some member jurisdictions support residents with bulky item pick up programs, and all members maintain clean communities by providing tax payer funded illegal dumping clean-up services on streets, lanes and other public property

By collecting these materials, members are preventing bulky household items from polluting the environment and are creating opportunities to divert as much material as possible from disposal. The following section summarises the current strengths, challenges, and opportunities for bulky item collection and illegal dumping clean-up programs in the region, as well as the current situation for the reuse of bulky items through municipal programs.

Illegal Dumping Clean-up Programs

Illegal dumping clean-up programs are a vital tool for managing abandoned bulky items in urban and rural environments. Residents can report illegally dumped items to member jurisdictions, who dispatch staff to investigate and recover items. Findings from the survey conducted by Share Reuse Repair Initiative align with Metro Vancouver's annual data that the most commonly illegally dumped bulky items are furniture, large appliances, mattresses, and construction materials. Left uncollected, illegally dumped materials attract more illegal dumping, and can pose hazards to people, wildlife and the environment, producing contamination, safety hazards, and wildfire risks. Therefore, members

provide essential services in response to reports of illegal dumping on streets, lanes, parks, and other public property, and make efforts to reduce the frequency of illegal dumping.

Survey and workshop participants mentioned the following challenges associated with illegal dumping clean-up programs:

- » **Bylaw Enforcement.** While almost every member has an illegal dumping bylaw to deter dumping, survey respondents were almost unanimous in describing the challenges of enforcing these bylaws due to difficulties in identifying and tracking down those who are dumping items.
- » **Resource Intensive.** Because abandoned items may be large, waterlogged, or hard to retrieve from inconvenient locations, the clean-up of illegally dumped bulky items can be costly, resource-intensive, and hazardous for pick-up crews.
- » **Continuing Barriers to Bulky Item Disposal.** Illegal dumping clean-up programs and associated informational campaigns do not address the barriers that residents may face in appropriately disposing of bulky items, such as cost, physical mobility, and vehicle access. Communication and educational campaigns aimed at preventing illegal dumping, such as *Put Waste in its Place*, inform residents about where items should be going, but do not address other barriers to bulky item management.

Members with only illegal dumping clean-up programs identified the following barriers to implementing residential bulky item pick-up programs:

- » **Cost and Resourcing.** For members already operating an illegal dumping clean-up program, implementing a residential pick-up program for bulky items is an additional investment, requiring resources including labour and equipment. Members with relatively low levels of illegal dumping found that their illegal dumping clean-up program was sufficient to maintain public sanitation requirements without investing additional resources into a new residential pick-up program.
- » **The “Pile On” Effect.** Concerns exist that having scheduled pick-ups for bulky items will encourage neighbours to illegally dump with the expectation that the municipality will pick items up, overwhelming resources.

Bulky-Item Collection Programs

Bulky-item collection programs are a municipal waste management strategy designed to handle the collection and disposal of items such as furniture, appliances, and large electronic devices. In Metro Vancouver, these programs are organised by members and provide residents with a convenient and responsible way to dispose of large items that are not handled by regular waste and recycling collection services. Twelve of Metro Vancouver’s 23 member jurisdictions currently run residential bulky-item collection programs. **These programs include the following variations:**

- » **Scheduling Type:** Some programs have a fixed schedule of pick-ups (e.g., biannual, quarterly), whereas others allow residents to schedule an appointment for pick-up.
- » **Item Limitation:** Most programs have a limit on the number of items a household can dispose of annually or per pick-up, which helps manage the volume and cost of the service.
- » **Fee Structure:** Some programs are funded through a pay-per-use model while others are covered by taxes or utility fees.
- » **Operational Models:** Some programs are operated by municipal staff, while others contract the service out to a private waste collection organisation.

Municipal bulky item pick-up programs in the region currently sort items for recycling, with no established programs specifically targeting the reuse of bulky items. The move from recycling to reuse of bulky items is a complex one, with operational challenges to overcome. Metro Vancouver and its members are part of a small group of local governments leading the push upstream to reuse.

Strengths and benefits of bulky item pick-up programs provided by members:

- » **Reduce Illegal Dumping:** Survey respondents and workshop participants observed that regularly scheduled or on-call bulky item collection discourages residents from illegally dumping bulky items, thereby potentially saving members money and resources.
- » **Recycling:** By providing specific guidelines for bulky item recycling, such as covering mattresses to keep them dry, members can direct these items to appropriate recycling programs. Most bulky item collection programs in the region prioritise recycling over disposal for items like large mattresses, electronics, and appliances.
- » **Increase Access and Convenience:** Pick-up programs increase access to bulky item services for those who are unable to easily transport items to a drop-off location, such as those without a vehicle. Members emphasised the benefit of this service for seniors, who may be unable to easily lift bulky items.
- » **Customer Satisfaction:** Municipal pick-up programs had a high level of customer satisfaction, according to survey respondents and workshop participants.

Challenges associated with bulky item pick-up programs:

- » **Space for Sorting:** The lack of affordable land in the region makes it difficult to sort, triage, and store items for reuse once picked up.
- » **Declining Quality of Items:** There is a noticeable trend towards a decrease in the quality of bulky items, particularly furniture. This decline often makes items less suitable for reuse as they become cheaper to dispose of rather than repair. Conversations with industry experts, such as those from FibreNEW, a high-end couch refurbishment service, highlight the issue of declining repairability in the furniture sector.
- » **Cost and Availability of Repair Services:** Education on large item repair is challenging when service availability is low and the cost is not competitive with replacement.
- » **Weather Damage:** Municipal pick-up program staff are generally not insured to enter homes for pick-up, due to safety concerns. Therefore, most pick-ups happen at the curb side. Items left on the curb are susceptible to damage from weather conditions, further diminishing their potential for reuse. Additionally, water-logged items are heavy and challenging for pick-up crews to handle.
- » **Resource Allocation:** Managing the operational logistics and costs associated with bulky-item collection can be a challenge. Matching peak residential pick-up demand with collection resources can be challenging, which delay the pick-up of items and increase the likelihood of damage from weather conditions. Solutions include optimising collection routes, partnering with organisations to build capacity, and charging a fee to offset costs.
- » **Public Participation:** Encouraging consistent public participation and behaviour change around bulky household items is a challenge, since options that allow for recycling and reuse may seem less convenient for residents. Regular reminders and public education campaigns about the benefits of the program can help maintain high levels of community awareness and engagement.

- » **Trucks Used for Pick-up:** If packer trucks are used for bulky item collection, they crush items, removing their potential for reuse. Items like furniture have higher likelihood of being reusable if collected in good condition.
- » **Urban Density and Multi-family Units.** Multi-family units pose a challenge for densely populated municipalities without a pick-up program because many have privately contracted waste collection and little space to leave items at the curb side for pick up. Members with pick-up programs often limit this service to single-family homes because many multi-family units are not serviced by municipal waste collection. Members expressed concern about the potential volume of bulky items in densely populated areas, yet multi-family units are also a large source of abandoned items. The operational complexities surrounding multi-family units are a barrier to address for bulky item pick-up programs.
- » **Post-Collection Processing:** Properly sorting and processing collected items for reuse, recycling or disposal can be resource-intensive. Partnerships with local reuse, recycling, and waste management organisations can improve efficiency and capacity.
- » **Lack of Consistency Across Programs:** The member jurisdictions currently design their bulky-item collection programs for their individual community needs and resources. However, these differences in service provision can cause some confusion for residents.
- » **Cost and Effort of Disposal Compared to Reuse:** To reduce administration and encourage participation, large item pick-ups are often offered at no or low cost to residents. If reuse isn't part of the pick-up program, residents may find it easier and lower cost to dispose of an item through the large pick-up program than to look for reuse options.

APPROACHES TO THE REUSE OF BULKY HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

In the previous section, baseline conditions were presented for the collection and management of bulky household items in Metro Vancouver. Municipalities take a collection of different approaches; however, a number of barriers currently prevent the reuse of bulky items that are collected. In the following section, a number of approaches will be presented that could enhance the reuse of bulky household items. The approaches and options presented are primarily concerned with furniture and large appliances, which were identified as items of most concern and with most reuse potential by Metro Vancouver, survey respondents, and workshop participants.

Member jurisdiction staff identified several opportunities to incorporate more reuse in their bulky-item pick-up programs:

- » **Seek Opportunities for Reuse.** Members saw potential for bulky items picked up through their programs to be reused.
- » **Reuse Collection Fleet.** A cube van or flatbed truck was seen to be ideal for collection of reusable items and provided the benefit of being able to fit all types of materials in the one stop.
- » **Prompt Reuse in Communications.** Only some members currently prompt and redirect residents to reuse options when called for pick-up services.
- » **Expansion of Items Accepted.** Picking up more types of items could increase convenience for customers and potentially increase recycling rates.
- » **Metrics to Help Diversion Efforts.** Understanding what items are most often picked up through bulky item programs and in what condition may inform program development and potential for reuse.

- » **Partnerships.** Identifying reuse organisations that are already supporting the reuse of bulky items, such as furniture and appliances, and aligning efforts could provide a low effort, high return option for municipalities.
- » **Encourage Expansion of EPR.** Bulky item pick-up programs could be supported by an expansion of extended producer responsibility to include furniture.

Before Pick-up

While the focus of this report is bulky item pick-up programs, there are ways that member jurisdictions support the diversion of items before they reach municipal pick-up services. Many of these are already practised by Metro Vancouver and its member jurisdictions.

Giveaway Weekends

During designated Giveaway Weekends, residents are invited to place unneeded items such as furniture, appliances, and garden tools near the sidewalk or curb, marked as free for collection. This initiative promotes a community-wide exchange, allowing for the reuse of items, thus reducing disposal and potentially preventing illegal dumping (however, items left out uncollected may attract illegal dumping, especially if items are placed behind homes in laneways). To enhance the program's reach and effectiveness, involvement from community groups, schools, and local businesses is encouraged. Municipalities play a crucial role by issuing clear guidelines on acceptable items, labelling, and placement to avoid hazards and obstructions. Additionally, the resident organising a follow-up item clean-up ensures responsible disposal of unclaimed items.

Yard & Garage Sales

At yard and garage sales residents sell or give away unwanted items directly from their properties or from a designated location, such as a community hall. These events may be organised by grassroots organisations or by municipalities. Yard and garage sales not only help households declutter and earn from unused goods, but also encourage the reuse of items within the community. By diverting items before they reach municipal services, they reduce the burden on waste management systems. They also foster a sense of community and provide a fun, engaging way for neighbours to connect and discover treasures. Municipalities can support these initiatives by offering guidelines for organising sales, providing community spaces, promoting events, coordinating registration, and providing maps of participating households.

Drop-off Events

Residents are invited to bring bulky waste, including old furniture and large appliances to designated collection points. These events are typically organised by municipalities and scheduled periodically throughout the year, providing a predictable, organised way for residents to rid their homes of unwanted items without resorting to illegal dumping. Collecting bulky items in one place at a scheduled time can make the sorting of bulky items for reuse and recycling more efficient, and may encourage involvement from reuse and recycling organisations. Providing detailed information about what can and cannot be dropped off is important for the event's success and customer satisfaction. Setting up multiple drop-off points throughout a municipality or region can increase accessibility for all residents, encouraging greater participation. Engaging social enterprises in sorting and diverting collected items can expand the capacity of drop-off events, as well as the range of materials accepted and diverted from disposal. This can offer a valuable source of materials for reuse organisations as well as raising their profile in the community.

Case Studies: Innovative Municipal Approaches

As Metro Vancouver supports a shift towards reuse in its management of bulky household items, it can look to and learn from approaches in British Columbia, in Canada, and beyond. In the following section, four case studies are presented that exhibit innovative models that open possibilities for

reuse in the municipal management of bulky household items. The case studies are selected to represent a range of geographies, reuse rates, and levels of effort by local government.

City of Chilliwack Spring and Fall Clean-Ups

In Chilliwack, British Columbia, a [biannual clean-up initiative](#) effectively combines community service with waste management. The city collaborates with non-profit groups, each responsible for a designated section of Chilliwack, to facilitate the collection of bulky items from residents. Scheduled in the spring and fall, this program allows residents a two-week window to arrange pick-ups directly with the non-profits, followed by another two weeks when the pick-ups take place. In exchange for this service, residents are encouraged to make donations to the participating groups of \$40+ per truck. The city aids by promoting the event, coordinating logistics, and providing safety protocols for handling the items. The tipping fees for disposal of items by the non-profit groups are waived by the city, encouraging their participation.

While currently focused on waste collection, the program provides promising opportunities for reuse. The non-profit groups involved can sort through the collected items, retaining, donating, or selling those in reusable condition, thus potentially diverting significant waste from disposal. Due to its popularity, the clean-up events have expanded from once to twice yearly, and related initiatives like a citywide garage sale have seen substantial community engagement, with over 180 participants registered for the spring 2024 event. The City of Chilliwack provides an example of a low-effort program that could be leveraged to emphasise the reuse of bulky items.

Drummondville, QB

In Drummondville, Québec, a pilot project initiated in 2020 to repurpose bulky waste has evolved into a permanent, appointment-based collection service due to its success. The city, which serves a population of nearly 85,000, identified that 70% of bulky waste collected could potentially be reused or recycled. To address this, Drummondville introduced a [user-friendly online booking system](#) that allows residents to schedule pick-ups for reusable and recyclable bulky items, including reusable furniture, electronic devices, tires, mattresses, and residential construction waste, while optimising collection routes for efficiency. To operate the service, the municipality partners with local social enterprises, including Ressourcerie Transition, a reuse organisation that sells gently used furniture. In 2021, the program diverted 245 tonnes of waste, saved \$18,000 in disposal costs, and led to the elimination of one of three annual bulky waste drives. Encouraged by these outcomes, Drummondville plans to expand the service, exploring new waste streams and partnerships to further its waste reduction goals.¹

RENAB and Jsem Zpět, City of Brno (Czech Republic)

In Brno, Czech Republic, residents can divert bulky household items for reuse through two programs:

- » The [RENAB](#) program accepts non-upholstered furniture, including tables, chairs, bed frames, garden furniture, and children's furniture, which can be dropped off at one of seven designated waste collection centres. The city's Department of Social Welfare uses the items to furnish social housing and distributes to households without the financial means to buy new items for their homes.
- » The [Jsem Zpět](#) (I'm back) program accepts fully or partially functioning large electronic appliances, such as stoves, refrigerators, and laundry machines. Items can be dropped off or picked up free of charge. Minor repairs and safety checks are conducted before the items are reused by non-profit organisations, charities, or low-income households. The Jsem Zpět program is a partnership between the City of Brno, the primary waste management

¹ *Increasing waste diversion to reduce landfill use.* Green Municipal Fund. <https://greenmunicipalfund.ca/case-studies/increasing-waste-diversion-reduce-landfill-use>

organisation, Sako, and ELECTROWIN, a non-profit organisation that specialises in electronic waste collection.

Furniture Bank, ON

Furniture banks collect gently used furniture and redistribute it to people who are unable to furnish their homes, such as those transitioning out of shelters or unhoused situations, low-income families, refugees, and newcomers to Canada. By doing so, furniture banks not only assist in waste reduction but also play a crucial role in supporting vulnerable communities. This model promotes the reuse of furniture, preventing usable items from ending up going to disposal. Examples of furniture banks local to Metro Vancouver include HomeStart, Helping Families in Need Society, Better Cause Society, and Shelter to Home. However, these examples are smaller scale and these organizations may not have the capacity to take additional items.

Furniture Bank, Toronto, offers an example of a high-capacity, scalable model that partners effectively with local government as well as businesses such as IKEA. They collect gently used furniture from the public and corporate partners, and cooperate with local government departments and charities to redistribute the furniture to those in need. Their operation provides inclusive employment and training opportunities for those with barriers to employment through their Leg Up program and Indigenous-led Repair Workshop. While Furniture Bank partners with local governments to identify those in need of furniture, they are also interested in partnering with solid waste management departments to collect furniture and other household goods for reuse.

Practices for Success

The previous examples offer strategies and models for enhancing the reuse of bulky household items. The following practices contribute to the success of these examples and may inform the development of options and opportunities for Metro Vancouver and its members to advance its bulky item programs.

Easy-to-use Scheduling Technology

Implementing user-friendly technology, such as online booking platforms, allows residents to easily schedule pick-ups for their bulky items. Systems for booking need not be complicated; the City of Drummondville highlights its simple website form as a strength of its program.² Easy, appointment-based scheduling can contribute to the flexibility of the service and customer convenience and satisfaction. As is already happening in some member municipalities, technology can also be used to optimise routes for pick-up, improving the efficiency of services, and reducing GHG emissions.

Partnerships

Effective partnerships with local social enterprises and non-profit organisations are a key success factor in all the examples. These collaborative relationships can help manage and expand the collection, sorting, and redistribution of reusable items. Partnerships can support the collection of items—such as in the City of Chilliwack’s Clean-up program, where local community groups arrange and conduct the pick-ups—as well as helping to identify and redistribute items through social housing and immigrant services and thrift stores.

Communication

Clear and regular communication can enhance the reuse rates of bulky items by reducing damage and inappropriate items. Municipalities can provide detailed information on what items can be picked up, how to prepare items for collection, and the social, economic, and environmental benefits of participating in the program. Drummondville’s approach of using a side-by-side video to show how residents can “change the tragic fate of [their] bulky items” offers an effective promotional

² *Increasing waste diversion to reduce landfill use*. Green Municipal Fund. <https://greenmunicipalfund.ca/case-studies/increasing-waste-diversion-reduce-landfill-use>

strategy. Clear and regular communication by members to their residents can reduce confusion on bulky-item collection programs, given that there are differences between different municipal programs. Enhanced knowledge sharing among members may reveal where alignments in programming can be beneficial.

Incorporating Repair/Refurbishment Skill-Building

Developing programs that include repair or refurbishment training can maximise the reuse potential of collected items and promote the development of these circular skills. This study found only a few programs or organisations that repair collected items; however, initiatives like Furniture Bank's Indigenous-led Repair Workshop not only help in reducing waste but also provide valuable skill-building opportunities, promoting inclusive employment and circular economic development.

Options and Opportunities

Based on the review of baseline conditions, research of different approaches, and a workshop involving Metro Vancouver member jurisdictions, options and opportunities were identified for enhancing the collection and diversion of bulky household items. This study represents preliminary work in moving towards reuse in bulky item management.

The following options and opportunities for consideration by Metro Vancouver range from those that are short-term to broader, more systemic, and long-term changes.

SHORT-TERM OPTIONS

Build reuse education and awareness into communication about bulky items

A low-barrier option already practised by Metro Vancouver and member jurisdictions is to incorporate reuse alternatives into the protocol for dealing with inquiries about bulky item disposal and pick-up. Metro Vancouver and members may include information about local reuse options for specific items on their website, or ask residents if they have tried to sell or donate an item when scheduling a pick-up. Prompting residents to consider existing reuse options, such as donating to a local thrift store, giving items away through a Buy Nothing Facebook Group, or selling on Craigslist, is a low-effort way to support the diversion of bulky items from disposal while reducing strain on municipal services. Additionally, these reuse options may overcome the challenges of transportation that residents face in municipalities without pick-up programs (e.g., by requesting that the buyer pick up the item). Municipalities can play an important role in reuse "match-making", connecting residents with local organisations and the latest information about their standards and what items are in high demand.

Identify more reuse organisations that take bulky items

There is interest and potential for partnering with social enterprises and reuse organisations that can channel reusable bulky items to new homes. However, reuse organisations accept different items under a variety of constraints. Metro Vancouver and its members can identify reuse organisations that will accept and repurpose bulky items, including furniture and large appliances. Understanding where reuse organisations are and what they accept can help residents to divert items for reuse before they reach municipal services. Reuse organisations that have the capacity to accept more items could be potential partners in future bulky item program development.

Pilot bulky item reuse programs

Pilot programs are a way to test initiatives before scaling to the wider community. Members may consider starting small by piloting bulky item reuse programs on a neighbourhood level. Pilots might build on established behaviours to shift understandings and norms about reusing bulky household items. For example, communities wanting to increase bulky item reuse could start by working with identified reuse organisations that take bulky items to review items collected so their collection crews can increase their knowledge of what reuse organisations are looking for. They could also rent a cube van or flatbed truck to pilot collection in a different vehicle type before making a longer-term commitment to transitioning their collection fleet for bulky items. For communities with contracted services, they could pilot hiring contractors that have reuse capabilities such as green junk haulers or charity organizations that specialize in reuse for larger items.

Establish metrics for bulky items collected and potential for reuse

Members with bulky item pick-up programs would like to know more about what is being picked up and its potential for reuse. They could draw upon and combine Metro Vancouver's already established metrics for reuse and bulky items to better understand and track the outcomes of their programs in a harmonized way. Reporting and data collected in pilots can help members better understand how data gaps can be practically addressed.

Develop and expand reuse event capacity

From Reuse Days at the North Shore Recycling and Waste Centre to the City of Coquitlam's City-wide Garage Sale to the City of Vancouver's Reuse and Recycling Drop-Off events, Metro Vancouver and members are already leading the way to reuse through events and programming across the region. Building on the success of the North Shore Reuse Days, Metro Vancouver is partnering with reuse organisations to bring the reuse service to other recycling and waste centres. Continuing to develop and expand these events will support reuse rates and capacity in the region.

Provide a regional platform for discussion on advancing bulky item reuse

In addition to considering funding opportunities, Metro Vancouver might support connections between members and reuse organisations. The region can play a convening role by continuing to work with member jurisdictions to identify and compile a list of local reuse organisations. This list could be made publicly available through MVRcycles.org or other similar websites, similar to the list of direct service providers for textiles reuse and recycling on the Metro Vancouver Think Thrice website.

Metro Vancouver can use its role as a convener to reduce initial the effort required to onboard new reuse organizations by facilitating the sharing of information on successful programs, including details such as insurance, reporting and procurement processes. Metro Vancouver staff could start by sharing their lessons learned to advance effective and collaborative relationships with reuse organisations developed through reuse, recycling and waste centres, and other similar programs.

Identify potential funders and funding models to advance bulky item reuse

Funding is a critical barrier to the effective implementation of bulky item pick-up programs. Metro Vancouver could look at options to financially support innovative approaches to bulky item collection, recycling, and reuse directly. Metro Vancouver could also explore external funding opportunities such as from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Green Municipal Fund to support necessary work to implement new approaches to enhance the reuse of bulky household items.

LONG-TERM OPTIONS

Contract a reuse partner to pick up furniture

Recognizing the high reuse potential of furniture, Metro Vancouver and members could identify and contract with reuse partner(s) that have the capacity to pick up and redistribute furniture. This would involve pinpointing specific types of furniture that are most likely to be reused and establishing a formal partnership with organisations equipped to handle such items effectively. The market scan found that high-quality home furniture is most desired and that, while organisations in the region are currently limited by space and resourcing, larger organisations specialising in the reuse of furniture beyond the region, such as Furniture Bank, are interested in expanding to BC and partnering with local government.

Explore policies and programs to support bulky-item reuse opportunities in multi-family units

Multi-family units pose significant challenges for bulky item pick-up programs. 4 of 10 jurisdictions surveyed pick up items from multi-family developments. Metro Vancouver and member jurisdictions could support the management of bulky items as well as creating reuse opportunities in these developments. Metro Vancouver and members may want to revisit waste and recycling room space and access guidelines to determine if space and access gaps still exist in new developments which hinder bulky item pick up services from multi-resident buildings. Jurisdictions looking to start a bulky-item pick up program might choose to include multi-family units as part of their program scope. Jurisdiction with existing bulky-item pick up programs only available to single-family homes may want to consider expanding them to service multi-family units.

Explore technologies to enhance ease of bulky-item reuse

Technological solutions could boost the efficiency and scope of reuse programs. Implementing advanced booking systems and route optimization could streamline collection processes, as demonstrated in the City of Drummondville, QB [user-friendly online booking system](#). Workshop participants suggested the region might also explore how bulky items could be connected with individuals and organisations in need through technology. For example, FoodMesh is a technology-based platform that matches entities with excess food with those that need it, such as charities and farmers. In the long term, Metro Vancouver might consider how a regional bulky item platform, similar to FoodMesh, could facilitate connections between those with reusable items potential users.

Make reuse as easy as disposal

Key feedback from the survey and workshop participants suggested that space is needed for sorting and triaging bulky items for reuse and recycling. Municipalities may also play a role in providing spaces where residents can access and take-home reusable items that have been diverted from disposal. While smaller spaces such as “share sheds” have been successful in smaller, rural, and remote communities, they are less appropriate for urban and densely populated regions. Larger urban areas might look to models like the City of Edmonton Reuse Centre, which accepts and offers reusable items to local residents free of charge, for inspiration.

Advocate for design for durability, care and repair for bulky items

Furniture that is low quality or difficult to repair has a shorter lifespan and thus less possibility for reuse. Metro Vancouver could advocate for policies that enhance the durability and reparability of furniture at regional, provincial, and national levels. This initiative would focus on extending the lifespan of large slow-moving consumer goods, such as furniture, by promoting designs that are

easier to and more affordable to repair. Such policies could align with the broader "right to repair" movement, which have predominantly focused on electronics and farming equipment but could be expanded to include priority bulky household items.

Promote and coordinate bulky-item reuse programs at a regional level

Expand upon or complement the "Waste in its Place" campaign by working with member jurisdictions on consistent messaging and experience with bulky-item reuse programs in the region. Through this work Metro Vancouver and member jurisdictions could continue to build a list of bulky item reuse and repair service providers that could potentially be hired by local governments in the region and/or directly service residents to reuse and repair their items. They could also track exchange platforms, events, and DIY instructions that help residents with the reuse, care, and repair of their bulky items.

Advocate for skills development programs for repair and refurbishment of bulky items

Metro Vancouver could look at ways to advocate for more local training and career development programs focused on repair and refurbishment skills. By investing in skills development, the region could foster a workforce equipped to contribute to the circular economy, ensuring that bulky items are not only collected and sorted but also effectively repaired and reused.

Conclusion

Share Reuse Repair Initiative reviewed current practices for bulky household items collection and management in the region and engaged with stakeholders to consider how Metro Vancouver might enhance the reuse and recycling of bulky household items. Options and opportunities for consideration by Metro Vancouver and members were developed based on insights from a survey of members, an interview with Metro Vancouver Solid Waste staff, research of alternative approaches and market conditions, and a participatory workshop with 22 member jurisdiction staff.

Metro Vancouver and its member jurisdictions already have some effective approaches for collecting bulky items and efficiently clearing illegally dumped items. Furthermore, there are a range of platforms and organisations that Metro Vancouver residents are encouraged to access to donate and reuse furniture and other household goods. The short and long-term options for consideration presented in this report could extend Metro Vancouver's leadership in adopting upstream approaches with enhanced reuse and recycling of bulky items.

Policy advocacy to support the design and sale of more durable and repairable items—particularly furniture—is needed to improve the currently declining durability of bulky items, which is reducing the potential for extending their life through care, reuse and repair. Increasing the reuse of bulky household items represents an opportunity to enhance the second-hand economy, and support affordable and sustainable living options, while honouring the carbon contained in what already exists and preserving landfill capacity.