MICHIGAN GREEN COMMUNITIES

Kalamazoo

Community Sustainability Profile Spotlight - Recycling

Kalamazoo has a long history of recycling. A solid waste millage began funding trash pickup in 1981. Curbside recycling pickup started in the early 1990s, and the millage continues to fund recycling services today. More recently, in 2019, the same year Kalamazoo's City Commission declared a climate emergency, the Commission also made a proclamation that Kalamazoo participate in Michigan's recycling challenge to increase the state's recycling rate to 30 percent by 2025.

Kalamazoo's Solid Waste Department's work is guided by their Community Sustainability Plan. Chris Broadbent, Kalamazoo's Solid Waste Coordinator, maintains that having a sustainability plan provides justification for developing new recycling programming and adding more material types to existing programs.

The Solid Waste Department is busy with new programming to collect new materials and help encourage residential recycling. In 2021, they began collecting expanded polystyrene (EPS) foam, a material common in packaging, especially food, by offering events for resident drop off. The EPS Foam Recycling Program was initiated by volunteers and the Environmental Concerns Committee as a pilot in recent years. It has now turned into a full-scale drop off program that collects not only EPS foam, but also electronics and oral care products once every quarter. The event also offers document shredding.

Kalamazoo, MI

Population (2020 Census): 73,598
Governance: Commission-Manager
Location: Southwest Michigan, Kalamazoo County

Case Study Highlight:

In May 2024, Kalamazoo launched a new campaign with the Recycling Partnership. The campaign's focus has been on education and outreach to targeted residents in both single-family and multifamily units. Although the campaign is still in its early stages, it has had early successes at identifying families that need more recycling education using AI cameras attached to recycling trucks. This partnership exhibits the Solid Waste Department's motivation to continue expanding recycling and improving resident education.

