



**TO: DOUGLAS COUNTY**  
**FROM: TASP CONSULTANT TEAM**  
**DATE: APRIL 11, 2023**  
**RE: KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR SEASONAL LEAF DROP-OFF EVENTS**

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## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

When planning a fall leaf drop-off event, there are some key elements for city and/or county staff to consider. These considerations are summarized in Table 1, below.

*Table 1: Key Considerations for Fall Leaf Events*

CONSIDERATION	DETAIL
<b>Format</b>	Leaf drop events can be hosted at a city or county facility or at a temporary location (such as a school parking lot, a city park, etc.). For temporary event locations, advance permitting is often required. Events can also vary between one-day occurrences to multi-week offerings (on just weekdays, just weekends, or during both). Several key considerations will differ based on the location and duration of the event.
<b>Timing</b>	Peak leaf season is a moving target and can vary from year to year. Many programs in the Denver area focus their efforts around the late-October to mid- to late- November window.
<b>Compost Processing Partner</b>	Identify and contract with a commercial composter that can handle the anticipated quantity of leaves. The compost processing partner may be able to help with transportation. A list of registered and/or permitted commercial composting facilities can be found on the <a href="#">CDPHE website</a> . Contracting with a compost processing and/or transportation partner may take time, so advance planning is highly encouraged. This single contractor (or combination of contractors) can help identify other equipment and/or logistical considerations for the event.
<b>Location</b>	A collection site needs to be large enough to accommodate a large pile of leaves (up to 30 ft. x 30 ft. or larger), a large collection container, or a few collection vehicles, as well as the vehicle traffic associated with a public-facing drop-off option. Participants may need room to turn vehicles around at or near the pile or drop-off location and the site must be able to accommodate a constant flow (or line) of cars for the duration of the event. With sufficient advertising, one-day events could attract hundreds of cars in just a few hours. If an event occurs at an external location (school or park), precautions should be taken to ensure all materials can be removed in a time- and location-appropriate manner.
<b>Equipment</b>	Depending on the location of the event and arrangements made with a composting and / or transportation contractor, the city/county may need equipment such as a front-end loader or collection container (roll-off) to collect leaves. A supply of traffic cones is also recommended, both for marking the drop-off location and for traffic control.



<b>Signage</b>	Signage should help direct people to the drop-off location and help prevent illegal dumping outside of designated event days and event hours. Signage can include the consequences for illegally dumping materials (these fees are often set by municipal or county code).
<b>Staffing</b>	Leaf drop events should be sufficiently staffed with site monitors, helpers, and equipment operators, as appropriate to the event format. Ongoing events at a city/county facility may only require 1-2 staff passively monitoring. One-day events or short-term events at satellite locations may require 3-8 operational staff for support of set-up, event operations, and clean-up. Regardless of format, on-site staff are essential to ensure that the leaf pile remains clean and not contaminated with plastic bags or materials other than leaves. All event staff should receive basic safety training and always wear appropriate PPE. Clear expectations should be set for event staff as to whether they are expected to help residents unload bags from vehicles and/or trailers. Depending on the scale of the event, traffic control can be outsourced to police or others (fees may apply).
<b>Advertising</b>	Advertising and marketing are necessary to increase impact, reduce contamination, and minimize confusion. These efforts can be done in coordination with a city or county solid waste entity and/or in conjunction with other seasonal programs. Suggested advertising channels include city/county website, existing digital platforms, social media (Facebook, NextDoor, others), posters and flyers, and other location-specific channels. A press release can be utilized to attract earned media.
<b>Paper Bags</b>	Leaves need to be loose or within approved paper bags upon arrival to the contracted commercial compost processor's site. To reduce labor intensity of manually emptying plastic bags, consider requiring that leaves are brought to the drop-off location loose (in trailers, truck beds and/or reusable containers), or, in paper bags. Some communities, like Denver, partner with Ace Hardware to supply a limited quantity of free custom-branded leaf bags for residents each season. Longmont provides free bags at a city facility, while supplies last. Incentivizing the use of paper bags increases event efficiency but may also require significant city/county subsidy.
<b>Source-Separated Leaves</b>	Programs should clarify that leaves must be 'source-separated' and not mixed with other yard debris such as branches, stumps, or kitchen-derived materials (food scraps, etc.). Compost processing 'tip fees' are based on leaf-only loads. These fees may be higher if other streams of organics are mixed in.
<b>Data Tracking</b>	Be sure to track the number of car visits per day, the tonnage collected (potentially obtained from the compost processing partner), and other relevant operational data. This information is helpful in planning for future events.
<b>Budget</b>	Consider costs associated with signage, staffing, advertising, compost processing (tip fees can vary widely depending on whether they include transportation costs or not), and paper bag giveaway options (which are optional). Depending on the city/county location and available equipment, additional budget may be required for loading leaves for transport. The region's largest composting facility that processes leaves from many programs in the Denver metro area is located in Keenesburg, Colorado (40+ miles NE of the central Denver metro area). Locations of other processing facilities can be found on the <a href="#">CDPHE website</a> .
<b>Finished Compost</b>	Compost processing fees will cover the cost to turn discarded leaves into finished compost but will not automatically include the cost of obtaining finished compost made from these



materials. If a community wishes to procure finished compost made from the materials collected by a program, consider discussing this option with the identified compost processors at the beginning of the planning process. In some cases, purchasing agreements for finished compost can help offset the cost of compost processing tip fees.

## OTHER COMPOSTING CONSIDERATIONS

Due to the seasonal increase in leaf volume each fall, managing leaves can overburden just about any solid waste operation whether it's landfill-bound or an organics recycling program. Increasing the year-round capacity for organics recycling can help manage the seasonal spikes in material. Curbside composting services provide residents with regular capacity for yard debris such as fall leaves, and often other types of organic material such as food scraps. Backyard composting resources (classes, general information, or the provision of free or subsidized backyard composting containers, etc.) can enable residents to manage organic materials from their own homes without the need to transport materials to a permitted commercial composting facility. Since curbside and backyard composting options do have input and volume limitations, seasonal leaf drop programs are complementary to any jurisdiction's existing solid waste management portfolio.

## PROGRAM EXAMPLES

### *City and County of Denver*

[www.denvergov.org/leafdrop](http://www.denvergov.org/leafdrop)

The City and County of Denver has operated a seasonal 'LeafDrop' program for more than two decades, using a combination of weekday drop-off locations and temporary weekend drop-off sites. In recent years, the program has collected up to 800 tons (1,600,000 pounds) of leaves for composting in a single season.

- **Drop-Off Locations:** City facilities and Denver parks (the Fall 2022 event featured 3 weekday sites and 5 weekend sites open on dedicated weekends)
- **Dates:** Weekday sites operate from October to early December; weekend sites open for three weekends in November
- **Operational Details:** Certain weekday sites accept loose leaves and all sites have separated piles for bagged and unbagged leaves. The weekend drop-off locations are staffed by the city's Solid Waste Management staff and 'rear-loader' collection trucks. Loose and paper-bagged leaves are placed directly into the collection truck and plastic-bagged leaves are emptied and then placed directly into the truck. The city uses its existing fleet of transfer trailers to transport leaves directly to A1 Organics' Keenesburg facility.

### *Town of Lafayette*

<https://www.lafayetteco.gov/692/Fall-Leaf-Drop-Off>

The Town of Lafayette has administered a Leaf Drop-Off program for nearly a decade. The program is complementary to the community's three cart program that provides universal curbside recycling and composting to participating residents.

- **Drop-Off Locations:** City of Lafayette Service Center (1700 Avalon Ave.)
- **Dates:** Open 6 am - 4 pm, M-F, late October - late November with one Saturday event day (9 a.m. - 1 p.m.)
- **Operational Details:** Program is self-service, residents drop loose or paper-bagged leaves into designated dumpsters

### *City of Longmont*

<https://www.longmontcolorado.gov/departments/departments-n-z/trash-and-recycling/special-services-events/fall-leaf-collection>

The City of Longmont offers residents FREE curbside collection of bagged leaves each fall. The City contracts with vendors to collect the leaves and to pick up and transport the leaves to a contracted compost processor.

- **Drop-Off Locations:** N/A - Longmont's program is a collection-based program
- **Dates:** Leaf collection occurs late October to mid-November in two different zones
- **Operational Details:** Residents place bagged leaves out on at their curb by 7 AM on Monday of their zone's designated leaf collection week. The 3<sup>rd</sup> party leaf collection contractor picks up leaves over the course of the week and delivers them to a city solid waste facility. A1 Organics picks leaves up from this location and transports leaf material to their Keenesburg facility for composting.