

REPORT ON THE 2009 LEAF COLLECTION PROGRAM

March, 2010

Volume of Leaves Collected

There were 19,270 cubic yards of leaves collected, from curbside collections, vouchers and residential drop off sources in 2009. The curbside bagged leaf collection program accounted for 8,890 cubic yards or 46% of the total, vouchers made up 8,683 cubic yards or 45% and residential drop-off another 1,697 cubic yards or 9%. All voucher loads went across the scale and were reported in tons and then converted to cubic yards. In 2008, leaf bag volume made up 20% of the total volume and the vacuum collection volume made up 80%. There was no leaf voucher component as part of the 2008 leaf collection program.

This volume was substantially less than reported in previous years because of the way that leaf volume was calculated. This year, we calculated bagged leaf volume by compacted packer loads. Each of our packers (town & rental) held 25 yards of compacted leaves. Drivers reported the number of loads or fractions of loads on their daily sheets. Based on those calculations, the town curbside bagged collection alone produced 8,890 cubic yards of leaves. We feel that this is a much more accurate way to determine leaf volume, because all the loads are consistently compacted. In the past, bagged leaf volume was determined by simply adding up the total number of bags and dividing that figure by 8, based on a formula of 8 bags per cubic yard. This did not take into account differences in how bags were filled. A compacted bag was counted the same as a half-filled un-compacted bag. If we were to have used that formula this year, we would have calculated a curbside leaf collection volume of 28,033 cubic yards, a difference of 315%!

Environmental Impact

The bagged collection program has greatly reduced the carbon footprint expended compared to the previous vacuum and bagged process. The FY 10 bagged leaf collection program utilized 5 packer trucks and 2 pick-up trucks (a total of 7 fuel burning vehicles) for 8 hours a day (6:30 am to 2:30 pm) for 5 days during 9 weeks and for 10-hour days for 1 week during the peak period. The vacuum collection program utilized 1 Town Vac-All truck, 2 pick-up trucks, plus 14 vacuum collection crews (10 Butler; 4 Town), comprised of a leaf vacuum unit and two trucks (a total of at least 45 fuel burning vehicles) working 10-hour days for 6-day weeks during peak periods for 5 weeks, plus a pick-up truck and two packer trucks (3 fuel burning vehicles) for 8 hours a day for 10 weeks.

Street Cleanliness

With fewer leaf piles in the street, there were fewer blowing leaves, cleaner gutters and fewer clogged basins. With bags collected on a weekly basis from every street in Town there were no leaf bags left at the curb for long periods. The only significant delays in the collection were during week 9 of the 10-week program because of snow fighting operations, which delayed collection in the Wednesday area by one day and in the Thursday and Friday areas by 4 days. However, a total of 97% of the leaf bags collected for the entire program had already been collected during the previous 8 weeks of the collection, so these delays did not impact a significant number of households.

The long-term impact on the basin cleaning program is that fewer basins are clogged with leaves, since less leaf volume will be washing into the catch basins. It is worth noting that the State of New Jersey has passed legislation to prohibit leaves in the street for more than 72 hours due to the environmental impact of leaves washing into basins and streams.

Public Safety Impact

During all but the heaviest collection days of the bagged leaf collection program, the crews completed their refuse collection area by 2 pm and were off the street dumping their loads by the time most school children were being bused home. During most of the vacuum collection program however, crews worked until 5 pm, when light was not optimal and rush hour traffic was at its peak.

Snow storms have occurred in the past during the leaf collection program. When the snow accumulations are significant enough to require plowing the streets, public works crews face a real dilemma with leaf piles in the street. If crews clear the street from curb to curb, they are forced clear any leaf piles from the street which often carries them downstream into the neighbor's driveway apron or on to their property. Not plowing curb-to-curb risks creating narrower streets which impede the flow of traffic. If the weather does not cooperate and the snow does not melt in the days immediately following a storm, it can create frozen piles of leaves, ice and snow that can linger until spring and make it impossible to clear streets from curb to curb.

With leaves piled in the street, the potential always exists for fire when cars park on dry leaf piles. A check of fire incident records, however, showed no incidents of car fires in West Hartford during either 2008 or 2009. However, the potential is greater when more leaves are piled in the street as occurs during a curbside vacuum collection.

Clogged catch basins are also a problem during the leaf season as blowing leaves cover catch basins and causing street flooding and impeding traffic. A search of the DPW service requests for October through December 2008 and 2009 revealed that there was no significant difference in the number of complaints about catch basin flooding due to leaves covering the basins or with contractors or residents dumping leaves into the basins. In 2008 there were 17 service requests for clogged basins and in 2009 there were 12 service requests. However, there were only 3 service requests in each year that were directly attributable to leaves.

Impact on Public Safety Resources

Public Works: During the 10-week bagged leaf collection program, the DPW was able to install 1,066 linear feet of new curbing and back filled and re-graded 6,345 linear feet of installed curbing and replaced 23 driveway aprons as part of our support of the town-wide resurfacing program. During slower collection periods, DPW crews were able to sweep arterial streets and rebuild 5 catch basin sumps. DPW crews also removed and installed 200 feet of curb and sidewalk to remediate a drainage problem on Still Road.

Fire: There were no reports of car fires due to leaves in 2008 or 2009 according to the Fire Department records.

Police: Police Records indicate that in 2008 four citations were written for leaves in the street during the fall leaf collection period and in 2009 no citations were written.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

The FY 2010 adopted budget for the bagged leaf collection program was \$639,665. This budgeted figure was based on a model that utilized a core of contractor collection crews supplemented by two Town public works crews. In rolling out the actual program, DPW management determined that they could implement an in-house program, utilizing rental packers with the two Town packer trucks, supplemented by private contractors and seasonal help at a substantial savings. The actual cost of the FY 2010 leaf collection program was \$314,979, which represents a savings of \$324,686 over the adopted budget. Furthermore, the actual cost in FY 10 represents a savings of \$639,545 compared to the actual expenditures for the leaf collection program in FY 2009. Compared to the estimated cost of \$1,020,517 for a vacuum and bagged leaf collection program in FY 2010, represents a savings of \$705,538. The Leaf Collection Program is budgeted at \$332,292, an increase of \$17,313 over the actual FY 2010 amount. However, the actual FY 2011 figure, barring major weather events or resident participation rates could be several thousand dollars less than the budgeted figure.

Compared to the 2008 combination vacuum and bagged leaf collection, the 2009 bagged leaf collection program allowed the DPW street maintenance division to continue their street maintenance and basin repair responsibilities and even add street sweeping of high traffic streets, all services that would not have been possible except on an overtime basis during the 2008 collection program. Furthermore, the daily operations of the Grounds and Fleet Maintenance Divisions continued without interruption during the 2009 leaf collection program. During peak collection periods in 2008 staff from both these divisions were utilized during regular hours and overtime hours to support the leaf collection program.

These savings were achieved at a cost. Residents now have to bag all their leaves if they want to have their residential leaves collected at the curb, although many residents were already bagging their leaves as part of the vacuum collection program. For residents with heavily wooded lots, the transition to an all bagged collection represented additional labor to bag their leaves and the additional cost for leaf bags. For other residents it meant additional cost for a contractor to load and transport their leaves to the Town leaf site for composting. In an effort to mitigate at least some of these costs, the Town Council instituted a leaf voucher program that allowed residents utilizing a private contractor to dump their leaves at the Recycling Center at no charge. The Town absorbed this cost as part of the collection program. In FY 10, this amounted to \$46,889 in voucher costs.

Evaluation of the Private Residential Vacuum Pick-Up Marketplace

This is a difficult area to quantify accurately. A total of 129 contractors submitted vouchers on behalf of Town residents and at least one on behalf of a Bloomfield resident. The observations of the DPW Managers in the field was that the investment in vacuum equipment by private contractors providing leaf vacuum collection service varied widely. They appeared to be only a handful of vendors that purchased vacuum equipment of comparable size and power to what the Town and Butler utilized in the public leaf collection program and it appeared that when they did so, they only purchased a single unit. There did not appear to be any vendor who made an investment in multiple units of the large vacuum machines. The Butler Company did provide private vacuum collection services to residents during 2009 leaf season. Since observations were really snapshots of one crew working at single location and the locations for vacuum collection vendors were spread out, it was difficult to determine the actual level of private investment in vacuum leaf collection equipment.

Potential for Re-Bidding of Vacuum Collection Program

The Butler Co. is still the only major player in the area that would be able to bid on a town-wide program. Dividing the Town in half and bidding out vacuum collection services would still require a vendor to provide a minimum of five large leaf vacuums and 10 collection vehicles, which is a significant investment and larger than most local landscaping companies currently employ. Trying to bid the Town out by refuse collection area would make the program more difficult to manage and could result in inconsistent service levels in different refuse collection areas depending on vendor performance. It would also not be inconceivable that a vendor would quit or be terminated during the collection. Under that scenario, leaf collection services would be delayed and costs to complete the collection in that refuse collection area would increase. It is the consensus in the DPW that a vacuum collection program with less than two or three complete rounds of collection is not a good program, given the uncontrolled variables weather and the timing of the leaf fall. A viable leaf collection program would have to provide at least two or three rounds of collection and the cost of equipment and manpower to complete that in a 5-6 week timeframe is estimated to exceed \$2.4 million.

There has been some discussion of re-thinking the bidding out of vacuum collection service into small components. The logic is that by breaking the Town down into as many as 21 collection areas that we generate more interest from smaller vendors, generate more competition and therefore reduce the price of the overall collection. In addition, it has been suggested that we solicit for a vacuum collection pricing and then bill the residents that utilize the service at those rates. The concept is that bidding these services for the Town as a whole will provide more affordable pricing than individual residents could obtain on their own.

Bidding Collection Areas by Refuse Quadrant or Smaller Areas

The problem will be to quantify the volume of leaves that would be picked up. The data on the actual leaf volume for any area smaller than a refuse collection area is not available. It was determined in the 2009 collection that the actual leaf volume in West Hartford is probably closer to 25,000 cubic yards of leaves, not the 44,000-70,000 cubic yards that have been used in the past. The first thing that a vendor will need to know is how much volume can they expect to collect in these smaller areas presented so that they can determine what resources they would need to collect that leaf volume. Quantifying the leaf volumes for smaller areas is not possible with our existing experience base and therefore difficult for contractors to submit bids on. In addition, the vendor will need to know where that volume is located and when will the services be provided. In any bidding process the more unknowns you have, the more likely bids will be higher to compensate for those unknowns.

- (1) There is always a possibility that there would be areas that would not receive a bid. These would likely be the areas with the highest volume or the largest areas that require the most resources. The Town would be left to negotiate contracts for collection in these areas or providing collection services in these areas themselves. Almost all of the equipment (leaf vacuum units and truck-mounted leaf boxes) were sold at auction to reduce the cost of the FY 2010 leaf collection program and DPW participation in this program would require costly re-capitalization of this equipment.
- (2) Small vendors may not be able to provide the level of service that the Town requires. For example, a small vendor may not have a back-up vacuum machine if the field unit breaks down. They also may not have access to a mechanic on duty to repair equipment that breaks down in the field.

- (3) Management of multiple vendors can become a difficult customer service issue for public works. The leaf collection program is normally managed by two managers, with one managing town bagged collection operations and the other overseeing the contractor. Working with a single contractor allows the DPW Manager to have a single point of distribution for information, forms, questions and complaints, so that they can spend the rest of their time observing the services being provided in the field and that it is being provided as required in the contract.
- (4) It may become impossible to provide our customers with a uniform level of service. As more vendors get involved, the possibility increases that some vendors may fail or that some may provide outstanding service while other provide marginal or average service. This can generate an enormous amount of complaints from residents at all levels, rightfully complaining that they did not receive the same services as their neighbors in other areas.

Billing for Vacuum Collection Services

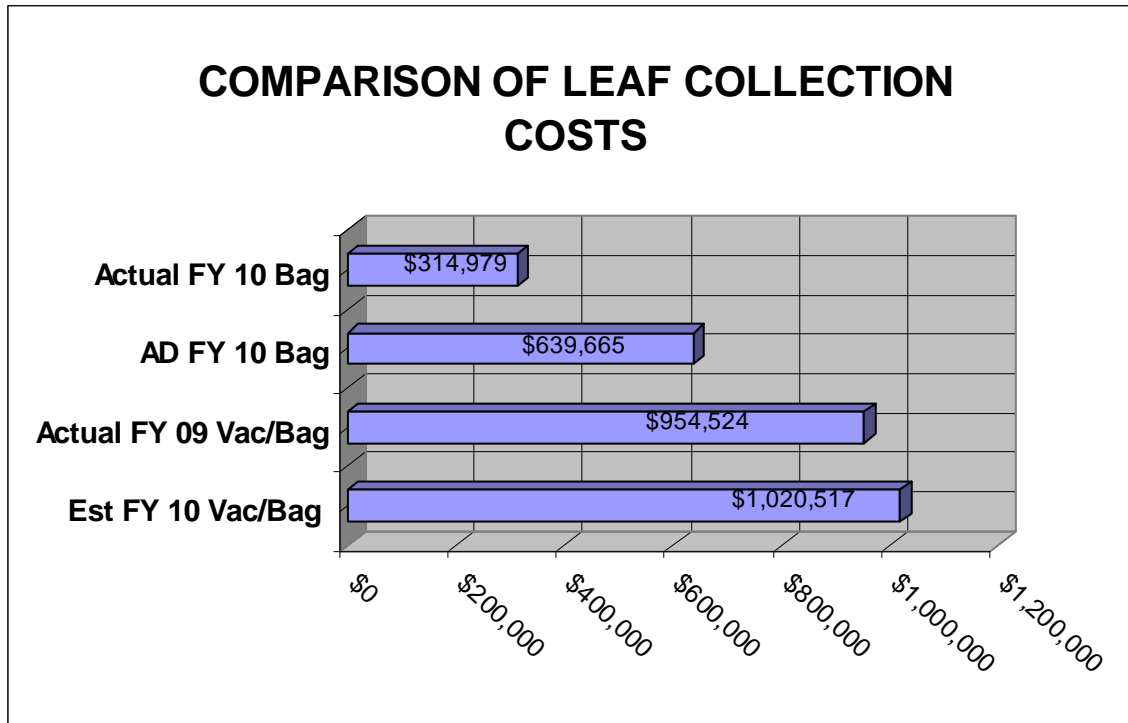
- (1) The DPW could not effectively manage the billing and collection of private leaf collection services. There are only one full-time staff person and 5 part-time office staff available to support this undertaking and we are not equipped to provide billing and collection services for the volume of accounts that would be generated in addition to performing our core office work. Pursuing unpaid bills or payments withheld by dissatisfied customers would create additional burdens.
- (2) The DPW does not maintain data on how many households utilize vacuum collection services.
- (3) The unit cost for a household will likely be significantly higher than a town-wide program price. Collecting leaves one time on each street is much more efficient than collecting from individual locations all over town or even within a refuse collection area.

A Single Round of Leaf Collection Provided Poor Services

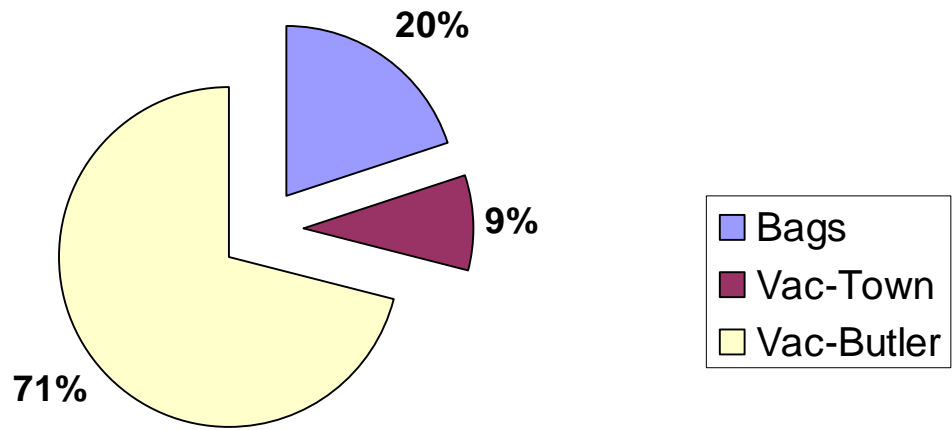
Finally, a one-round vacuum collection program is a poor design. The fact that we cannot control the weather or when the leaves will fall before freezing temperatures and snow makes vacuum collection an annual crapshoot. Rotating the starting locations in each refuse area only angers a different set of residents each year. The leaf collection program was most successful when the DPW provided 3-4 rounds of collection beginning in mid-October and continuing through December until weather made collection impossible. In recent discussions, local contractor supports the need for multiple collections. The resources to provide that level of manpower, fuel and equipment are just not a priority for the community. Previous generations of policy makers have decided that other services are more important for the community when they reduced the program to its final iteration in FY 2010, a town-wide bagged leaf collection program.

DPW Recommendation

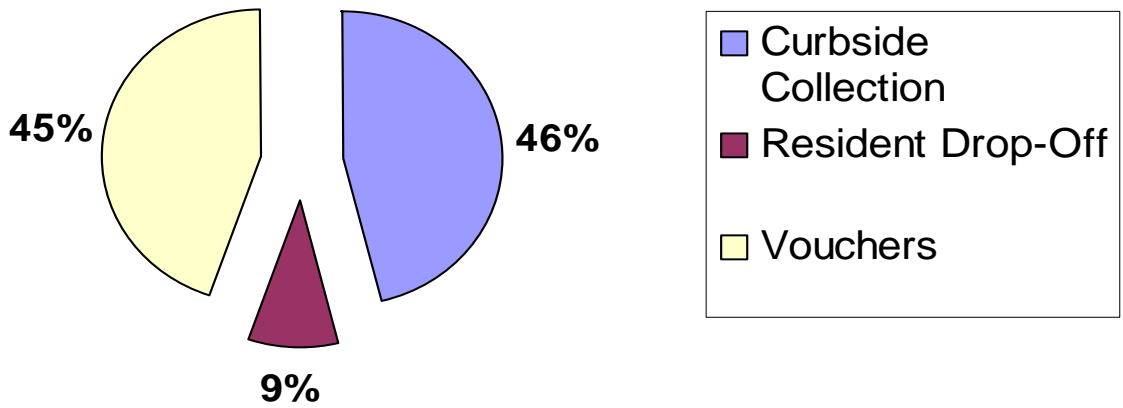
Due to resource considerations and the minimum impact on DPW operations, we would recommend remaining with the bagged leaf collection program. The program as currently designed is cost-effective, creates fewer appearance issues, fewer storm water drainage issues and gives residents who want to continue vacuum collection service a greater choice in when they can get their leaves collected, something a town-wide program cannot provide. We expect that if the town-wide bagged collection continues, there will be greater private sector investment in vacuum leaf collection equipment. The increased competition for customers should lead to lower prices for residents, which may attract more customers to consider the vacuum collection option for disposing of all or a portion of their leaves.



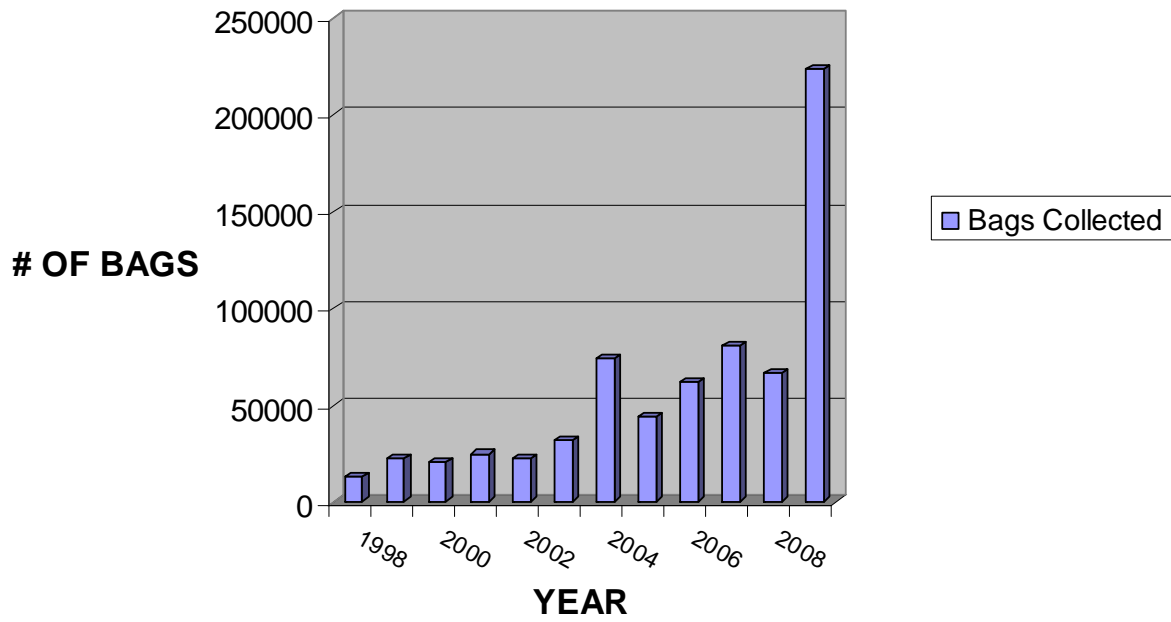
2008 LEAF COLLECTION VOLUME BY SOURCE



2009 LEAF COLLECTION VOLUME BY SOURCE



BAGS COLLECTED BY YEAR



RESOLUTION SEEKING REVIEW OF BAGGED LEAF PICK-UP PROGRAM

WHEREAS, in order to respond to declining economic conditions and produce a budget that cut spending from the previous year, the Town Council eliminated the vacuum leaf pick-up program as part of the FY2009 budget and implemented an enhanced bagged pick-up program in its place; and

WHEREAS, the Town Council stated that the performance of the new bagged pick-up system would be evaluated upon its completion and additional leaf pick-up options would be evaluated as part of the FY2010 budget; and

WHEREAS, the bagged leaf pick-up program will be completed during the first week of December 2009; and

WHEREAS, the Town Council's decision to end vacuum leaf pick-up appears to have created a new market of smaller companies performing residential leaf vacuuming services, compared to only one company that submitted a bid during the Town's last request for proposals for Town-wide vacuuming service;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED, that the Town Council requests from the Town Manager an evaluation of the 2009 bagged leaf pick-up program and recommendations for the continuation and/or alteration of said program for the FY2010 budget, including but not limited to the following elements: volume of leaves collected, environmental impact, street cleanliness, public safety impact, cost/benefit analysis and public input, impact upon public works resources, evaluation of residential vacuum pick-up marketplace and potential redesign and/or rebidding of vacuum program. Evaluation should be completed by Spring 2010 so findings can be incorporated into discussion of FY2010 budget.

(Slifka, Brennan, Cantor, Verrengia, Durbin, Casperson, Hall, Adler, Davidoff)
12/8/09