Cook County and South Suburban College

Center for Hard to Recycle Materials (CHaRM Center)

2023-2024 Progress Report

COOK COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF
Environment &
Sustainability

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Environment and Sustainability
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History of the CHaRM Center

In 2022, more than $1 billion was allocated to Cook County through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Through a robust planning process, the County developed a responsible, comprehensive spending plan to use ARPA one-time resources to support immediate recovery from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and long-term transformative initiatives, and to promote equitable recovery for populations that were historically disinvested or disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle announced over $100 million in ARPA funding to support a clean environment for all and fight climate change. These projects are found throughout the County's bureaus and departments, reflecting President Preckwinkle's commitment to Sustainable Communities as one of the six pillars of the County's Policy Roadmap, a four-year strategic plan for offices under the president.

The Cook County Department of Environment and Sustainability (DES) created the Recycling, Composting and Circular Economy Solutions (RCCES) initiative in late 2022 with the mission of building municipal capacity to implement reduction, reassembly, remanufacture, repair, reuse, repurpose, recycle, compost and circularity-related initiatives within suburban Cook County. The RCCES initiative will aid expansion of zero waste and circularity-related programs and opportunities within the County to help successfully reach the goal of 45% diversion rate by 2030. Notably, the initiative will support the south suburbs, where many of the County's municipalities with moderate to high environmental justice index scores based on data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are located.

Two strategic objectives of the RCCES initiative were the creation of a new south suburban recycling drop-off facility and a new south suburban Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) facility. These two facilities would be folded under the Center for Hard to Recycle Materials (CHaRM Center).

After extensive data analysis, community conversations and stakeholder engagement efforts, DES partnered with South Suburban College (SSC) in 2023 to establish these new facilities. SSC is a public community college located in the center of southern Cook County, where most municipalities don't have residential recycling and other waste diversion programs. Many of the County's municipalities with the lowest recycling and diversion rates are in this area.

On April 22, 2023, Cook County and SSC celebrated Earth Day by opening the first phase of the CHaRM Center, a permanent recycling drop-off facility. On April 22, 2024, Cook County observed Earth Day by announcing the second phase of the CHaRM Center, a permanent HHW facility, will open in 2025. Both facilities are largely funded by ARPA and are available to Cook County residents for free.

Mission, Vision, Goals and Theory of Change

Mission:

The CHaRM Center is a premier environmental sustainability program of Cook County and SSC. With a permanent recycling drop-off facility and a permanent HHW facility, the CHaRM Center aims to improve Cook County's environmental health by encouraging recycling, repurposing, reusing and diverting millions of pounds of waste and other hard-to-recycle items from Illinois landfills and water systems annually. All operational expenses for the CHaRM Center are paid through grants, sponsorships, donations and recycling-related fees.

Vision:

The vision of the CHaRM Center is for all Cook County residents, businesses and other institutions to implement practices that improve the health and environment of their local communities.

Goals: The CHaRM Center will:

1. Increase the waste diversion rate for the south suburban region by 23% by 2030.

Context: The 2022 waste diversion rate for the south suburbs was 22%, while the County's goal is for each region to achieve a 45% waste diversion rate by 2030, in alignment with the Illinois Materials Management Advisory Committee's recommendations to the Illinois General Assembly. To achieve the 45% waste diversion goal, the CHaRM Center will provide the infrastructure, education, engagement and access to south suburban residents, businesses and other institutional entities to help divert materials away from regional landfills.

2. Provide education and engagement opportunities to south suburban residents, businesses and other institutions by 2030.

Context: Cook County and SSC will provide south suburban residents, businesses and other institutions with educational and promotional materials, marketing campaigns, special events and other engagement opportunities. These materials and opportunities will bolster efforts to prevent and reduce waste in the County's southern region.

3. Support the next generation of environmental sustainability leaders by 2030.

Context: Cook County and SSC will provide SSC students and other community youth internships at the CHaRM Center; educational coursework, training and professional development opportunities; and/or opportunities to gain leadership skills by working with the County and other environmental organizations on various activities, events and programs.

Theory of Change:

The CHaRM Center will work in collaborative partnerships within every sector of the local community, from residents to businesses, nonprofits, schools and government, to develop and provide zero waste and circular economy solutions in the south suburbs. Cook County and the CHaRM Center will then share this model, as quickly and broadly as possible, with other communities and provide them with the policies, programs, infrastructure and communications tools needed to replicate zero waste and circular economy-related successes. The CHaRM Center will also advocate for local and state policies and resources that more quickly magnify this change at a broader scale, fostering circularity throughout local and state economies.

CYCLE

Progress to Goals: 2023-2024

Zero Waste and a Circular Economy

Actions that will help increase the waste diversion rate for the south suburban region by 23% by 2030

Actions	Accomplished/Completed	Ongoing	In Development	Not Started
Open a recycling drop-off site.	2023 Update: The drop-off site opened on Earth Day, April 2023. 2024 Update: Approximately 2,221,000 pounds of materials from nearly 13,800 households diverted from regional landfills.			
Open a House-hold Hazardous Waste (HHW) facility.			2024 Update: Cook County purchased land alongside the recycling drop-off site at SSC that will be home to the HHW facility, projected to open in 2025.	
Partner with local stakeholders in the creation of a south suburban solid waste agency.			2024 Update: Cook County adopted a new Solid Waste Management Plan that includes a goal of encouraging and supporting efforts for south suburban municipalities to develop a collective approach through an existing organization or a new subregional solid waste agency to provide needed technical assistance and staffing capabilities for municipalities to individually or jointly manage their solid waste, recycling and organ-ics-related programs and services.	

Progress to Goals: 2023-2024

Zero Waste and a Circular Economy

Actions that will help increase the waste diversion rate for the south suburban region by 23% by 2030

Actions	Accomplished/ Completed	Ongoing	In Development	Not Started
Formalize partnership with recyclers, reuse facilities and companies working to implement corporate Environment Sustainability Goals (ESG).				X
Formalize partnerships with all 54 south suburban municipalities.			2024 Update: SSC is scheduling meetings with all municipalities to create strategic partnerships.	
Formalize part-nerships with public schools.		2024 Update: SSC has partnered with Thornton Township High School District 205 for its recycling needs and will continue to reach out to high schools, middle schools and elementary schools.		

Progress to Goals: 2023-2024

Zero Waste and a Circular Economy

Actions that will help increase the waste diversion rate for the south suburban region by 23% by 2030

Actions	Accomplished/ Completed	Ongoing	In Development	Not Started
Formalize partnerships with local hospitals.		2024 Update: SSC partnered with Rush University Hospital and University of Illinois at Chicago to recycle foam and textiles.		X
Formalize partnerships with public libraries.				X
Formalize partnerships with largest waste generators.		2024 Update: SSC partnered with Homewood Disposal Services to recycle e-waste.		

Progress to Goals: 2023-2024

Zero Waste and a Circular Economy

Actions that will help increase the waste diversion rate for the south suburban region by 23% by 2030

Actions	Accomplished/ Completed	Ongoing	In Development	Not Started
Partner with south suburban elected officials on special recycling and environmental events and programs.		2024 Update: SSC partnered with local state senators, state reps, county commissioners and mayors to welcome 21 different "CHaRM on Wheels" related events in their respective communities.		
Host a food scrap community drop-off station for south suburban residents.			2024 Update: Cook County and SSC wrote grant proposals to add a food waste composting program for the south suburbs at the CHaRM Center.	
Provide educational/ promotional mailers to south suburban residential homes about the CHaRM Center.	2023 Update: Mailed nearly 10,000 residential mailers to promote the opening of the CHaRM Center. Project funded by The Recycling Partnership.		2024 Update: Cook County and SSC wrote grant proposals to conduct a comprehensive marketing campaign for the CHaRM Center to create awareness among all Cook County residents.	

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