



# Recycling Education: Literally One House at a Time

WIRMC

2/28/2020





Dustin  
Nolan

City of Waukesha  
Recycling and Solid  
Waste Coordinator

# My Mission



Experiment – and push limits of  
comfort – in search of more  
effective recycling education.



# The Questions, the Plan, the Theory

## The Questions

- Has recycling education been working?
- How could it be improved?
- What is it going to take?
- What if...?

## The Plan

1. Show up to households (unannounced) and audit their recycling.
2. Literally sort their recycling and leave the contamination items behind (outside the recycling bin) for the resident to see.
3. Send a letter/guide to resident advising on better recycling.
4. Return and see if they do better the next time.

## The Theory

Bringing recycling education **directly to the individual** – and making it **tangible** (showing them their own contamination) – will improve recycling habits.



# Trial #1



Video



# Trial #1



## Response to Trial #1

- Nextdoor App
- Resident contacted city (called front desk).





General

Reply



Jackie Tate 2  
Woodfield

### Who's looking in the recycle bins?

We saw today a man going through our recycle bin, while another was video taping. They removed some items and placed them in a bag next to the bin and then went to the next house. They didn't do all of the neighbors because the recycle truck came and took the bins before they had a chance. Does anyone know what this is about?

25 Oct

Thank Comment

2 23



Alex Legan, Woodfield

They said they were with the city of Waukesha doing a report on recycling.

Oct 25 Thank Reply



Jackie Tate, Woodfield

Interesting that their report includes removing items and placing them at the curb. :)

Oct 25 Thank Reply



Angie Schneider, Fox Point

**Jackie Tate** I watched them place the bags on the ground while The garage guy pulled up. They could have put them in the garbage cans....

See more

Oct 26 Thank Reply

1



Marilyn Rasmussen, Caples Park

Ummmm. That's just wrong. Were there specific items on the curbside that had something in common with each of those houses? Maybe we shouldn't be thinking so logical since it is so illogical!

Oct 25 Thank Reply

1



Mike Rasmussen, Oakdale

Agreed, something isn't right



Add a comment...



Home



For Sale



Businesses



Notifications



More

“We saw a man today going through our recycling bin, while another man was video taping. They removed some items and placed them in a bag next to the bin and then went to the next house. They didn’t do all the neighbors because the recycle truck came and took the bins before they had a chance. Does anyone know what this is about?”



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😊 Thank    💬 Comment

👍👍 2    💬 23



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Add a comment...



Home



For Sale



Businesses



Notifications



More

“They said they were with the city of Waukesha doing a report on recycling.”

“Interesting that their report includes removing items and placing them at the curb. 😊”

“Ummmm. That’s just wrong. Were there specific items on the curbside that had something in common with each of the houses? Maybe we shouldn’t be thinking so logical since it is so illogical!”

“Agreed, something isn’t right”





## General

Reply



Logan Wolfram, South Park / Braintree

My best guess is possibly removing mis-recycled items or non rinsed recyclables?? Very weird, I kind of hate that the contents of our trash are considered abandoned property and are fair game to the public to go through. Film them next time!

Oct 25 Thank Reply

😊 3



Jackie Tate, Woodfield

I will def try to film. He may come back for the other neighbors.

He is welcome to go through it (with his BARE hands) but he didn't have to leave items on the curb. He could hav... See more

Oct 25 Thank Reply

👍😊 3



Logan Wolfram, South Park / Braintree

Oh that doesn't make sense then, those are both recyclable for sure! I'd call waste management and let them know at the very least. I just hate that someone made you feel so uncomfortable in your own home!

Oct 25 Thank Reply

😊 1



Tammy Rodriguez, Rivers Crossing

I would call it in and verify. If it doesn't feel right it probably isn't.

Oct 25 Thank Reply

😊 1



Joe Boppre, Rivers Crossing

Probably identifying items not suppose to be in the recycling which is often done

Oct 25 Thank Reply

😊 1



Rockie Matson, Pebble Valley Southeast

A good reminder to shred papers with identifying info on them and not just toss in to be recycled. Also, remove labels from recycled prescription bottles.

Oct 25 Thank Reply

😊 2



Linda Barta, Pebble Valley Northwest

You should have used your phone to record them



Add a comment...



Home



For Sale



Businesses



Notifications



More

“...Very weird. I kind of hate that the contents of our trash are considered abandoned property and are fair game to the public to go through. Film them next time!”

“He is welcome to go through it (with his BARE hands) but he didn't have to leave items on the curb.”

“...I just hate that someone made you feel so uncomfortable in your own home.”

“Probably identifying items not suppose to be in the recycling which is often done”





## General

Reply

**Carmen Dowdy, Hillside Village**  
Us too someone is going through the recycle bins ,then leaving the stuff in the sidewalk .

Oct 25 Thank Reply

**Karen Evers, College Hill**  
Sometimes people recycle on their own. They make a little bit of money doing it. Very little money. Our business puts things in our dumpster that can be recycled. Our dumpster is mixed use. We can only wish someone come and pull out recycle stuff. I hate to break it to most people. Most of the stuff in the recycle bins ends up i... See more

Oct 25 Thank Reply



3

**Sandra Baumann, Waukesha NW Off Summit**  
Probably collecting cans possibly?

Oct 25 Thank Reply

**Tenley Heller, Merrill Hills**  
But why would they video if they were just collecting?

Oct 25 Thank Reply



2

**Bill Johnson, Caples Park**  
Not sure why they would video, but "collecting" out of a recycle bin is considered theft.

Oct 25 Thank Reply



2

**Linda Barta, Pebble Valley Northwest**  
It is illegal to remove things from recycle bins. I would call the police and report it

Oct 26 Thank Reply



1

**Christy Freeman, River Place**  
Better than the opposite...at my previous home, I watched a guy dump 3 garbage bags of heavy objects into 3 house's trash bins nearby... In the middle of the night...then speed off...

Oct 26 Thank Reply



1

**Glen Gormanson, Fox Point**



Add a comment...



Home



For Sale



Businesses



Notifications



More

“Us too someone is going through the recycle bins, then leaving the stuff in the sidewalk.”

“But why would they video if they were just collecting?”

“It is illegal to remove things from recycle bins. I would call the **police** and report it.”





## General

Reply

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Oct 25 Thank Reply

2

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Oct 26 Thank Reply

1

**Glen Gormanson, Fox Point**  
Call Dustin Nolan at City Hall and ask him about this activity you saw. You may still need to call the Police Department too, depending on what Dustin says.

Oct 26 Thank Reply

2

**Kelly Hoefert, Downtown Waukesha**  
City workers always have a badge Because they use it for work. If the bag was still on the curb maybe they want people to know what is or isn't recyclable. Usually leaving an orange tag on the bag for the owners to see. Maybe they were shooting a pod cast, you never know these days.

Oct 26 Thank Reply

**Iva Richards, Pebble Valley South**  
or was somebody digging for personal or financial information

Oct 26 Thank Reply

1

**Claudia Miller, Kame Terrace**  
Maybe someone looking for scrap metal or just a hoarder

Oct 27 Thank Reply



Add a comment...



Home



For Sale



Businesses



Notifications



More

“Call Dustin Nolan at City Hall and ask him about this activity you saw. You may still need to call the Police Department too, depending on what Dustin says.”

RE: Complaint - people going through recycling - taking pictures -

File Message Insert Options Format Text Review Help Tell me what you want to do

Paste Cut Copy Format Painter Clipboard

Basic Text

Names

Include

Tags

Voice

My Templates

Send

To Dustin Nolan;

Cc

Bcc

Subject Complaint - people going through recycling - taking pictures

Dustin,

This resident is calling to lodge a complaint:

Last Friday, someone was going through their cul-de-sac's recycling taking pictures. They came before they recycling was take at 7:00 a.m.:

This resident asked them who they were, and they said they worked for the City, but had no identification and left when asked.

They had a mini van with no signage.

Thank you,

Ellen

Ellen Sweitzer  
City of Waukesha -  
Engineering Division  
130 Delafield Street  
Waukesha, WI 53188  
262-524-3603  
[esweitzer@waukesha-wi.gov](mailto:esweitzer@waukesha-wi.gov)

# Reset



## Regroup, Rethink, Reset

- Lessons Learned
  - This is not as care free as I hoped.
  - Be prepared may not be welcomed.
  - Be prepared it may go viral.
- Sustainments
  - Do it again anyway.



## Trial #2



## Trial #2 Initial Inspection





















































Hello resident



We are conducting a [recycling study](#) in the city.

The items in this bag were found in your recycling cart, but they should **NOT** have been included for recycling.

Next time, either **place in the trash** or *manage differently* (see note below). Thank you in advance for [recycling right](#)!

Another Helpful Tip:

If you have any questions, please contact Dustin at 262-524-3593.

City of Waukesha Recycling and Solid Waste Coordinator

Success!



Send follow-up letters!







## DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

Fred Abadi, PhD, PE, Director  
[fabadi@waukesha-wi.gov](mailto:fabadi@waukesha-wi.gov)



January 17, 2020

Waukesha Resident  
1101 Gertrude St.  
Waukesha, WI 53186

Dear Resident:

Currently, the city is conducting a [recycling study](#) to better understand what is being put in recycling carts at households. You may have noticed we visited your street on recycle day and did an audit of your recycling container. This may have included [pulling out non-recyclable material and leaving that material on the side of your cart](#) with a note explaining the action. This was an effort to visually and tangibly educate regarding trash contamination found in the recycle. Hopefully, the note left that day was sufficient to explain the reasoning for the bag of stuff laying next to [your](#) recycle cart after pickup!

I wanted to send this letter as a follow-up to the audit of the recycling bins. Enclosed you will find a **current recycling guide** listing all the things that **should** be included with the recycling and things that should **not** (back-side of guide). Please review the document and compare it to what you have been currently throwing into the recycling bins and the items pulled out of your container. There may be opportunities to improve for better recycling.

This is important because putting trash into the recycling causes significant and costly problems. Trash is meant to go to the landfill and recyclables go to a recycling facility. The recycling facility is **not** equipped to handle trash and it can cause serious damage to machinery – this is EXPENSIVE to the program. Furthermore, at the recycling facility, workers must **hand-pick** out trash that is sent to them. This is not a pleasant task and potentially dangerous to their health and safety.

To conclude this study, [the city will return to inspect the recycling again on an upcoming service day on your street](#). The goal is to see if the recycling improves, stays the same, or gets worse. Hopefully, we can see things stay good or improve!

We sincerely appreciate your taking the time to learn what and how to recycle per the guidelines. It is very important. If you have any questions for me, I can be reached at 262-524-3593 or email [dnolan@waukesha-wi.gov](mailto:dnolan@waukesha-wi.gov).

Regards,

*Dustin Nolan*

Dustin Nolan  
Recycling & Solid Waste Coordinator  
130 Delafield St.  
Waukesha, WI 53186

# **RECYCLE**

THANK YOU FOR RECYCLING THESE:



## **Cans**



**Aluminum and Steel Cans**  
empty and rinse

## **Cartons**



**Food and Beverage Cartons**  
empty and replace cap

## **Glass**



**Bottles and Jars**  
empty and rinse

## **Paper**



**Cereal Boxes, Newspaper, Magazines & Mail, Flattened Cardboard, and Paper Tubes**

## **Plastic**



**Kitchen, Laundry, Bath: Bottles and Containers**  
empty and replace cap  
(#1△, #2△, #5△)

## **DO NOT RECYCLE THESE CURBSIDE:**

### **Scrap Metal**



No car parts or scrap metal

### **Plastic Bags**



Do not bag recyclables;  
return plastic bags and wrap  
to retail stores

### **Hazards**



No flammables,  
compressed cylinders,  
batteries, electronics,  
or sharps

### **Garbage**



Empty all containers,  
no food, liquids, diapers,  
or garbage

### **Tanglers**



No hoses, wires,  
or chains



[www.waukeshacounty.gov/recycling](http://www.waukeshacounty.gov/recycling)





## Trial #2



## Return Inspection





























## Trial #2



## Observations/Results

- Improved recycling – yes.
- Fewer bins out.
  - Some bins for first time.
- Almost no mail/papers.



Satisfied?



What to do next?



## Trial #3



## One More Push

- “All-In Effort”
- Changes
  - Pre-notice to residents
  - Planned time to inspect in evening.
  - No cameras.
  - Solo.





Hello resident!



We are conducting a [recycling study](#) in the city and will be coming to your neighborhood the evening of **TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 18<sup>TH</sup>** between **5:00 and 6:30 p.m.**

When we visit your neighborhood, our intention is to [study what is going into the recycling bins](#) for pickup.

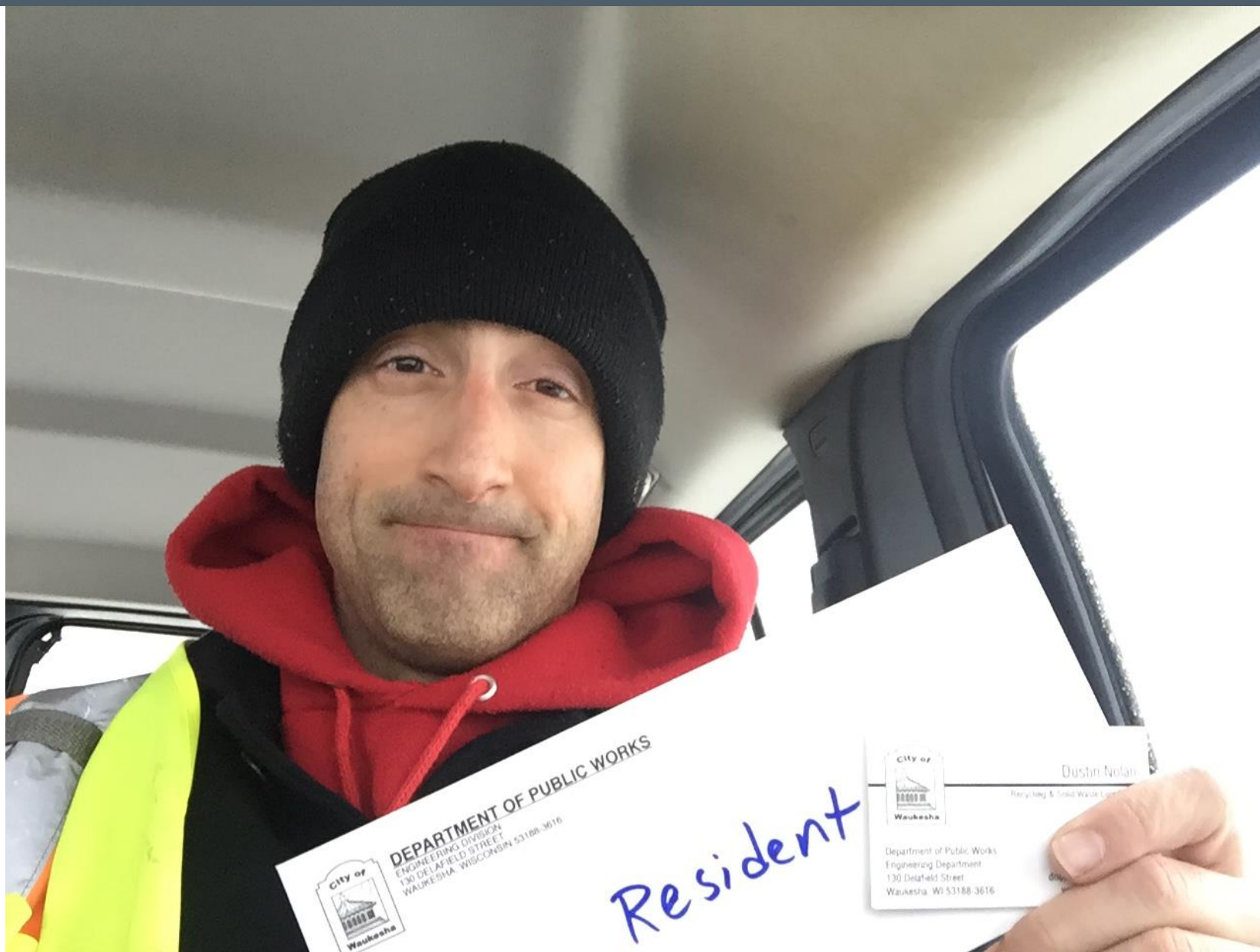
We want to see **the good and bad** items going into recycling and try to learn **why** certain items are being placed in for recycling.

If you are home when we arrive please feel free to say hello and ask questions! We would like to hear your thoughts on recycling!

If you have any questions, please contact **Dustin Nolan**

City of Waukesha Recycling and Solid Waste Coordinator

262-524-3593 or email [dnolan@waukesha-wi.gov](mailto:dnolan@waukesha-wi.gov)



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS  
ENGINEERING DIVISION  
130 DELAFIELD STREET  
WAUKESHA, WISCONSIN 53188-3616

Resident



Department of Public Works  
Engineering Department  
130 Delafield Street  
Waukesha, WI 53188-3616

Dustin Nolan

Recycling & Solid Waste Logistics





## Trial #3



## Scope

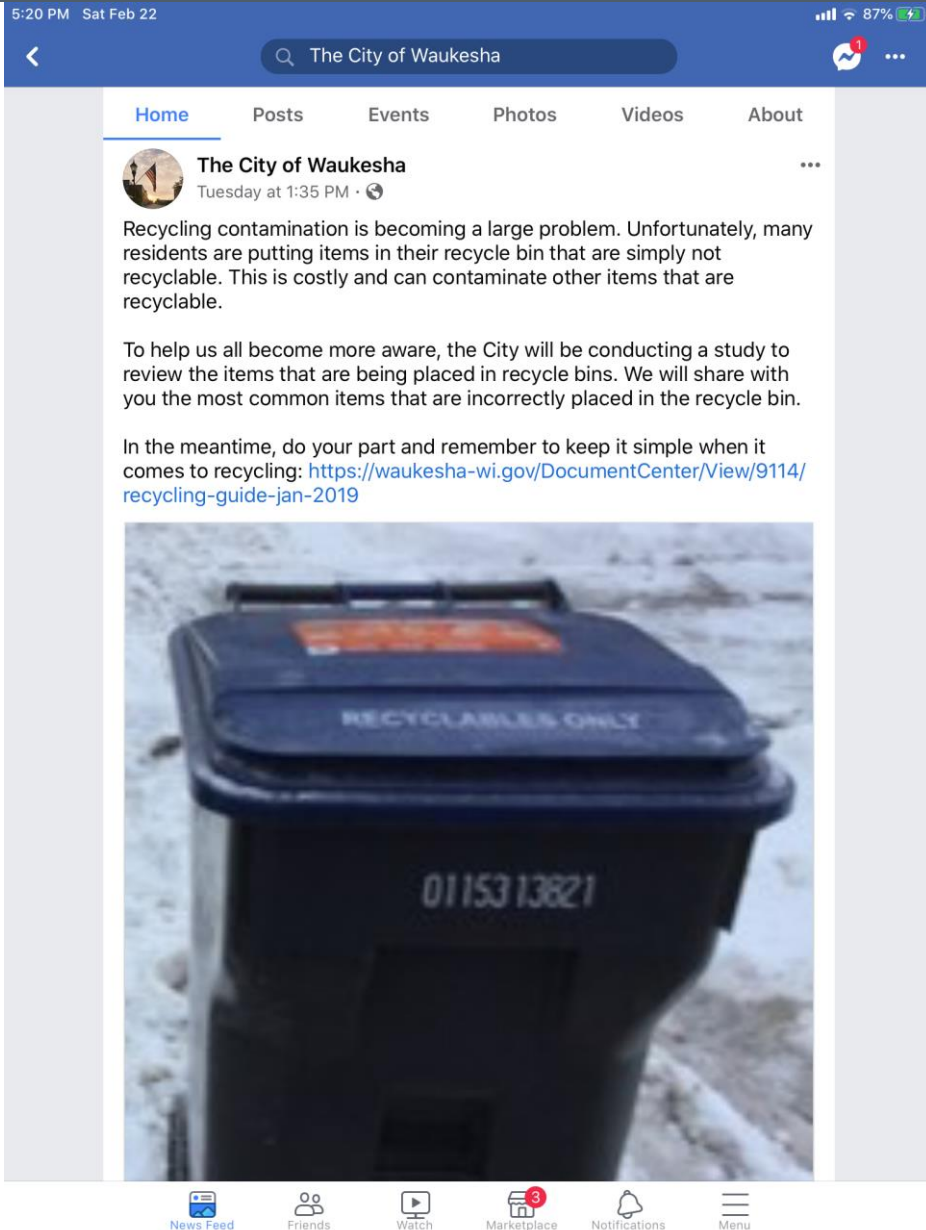
- 19 notices left
- 1 encounter (last house)



# Social Media Post



City of Waukesha Facebook Post



*Recycling contamination is becoming a large problem.*

*Unfortunately, many residents are putting items in their recycle bin that are simply not recyclable. This is costly and can contaminate other items that are recyclable.*

*To help us all become more aware, the City will be conducting a study to review the items that are being placed in recycle bins. We will share with you the most common items that are incorrectly placed in the recycle bin.*

*In the meantime, do your part and remember to keep it simple when it comes to recycling:*

<https://waukesha-wi.gov/recycling-guide-jan-2019>



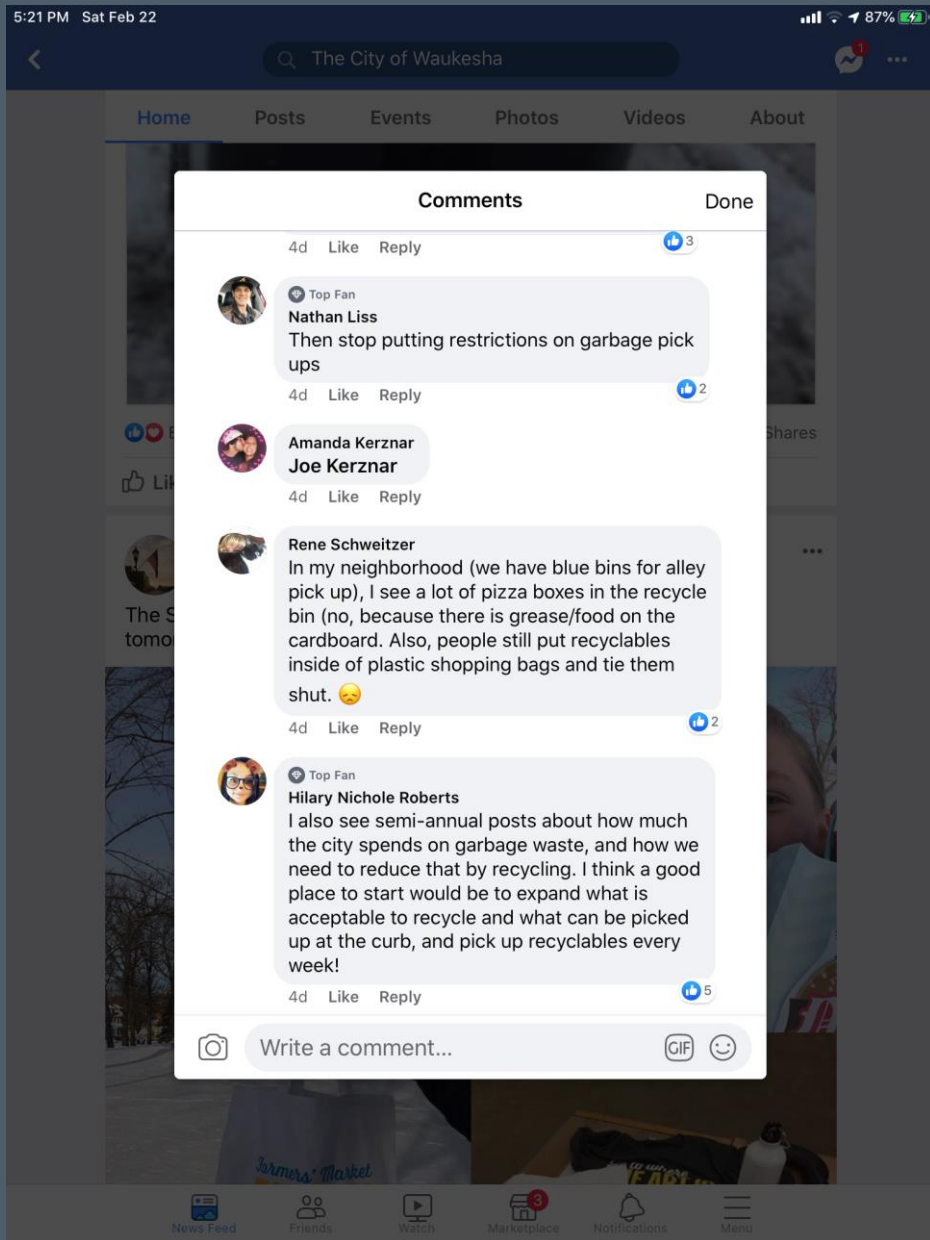
# Social Media Post



City of Waukesha Facebook Post

The response...

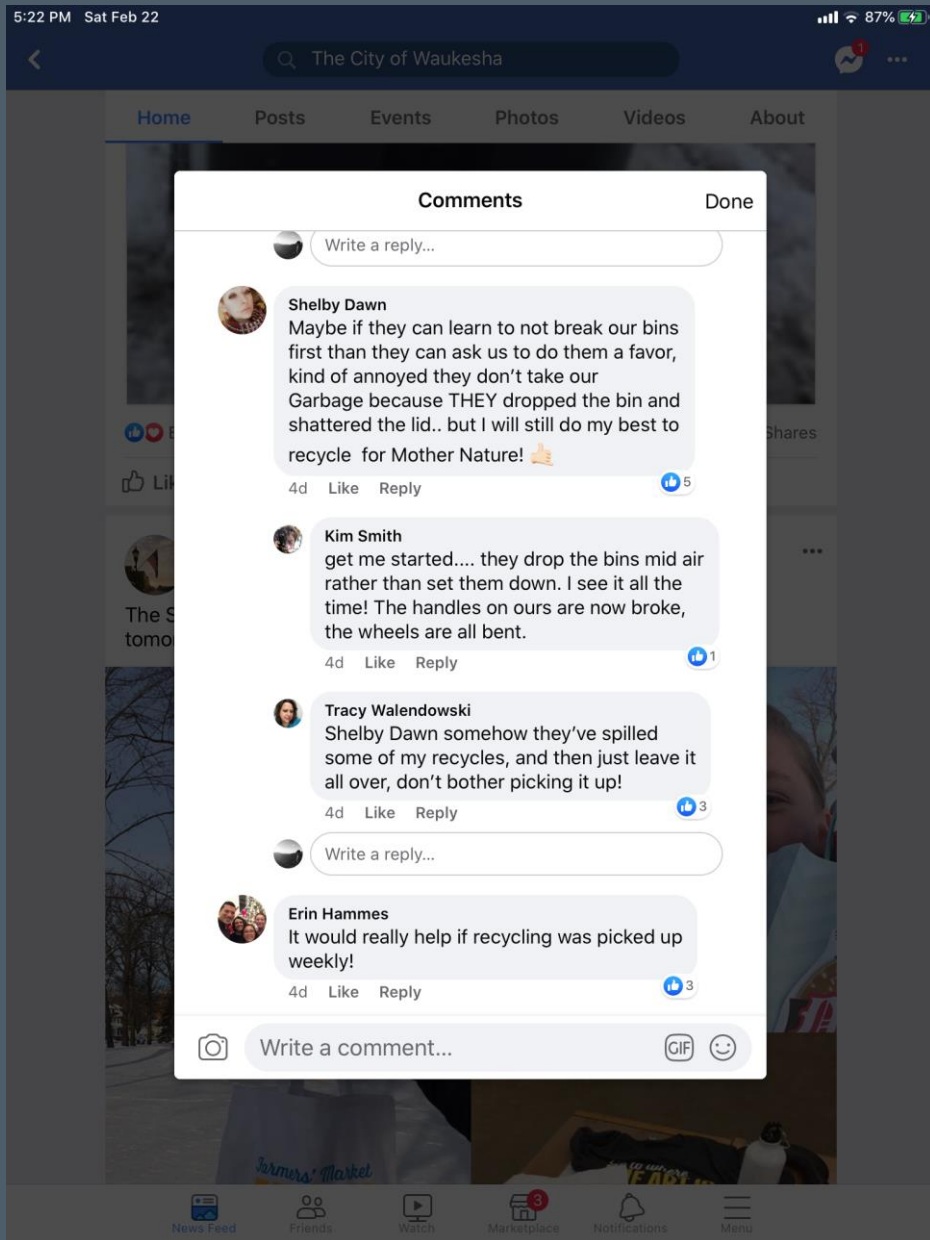




“Then stop putting restrictions on garbage pickups”

“...I think a good place to start would be to expand what is acceptable to recycle and what can be picked up at the curb, and pick up recyclables every week!”





←

“Maybe if they can learn to not break our bins first than they can ask us to do them a favor, kind of annoyed they don’t take our Garbage because THEY dropped the bin and shattered the lid..but I will still do my best to recycle for Mother Nature!”

←

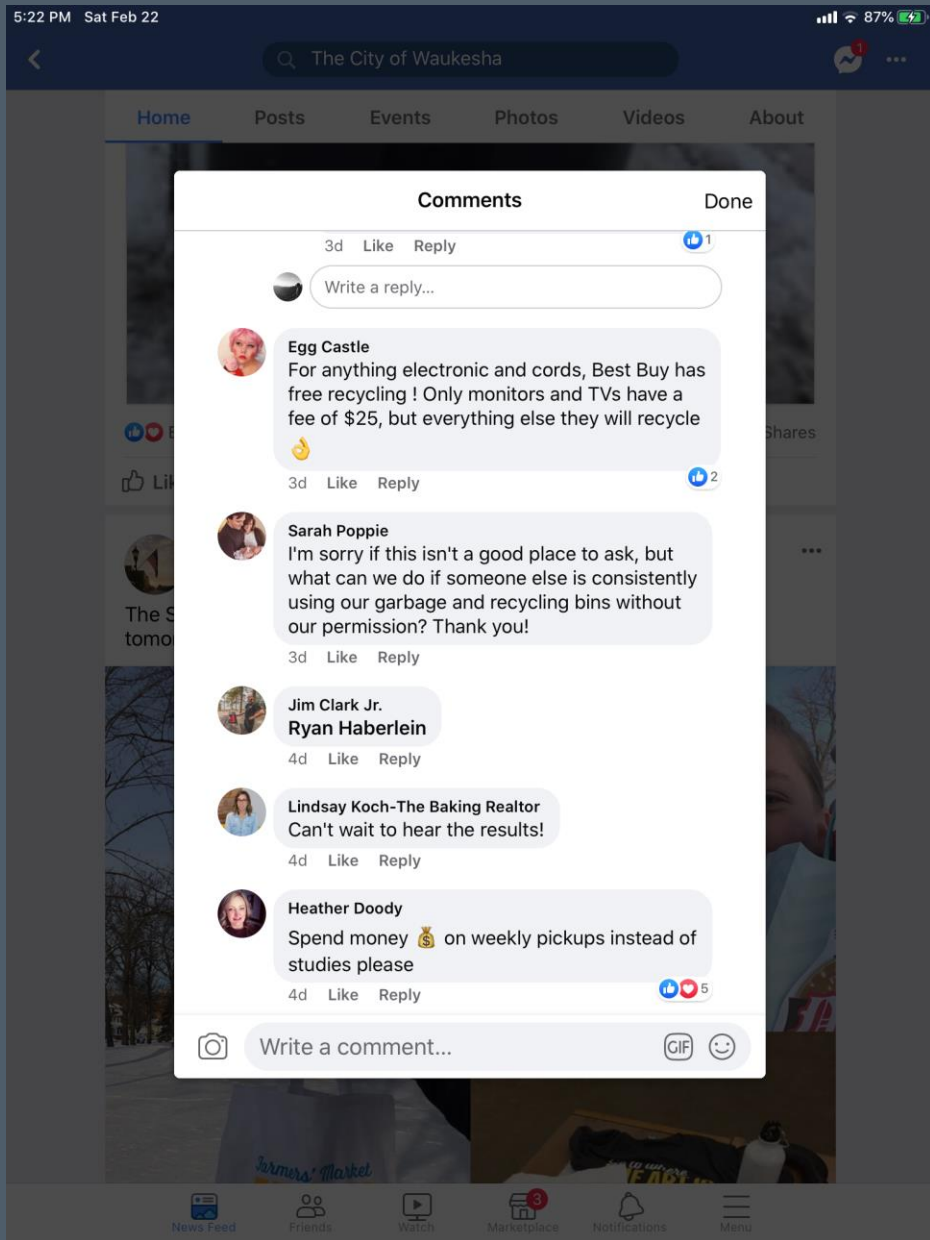
“Get me started...they drop the bins mid air rather than set them down. I see it all the time.”

←

“...somehow they’ve spilled some of my recycles, and then just leave it all over, don’t bother picking it up!”

←

“It would really help if recycling was picked up weekly!”

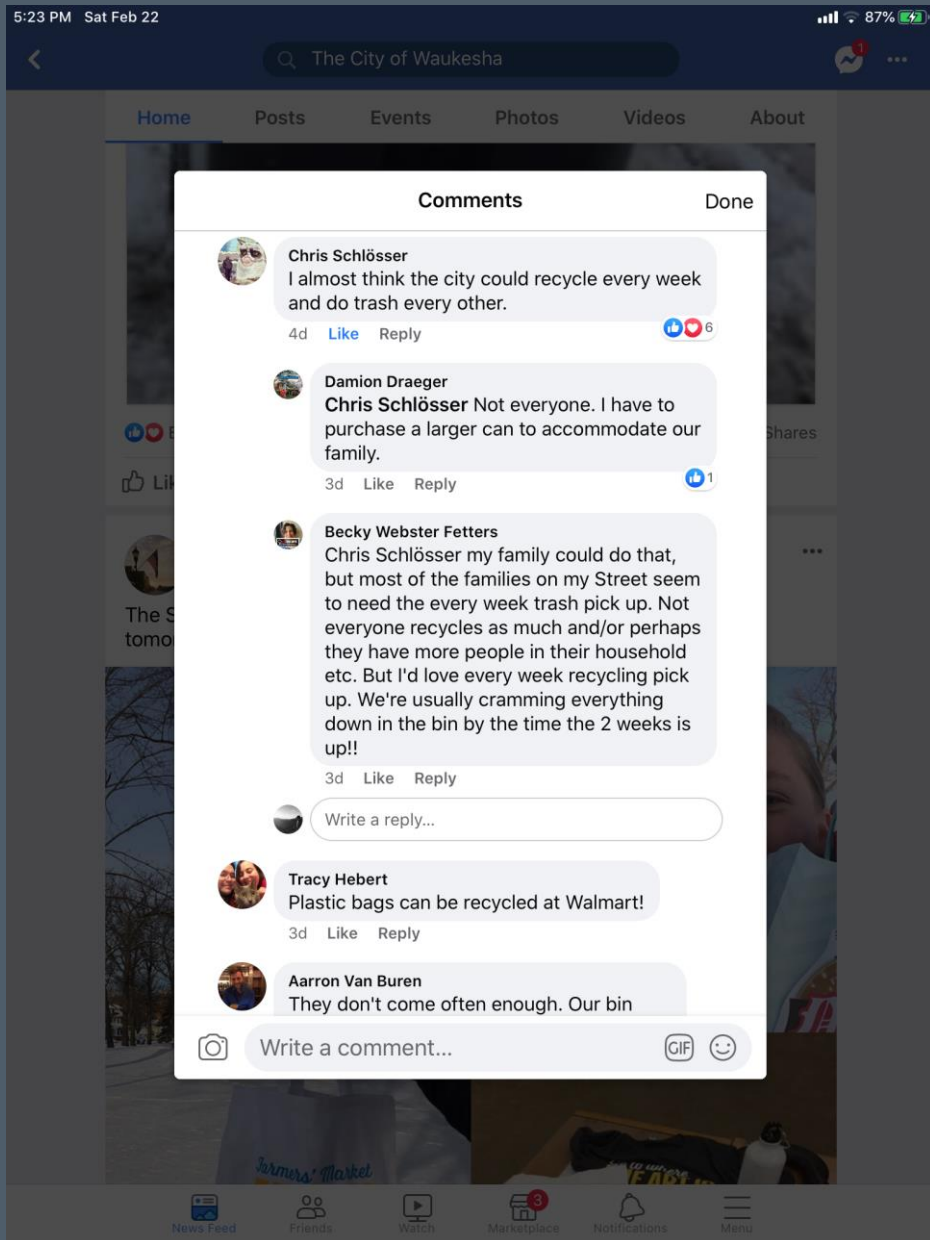


“Can’t wait to hear the results!”



“Spend money on weekly pickups instead of studies please”

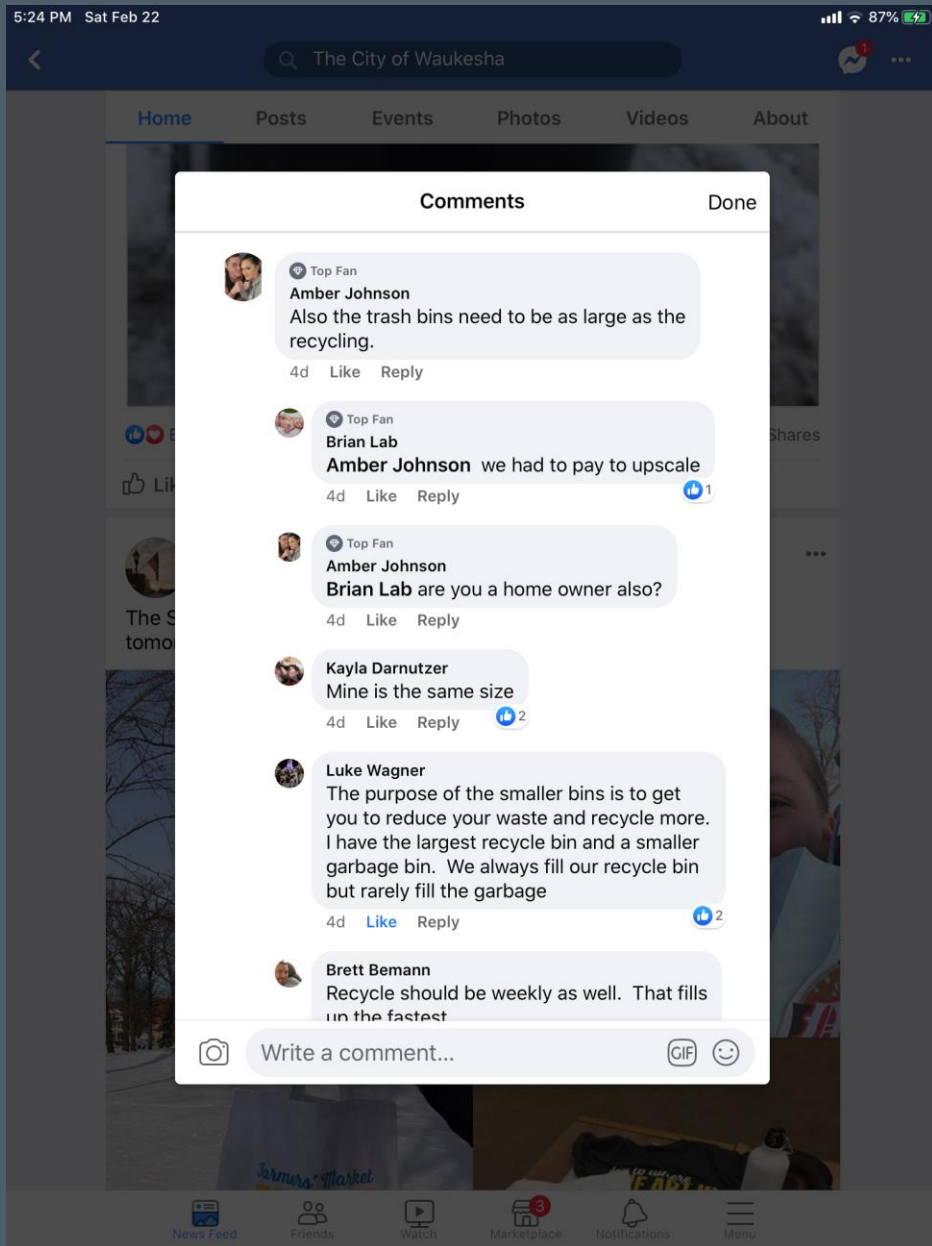




“I almost think the city could recycle every week and do trash every other.” ★

“...Not everyone. I have to purchase a larger can to accommodate our family.”

“Plastic bags can be recycled at Walmart!”



“Also the trash bins need to be as large as the recycling.”

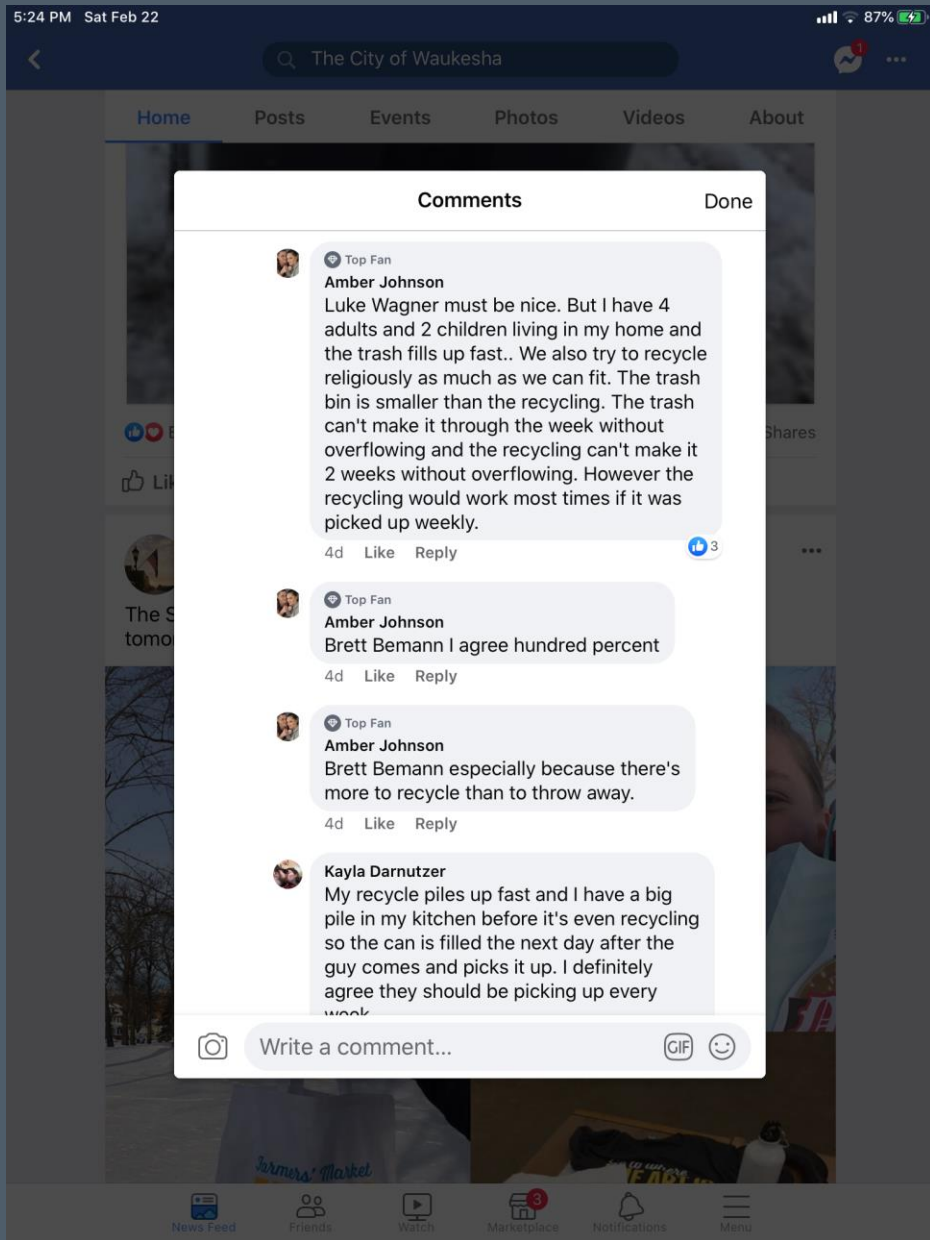


“We had to pay to upscale.”

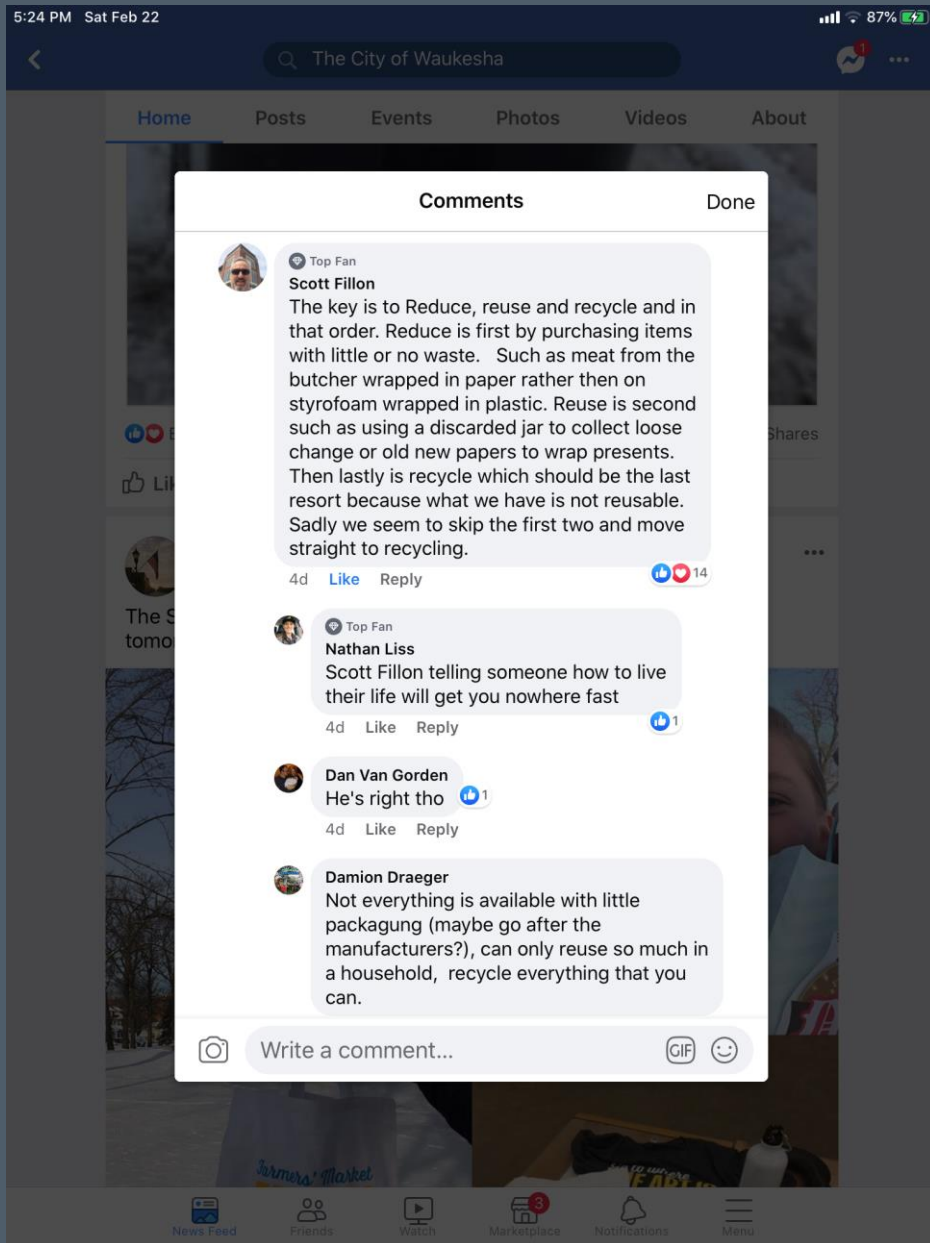


“The purpose of the smaller bins is to get you to reduce your waste and recycle more. I have the largest recycle bin and a smaller garbage bin. We always fill our recycle bin but rarely fill the garbage”





“...Must be nice. But I have 4 adults and 2 children living in my home and the trash fills up fast.”

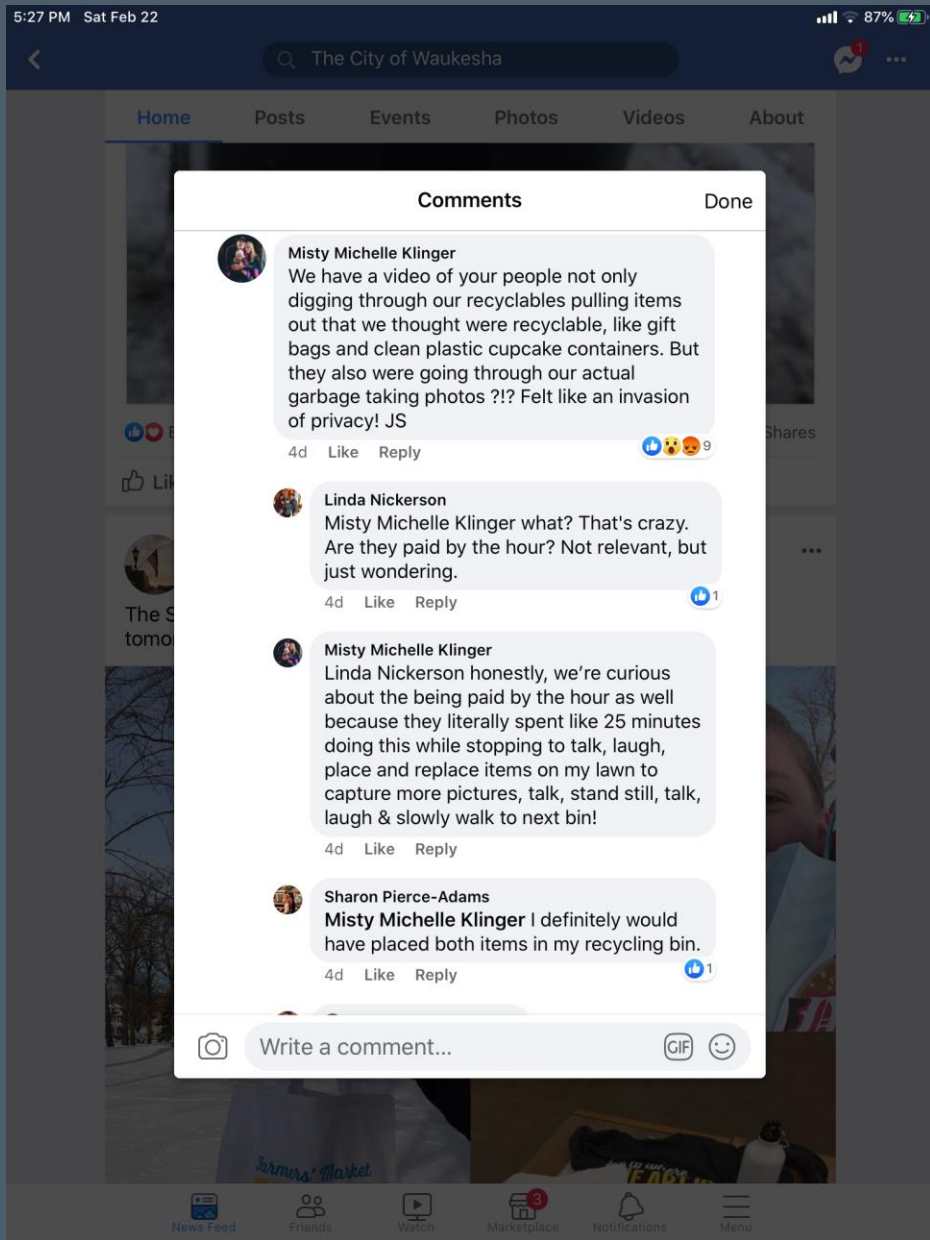


“The key is to Reduce, reuse, recycle and in that order. Reduce is first by purchasing items with little or no waste. ...Reuse is second... ...Then lastly is recycle which should be the last resort... Sadly we seem to skip the first two and move straight to recycling.”



“...telling someone how to live their life will get you nowhere fast.”





“We have video of people not only digging through our recyclables pulling items out that we thought were recyclable, like gift bags and clean plastic cupcake containers. But they were also going through our actual garbage taking photos ?! Felt like an invasion of privacy! JS”



*“...what? That’s crazy. Are they paid by the hour? Not relevant, but wondering”*



“...honestly, we’re curious about the being paid by the hour as well because they literally spent like 25 minutes doing this while stopping to talk, laugh...capture more pictures, talk, stand still, talk laugh and slowly walk to the next bin!”

## Trial #3



## Time to Do It

- Called my lawyer.
- Ventured out anyway.
- Strategies:
  - Daylight
  - Moved city vehicle with me as I walked...put back gate up
  - Didn't take any photos
  - Held a bag and clipboard
  - Did not peak in any trash bins
  - Wore a baseball hat



## Trial #3



## Observations/Results

- Overall?
  - Went well with interactions!
  - One guy asked me “Are you going to do mine?” (wanted me to)
  - Invited!
- Not all carts out and not a ton of trash within them.
- Cold – tape didn’t stick.
- One worried resident from pre-notice? – no carts out.

The Next  
Day...



Phone Call From WTMJ 4

6 PM News Story



# The Day After That...



Phone Call From Local Newspaper:  
The Waukesha Freeman



SHARE

## Recycling contamination has increased in county

nbrahm@conleynet.com 262-513-2651

WAUKESHA — While you might believe throwing that item in the recycling bin is a good idea, it's important to take a second look at the recycling regulations in your area.

Analiese Smith, Waukesha County recycling and solid waste supervisor, said during the past several years there has been an increase in recycling contamination.

Smith said the Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) that some of the county uses is located in Milwaukee. This MRF includes recycling from about 3/4 of Waukesha County, Milwaukee and smaller third parties.

"The facility-level data is, we've seen contamination in the 15% to 20% range," Smith said.

Smith said these numbers are what they've seen in the past year; however, the number has been closer to the lower end of that range, at about 15%.

### Waukesha

Dustin Nolan, recycling and solid waste coordinator in the city of Waukesha, also said contamination has worsened in recent years.

Nolan said he has been working on an informational campaign where he is studying what is being thrown away and works to educate residents.

This includes spot-checking garbage at households and looking at what kind of trash contamination they

See **RECYCLE**, PAGE 8A



Click here to see  
this page in the  
eEdition:



(Login Required)

SHARE



# Conclusions: What I Observed...



## ...About Messaging/Communicating

- 1) The power of social media is real.
- 2) The combination and compounding of media is effective.
- 3) Citizens do read notices and letters.
- 4) Citizens rarely follow-up to the source of their concern if they go on viral tirades.
- 5) Citizens rarely follow-up to personal appeals and offers to discuss.



# Conclusions: What I Observed...



## ...About Going to Their Homes

- 1) It genuinely makes people uncomfortable approaching them at their homes.
  - a) Except...it sometimes excites them, too?
  - b) It can make them feel a part of something important?
  - c) It feels like they are getting attention?
- 2) People are very worried about ID theft.
- 3) Cameras/video recording is everywhere, always. Households and handhelds.
- 4) People get confused as to what your purpose is – what you are trying to do.





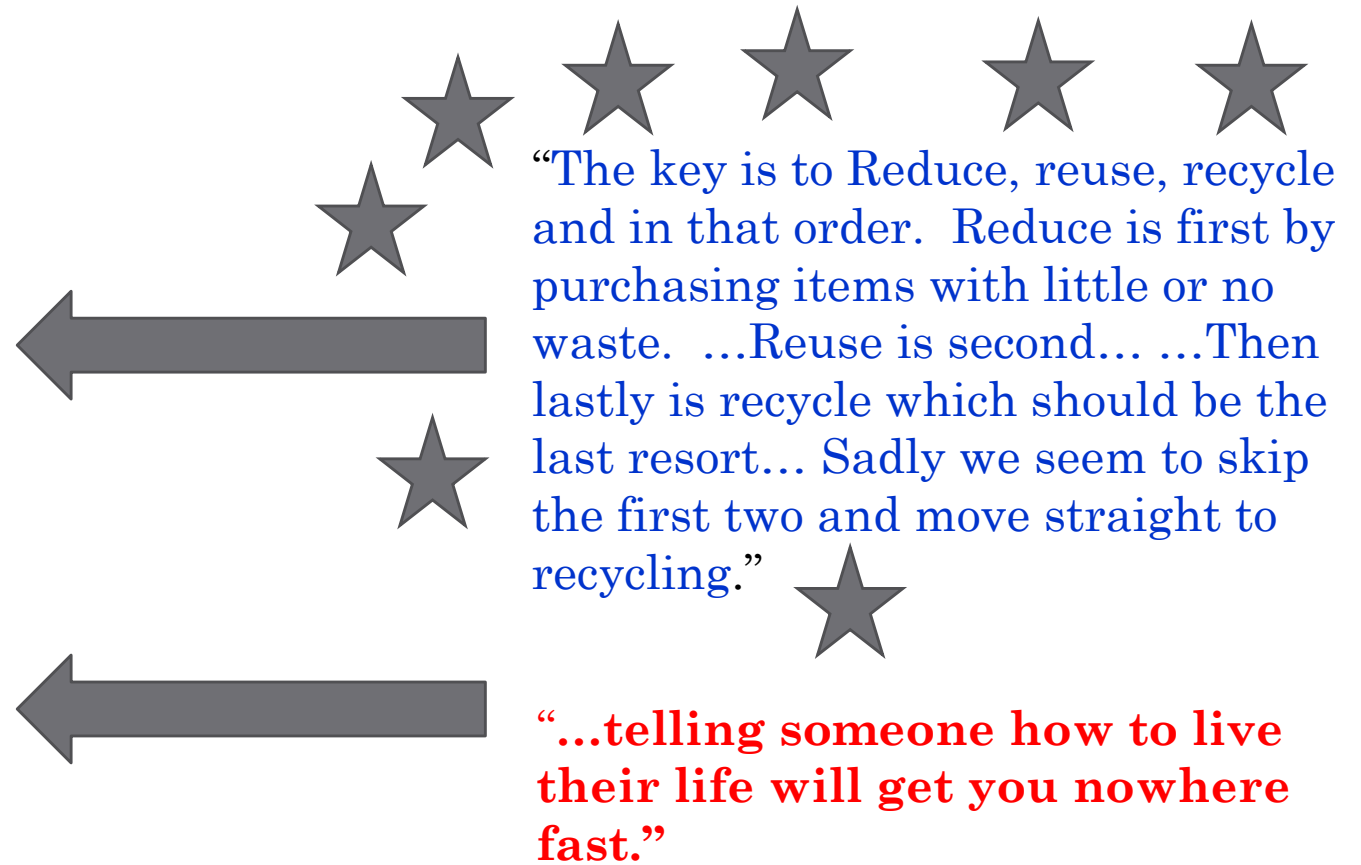
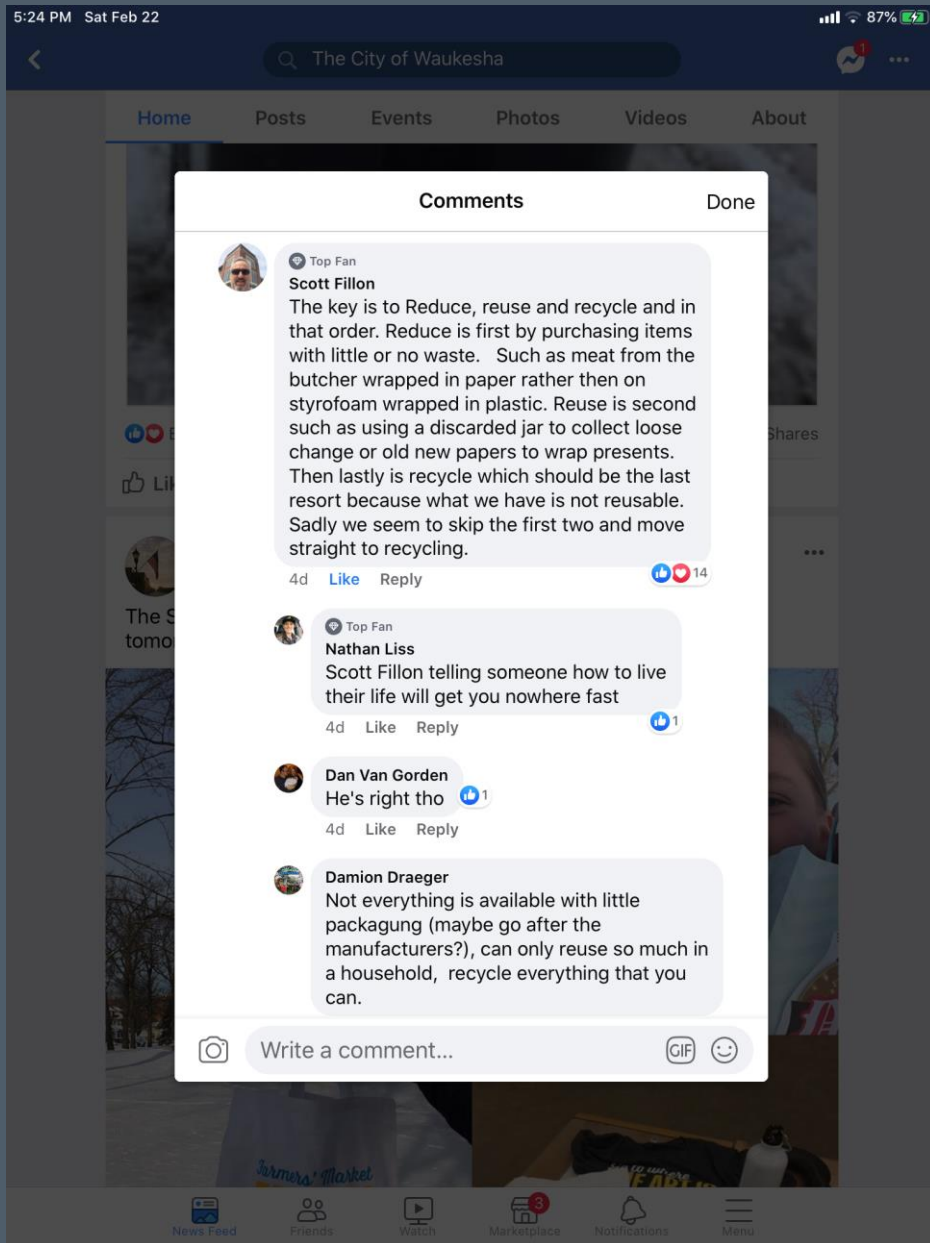
# Conclusions: What I Observed...



## ...About People's Waste Habits

- 1) Garbage is personal.
  - a) When you are talking about waste habits, you are inevitably talking about lifestyle.
- 2) Pride is real.
  - a) Pride in possessions.
  - b) Pride in affluence.
  - c) Pride in tax paying.
- 3) Home janitorial routines are also personal.
  - a) Plastic bag system in house.
  - b) Paper bag system in house.
  - c) Keeping bins clean.







## This “Study”



## Fair Criticisms

- 1) Not very scientific.
- 2) Made it up as I went.
- 3) Focused on forcing the interactions more than the follow-up/results of the actual recycling.
- 4) Still played some aspects soft.
- 5) Maybe would have used a different title?

# Door-to-Door Recycling Education



## Recommendations

- 1) Make it known you are coming – not secretive.
- 2) Wear a vest and look as official as you can.
- 3) Bring a buddy if you can.
- 4) Choose good weather.
- 5) Know your timing with the recycling truck.
- 6) Bring a spare bin to help sort full bins.
- 7) Be prepared to stop immediately and move-on entirely.
- 8) Must follow-up with correspondence to be effective.



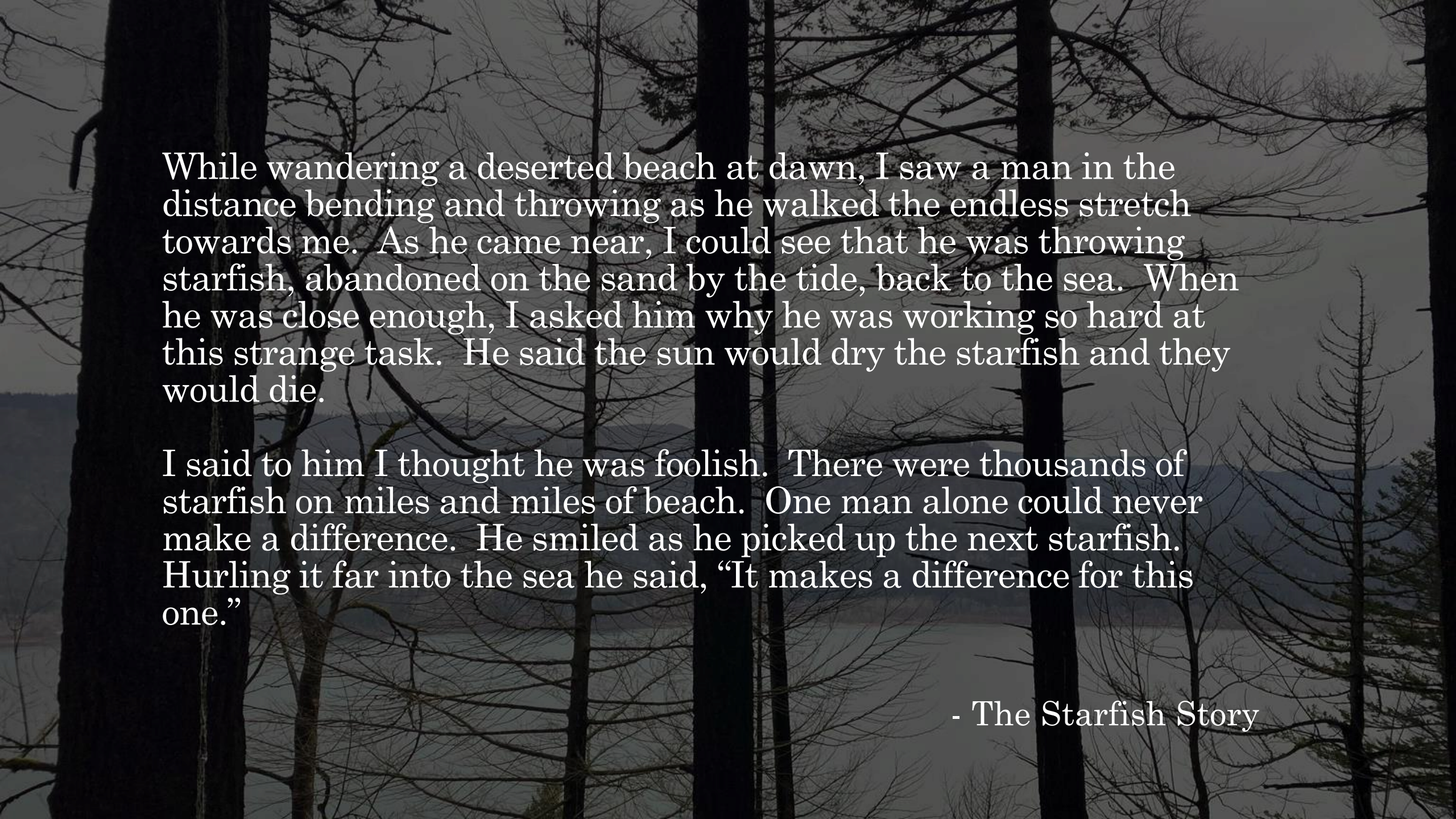
# Door-to-Door Recycling Education



Is it worthwhile? I say yes.

- 1) Direct communication/education.
- 2) Using the “garbage is personal” advantageously.
- 3) Tangible contamination (visual and hands-on).
- 4) Sends message that city is taking this serious.
- 5) Word spreads!
- 6) Literally source separating/helping the cause (tiny bit).

Considering all the above...even if it's tiny in quantity...  
and slow going...I say its worth it.



While wandering a deserted beach at dawn, I saw a man in the distance bending and throwing as he walked the endless stretch towards me. As he came near, I could see that he was throwing starfish, abandoned on the sand by the tide, back to the sea. When he was close enough, I asked him why he was working so hard at this strange task. He said the sun would dry the starfish and they would die.

I said to him I thought he was foolish. There were thousands of starfish on miles and miles of beach. One man alone could never make a difference. He smiled as he picked up the next starfish. Hurling it far into the sea he said, "It makes a difference for this one."

- The Starfish Story





# Dustin Nolan

[dnolan@waukesha-wi.gov](mailto:dnolan@waukesha-wi.gov)

262-524-3593