

# Edmonton’s waste system: what did we get for our money?

Residents were sold high diversion and world-class performance. The public record shows a persistent gap between that ambition and what the system delivered.

“turns waste into revenue”<sup>[35]</sup>

City manager’s article, 2012

“world class waste management system”<sup>[7]</sup>

City of Edmonton, 2015 environmental report

THE DIVERSION GAP

Share of residential waste reported as kept out of landfill



**Read this correctly:** the 2015 goal and result appear together in the City’s report. The 2024 figure is a later snapshot; calculation methods and service arrangements changed. These are not a uniform trend series.

FIVE TROUBLED PROJECTS, WITH DISTINCT OUTCOMES

|                              |                                                      |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Co-composter                 | Closed <sup>[17]</sup>                               |
| Enerkem biofuels             | Operations ceased <sup>[18]</sup>                    |
| Greys Paper Recycling        | Operator bankrupt <sup>[19]</sup>                    |
| Anaerobic digester           | Organics use judged unviable <sup>[20]</sup>         |
| Construction-waste recycling | City withdrew; third party took over <sup>[17]</sup> |

This is a record of repeated setbacks, not five identical failures. The outcomes do not establish that every facility was cancelled or every dollar was lost.

\$402.6M

Wider-system capital commitments<sup>[1][2][6]</sup>

Selected historical periods; includes useful assets. **Not a total loss or the cost of these five projects.**

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Business cases reviewed were insufficient<sup>[6]</sup>

2018 audit: the four cases did not rigorously compare options and establish the preferred choice’s advantage.

## 02 / WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

# Make the next promise earn our confidence.

Landfill will remain part of waste management. My concern is the value purchased: did costly processing deliver the promised diversion, and what risk are residents taking on next?

## VARME / A LONG PUBLIC COMMITMENT TO A PRIVATE PLANT

The announced agreement covers **up to 150,000 tonnes a year for 15 years**. Varne still lists the plant as under development, with a 2026 investment decision anticipated. <sup>[23][24][49]</sup>

**\$10 per tonne** = **\$22.5 million over 15 years**

Illustration at 150,000 tonnes every year; undiscounted, before escalation. Not a disclosed fee or guaranteed payment.

ERA reports that lower-than-expected fuel energy and underestimated carbon-capture energy demand forced a **25% scale-up and commercial-model changes**. The study also advanced engineering and risk assessment. <sup>[48]</sup>

**The decision test:** publish the actual fee, comparable alternatives, volume obligations, environmental benefit and maximum public exposure. The signed fee and any put-or-pay terms were not available in the records reviewed. The proposed shorter haul also belongs in the comparison. <sup>[50]</sup>

## BLATCHFORD / THE SAME STANDARD FOR THE CITY AS DEVELOPER

The 2024 audit records a **\$632M approved redevelopment capital budget**, intended to be recovered through land sales. It found unsupported sales and appreciation assumptions, a valuation last updated in 2017, and a completion forecast moved from 2038 to 2042. <sup>[65]</sup>

This is a budget, not a loss. There is real progress: the City reported nearly 400 homes completed or under construction by late 2025. The question is whether demand, pricing and financing can sustain the promise. <sup>[66]</sup>

### THE STANDARD I WANT COUNCIL TO APPLY

**Prove the advantage.** Compare full costs and verified environmental outcomes against credible alternatives.

**Publish the exposure.** Show who pays when volumes, markets, grants or performance fall short.

**Report delivery.** Measure results against promises, and change course when the evidence demands it.

A systems critique across decades and successive councils. Public records and my industry experience; corrections and better solutions welcome.

Chris + Kay | AI-assisted analysis. Sources and financial qualifications are linked by number.

Full account and 78 sources: [chrislabossiere.com/edmonton-waste](https://chrislabossiere.com/edmonton-waste)