

To: Brentwood Selectboard
From: Solid Waste SubCommittee
Date: April 2026
Subject: Trash, Recycling, and Waste Reduction Options for 2026 and Beyond

Overview

This memo summarizes Brentwood's current solid waste and recycling costs, key questions the Solid Waste Committee has been exploring, and three broad scenarios for reducing both tonnage and cost. Our intent is to ground the conversation in our actual data, highlight feasible first steps, and outline areas where we need community input and Board support.

Current Program and 2025 Costs

Brentwood's current system uses Casella for trash and recycling collection, with municipal solid waste (MSW) disposal contracted separately through the Southeast Regional Refuse Disposal District with Waste Management. We currently operate a curbside, single-stream recycling program.

In calendar year 2025:

- MSW tonnage: 1,480.66 tons
- MSW collection cost: \$378,999.96
- MSW disposal cost: \$128,984.22
- Total trash program cost: approximately \$507,984

- Recycling tonnage: 347.76 tons
- Recycling collection cost: \$150,750
- Recycling processing ("disposal") cost: \$47,900.14
- Total recycling program cost: approximately \$198,650

In other words, Brentwood spent in the neighborhood of \$700,000 on trash and recycling in 2025, with trash accounting for roughly three-quarters of that total.

Key Questions

Given these numbers and regional trends, the Committee is focused on nine key questions:

1. What is actually recycled by Casella, and how much of our recycling ends up in the trash?
2. Is cardboard really the only recyclable with meaningful value?
3. What is the true cost of recycling when we include both collection and processing?

4. What is realistically feasible in Brentwood that could save money without overwhelming residents?
5. Who are the other players we might partner with (farms, compost haulers, reuse organizations)?
6. How many households might participate in composting or food-scrap diversion?
7. How quickly could we go out to RFP for collection or disposal, if we chose?
8. How can we shift our communication from “recycling” to true waste reduction?
9. Are there vendors who can support special collection days for metals, textiles, furniture, etc.?

Preliminary Findings

Recycling and value

Based on Casella’s 2025 data for Brentwood, we know how many tons we collected and what we paid to process them, but we do not yet have a detailed breakdown of our contamination rate or where each commodity ultimately goes. We plan to request more granular data from Casella.

We do know that:

- Cardboard is the most consistently valuable recyclable for towns our size.
- Metals and some plastics and paper grades also retain value, especially when clean.
- Glass is often a net cost unless there is a nearby beneficial-use outlet.

The 2025 numbers make it clear that recycling is not “free”: the town spent roughly \$199,000 on recycling services last year. However, recycling and reuse remain important tools for reducing our trash tonnage over time and preserving landfill capacity.

Waste reduction scenarios

We modeled three main scenarios using our 2026 budget estimates.

Scenario 1: Voluntary Food Scrap Diversion and Education (Low Effort / Moderate Savings)

This scenario focuses on the heaviest fraction of our trash: food waste. Studies and regional examples suggest food scraps can account for up to 20–40% of municipal trash by weight.

In Scenario 1, we assume:

- A 20% reduction in MSW tonnage through a combination of:
 - Backyard composting support (bulk purchase of discounted bins).
 - Free food-scrap drop-off at the transfer station, serviced by a regional hauler or composting farm.
 - Reuse initiatives such as an “Everything is Free” yard sale day and/or a small swap shop.

Under this modeling, reduced MSW disposal costs fall from approximately \$135,235 to \$108,188, for an estimated annual savings of about \$27,047 on disposal alone. This approach requires no changes to the Casella contract and is entirely voluntary for residents.

Scenario 2: Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT) (High Effort / Maximum Savings)

In a PAYT model, residents purchase specialized, municipal-branded trash bags (typically \$1–\$2 each), and those who throw away less trash pay less. New Hampshire towns that have adopted bag-based PAYT programs have reported 42–54% reductions in solid waste tonnage, along with increased recycling.

For Brentwood, we modeled a conservative 40% reduction in MSW tonnage. Under that assumption, reduced MSW disposal costs drop to approximately \$81,141, for an estimated annual savings of about \$54,094 compared to our 2026 baseline.

PAYT is the single most powerful tool we examined for reducing disposal costs and total tonnage. It is also the most politically and operationally complex, and would require a thoughtful design process, substantial public education, and protections for low-income and senior households.

Scenario 3: Structural Changes (Transfer Station, Contract Structure, and Automation)

The third category of change is more structural and longer-term. Options include:

- Moving toward a transfer station model, potentially paired with PAYT, which can dramatically change how and when trash and recyclables are handled.
- Splitting contracts (collection vs. disposal) to allow Brentwood to bid each portion separately, as other NH municipalities have done.
- Transitioning to multi-stream recycling in order to improve contamination rates and increase the value of our recycling.
- Transitioning from manual collection to automated carts in order to improve route efficiency and reduce labor costs over time.

Feasibility and Timing

From a feasibility standpoint, the Committee believes the following near-term steps are realistic within the next 12–24 months:

- Launching a voluntary food-scrap diversion program (transfer station drop-off plus backyard compost support).
- Implementing reuse initiatives such as swap shops and “Everything is Free” days.
- Enhancing communication around “what goes where” and how small actions affect the town budget.
- Conducting a community survey to gauge residents’ appetite for PAYT and other changes before any formal proposal is developed.

A full RFP process for collection and/or disposal, or the adoption of a PAYT system, would require additional time. Based on typical municipal procurement timelines, a comprehensive RFP and vendor transition could take 6–12 months from initial Board direction to service start.

Community Engagement and Next Steps

To ensure any changes are grounded in resident experience and concerns, the Committee will be:

1. Creating a town-wide survey on trash, recycling, composting, and PAYT; draft questions are attached separately.
2. Presence at upcoming community events (the Brentwood Gathering on April 17 and Earth Day roadside cleanup on April 25) to:
 - Share simple visuals of our 2025 data.
 - Explain the food-scrap and PAYT scenarios in plain language.
 - Collect early feedback and build a list of interested households and volunteers.

Requested Board Support

At this stage, we are not asking the Board to choose a single scenario. We are requesting:

- Support moving forward with the community survey.
- Support for designing a voluntary food-scrap pilot program for discussion at a future meeting.
- Permission to continue exploring PAYT and contract options, using the survey results and additional data from Casella and Waste Management to refine our analysis.

We welcome your questions, feedback, and guidance on how bold or incremental Brentwood is ready to be in this next phase.