

May 13, 2021 e-mail to Master Recyclers regarding Ridwell, Inc.

Hi Master Recyclers,

A few of you have reached out to us about Ridwell, and we wanted to take a moment to talk a bit more about this service.

Ridwell is a recycling collection service that will collect, at your home, items currently only recyclable through a recycling depot (textiles, Styrofoam, lightbulbs, etc.). Ridwell advertises that they perform this service for around \$10/month to \$14/every three months.

It seems like a very desirable service, but there are some concerns about their business model. Some of what we share here, you will recall, is a reminder of the principles and values we explored during your Master Recycler class.

All garbage and recycling collectors within Clackamas County operate under a franchise. This allows us to:

- Know your garbage, recycling, yard waste, or compost is going to an approved facility with their own environmental reporting requirements, ensuring safe management of the materials.
- Set what is collected for recovery based on known information on what makes stable recycling markets. This is why Oregon's list of approved curbside recycling is more strict than in Washington or California. The markets for the items on the "yes" list are not going to fluctuate wildly, leaving the sorting facility with tons of material that is no longer desirable.
- Ensure items collected are environmentally worth their recovery when viewed with a life-cycle lens.
- Standardize services equitably across all collectors within the County.
- Promote transparency in recycling and garbage fees, ensuring that everyone pays a fair fee
- Minimize inefficient traffic caused by multiple collection services
- Ensure that collection systems provide living wages

Current players in the system report to local and state governments and pay into the collection system, which helps improve the collection system for all.

Ridwell did not consult with local governments who operate the franchise system before advertising their services to residents. They do not have a license or franchise to operate here—thus in every local community in the Metro area, Ridwell's service is illegal or in violation of local codes. Ridwell's approach is also in contradiction to state law. Because of this, Ridwell:

- Does not pay into the collection system's improvement for everyone
- There is no oversight of the items they collect
- They do not report on the quantity they collect
- They do not report on where the items are taken for recycling
- We cannot confirm the items they are collecting are effectively recycled instead of adding to recycling issues worldwide, which can lead to more harm than good

Ridwell is also a private, luxury service that costs around 30% of regular monthly garbage and recycling service. The cost is on top of regular garbage and recycling service. If these items are environmentally worth collection, then we should work to make collection of these items available to everyone and not a select few who can afford such services.

It's also important to mention that many of the items Ridwell is collecting can be dropped off for free at many recycling depots.

Ridwell's offered service, charging a fee to collect discarded materials from residents, is in violation of local ordinances whereby every city and county regulates an approved collection provider. Clackamas County and other local governments have communicated this to Ridwell, **but have also invited Ridwell to engage constructively with us to identify pathways where innovative services that have a positive environmental benefit can be offered in our community.** If this collection service is truly worthwhile, our elected Board can consider a variety of approaches to incorporate it as an option. So far, Ridwell has not done this.

We share your desire that more materials that may have environmental benefits to recycle, become easier to actually recycle. And we understand why many consumers would feel that a service like Ridwell is a good idea. You may want to encourage Ridwell to work with cities and counties in good faith.

We mentioned that one of the benefits of our system is to help ensure that we don't use recycling to greenwash—we can focus on recycling products in ways that have a real environmental benefit. For example, there is growing concern on the chemical recycling of Styrofoam, and whether this is an environmentally sound practice when you account for air, water, and soil pollution from chemical recycling and the environmental justice issues for the communities that live near these chemical recycling facilities.

You can learn more about this issue at the below links:

<https://www.no-burn.org/wp-content/uploads/Agilyx-Case-Study.pdf>

https://www.no-burn.org/wp-content/uploads/All-Talk-and-No-Recycling_July-28.pdf

Here are two links where industry responds:

<https://www.recyclingtoday.com/article/debate-over-chemical-recycling-plastics/>

<https://www.plasticstoday.com/advanced-recycling/chemical-recycling-doomed-gaia-claims>

Clackamas County does offer recycling licenses to businesses who pick up recyclable materials *at no charge to the customer*. This is a long-standing option that allows scrap metal, wood, or other material with value to find end markets. Ridwell could pursue this option but we anticipate that the materials that Ridwell offers to collect do not have enough environmental or financial value to allow Ridwell to collect the material without a fee.

We also share your concern that too many plastic and other consumer products do not easily find a recycling solution. This is why Clackamas County and many local governments support Senate Bill 582 which will help bring new financial resources into our collection system, requiring producers of plastics like Styrofoam and clamshells to pay for the recycling and disposal of these materials.

You may want to contact your state legislators to let them know that you want SB 582 to pass.

All that being said, we as Master Recyclers know that recycling is not always the answer. To have the most environmental benefit, we should be encouraging people to focus upon **reducing** hard to recycle items in the first place. Lauren put it nicely in this recent article for the Master Recycler newsletter: <https://www.masterrecycler.org/news/2021/4/1/are-we-using-the-right-tool-for-the-job>

As always, we are happy to chat with anyone about this.

Sincerely,



Stacy Ludington

Eben Polk

Sustainability Analyst
(and your Master Recycler liaison)

Sustainability Supervisor

Clackamas County Sustainability & Solid Waste Program