

Pope/Douglas Solid Waste looking to expand: Plans approved by Douglas County commissioners

Pope/Douglas Solid Waste Management receives approval for its \$18.9 million expansion, upgrade project

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Pope/Douglas Solid Waste Management Director Steve Vrchota (standing) presented information to the Douglas County Board of Commissioners about the proposed upgrades and changes to the solid waste facility at Tuesday's regular board meeting. (Celeste Edenloff / Echo Press)

Pope/Douglas Solid Waste Management is looking to make upgrades to its facility and has applied for three Capital Assistance Program grants from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the state of Minnesota.

In doing so, Steve Vrchota, director of the solid waste facility located in Alexandria, presented the plan to Douglas County commissioners at the county board meeting Tuesday, asking for their support of the project.

“This is definitely a need, not a want,” Vrchota told the commissioners.

Support for the \$18.9 million project was approved by the commissioners through a resolution that states: “The Board of Commissioners of Douglas County, Minnesota is in support of the Pope/Douglas Solid Waste Management CAP project at \$18.9 million, provided that \$8 million

in funds is being provided by the State and \$10.9 million would be provided by Pope/Douglas Solid Waste Management; a unified regional waste recovery, recycling and composting system.”

Project details

The plan for Pope/Douglas Solid Waste is to:

- Move the current household hazardous waste/recycling center, along with the administrative building, to a new location.
- Construct an environmental learning center.
- Expand the Material Recovery Facility and install new recovery equipment.
- Construct an organics composting site at the existing landfill site near Grant County.

“We have presented to the city and were told this is a permit-ready project,” Vrchota said. “The city is in full support of the project.”

The new environmental learning center would expand the current facility from a 3,200-square-foot building to a 10,000-square-foot space. The building would include the recycling program, household hazardous waste, education center and administrative space.

Vrchota said it matches space needs for their current operations and allows room for expansion.

The expanded recycling center and household hazardous waste area allows for safe storage and recovery of additional materials, he said, adding that it safely services their customers’ needs in a climate-controlled environment.

In addition, the facility would be heated and powered with clean renewable energy from the waste-to-energy facility.

“It would be a very energy-efficient project,” Vrchota said.

For the Material Recovery Facility, the tipping floor would be expanded to meet the current tonnage needs, as well as replace worn-out equipment.

Expanding the facility would increase recovery of recyclable materials from 2.5 percent to 8 percent, allow flexibility to process up to 18,000 tons per year of curbside-collected recycling materials produced in the region, reduce manual sorting and increase operator safety, Vrchota explained.

Lastly, the organics composting facility would provide a regional composting site that would allow Pope/Douglas Solid Waste to expand its food waste recycling program. The facility would be geographically centered in the five counties it partners with and would generate “high-value compost” for local projects, Vrchota said.



This drawing shows the existing Pope/Douglas Solid Waste Management facilities, along with the proposed changes. (Contributed)

About the facility

Pope/Douglas Solid Waste Management provides recycling services and household hazardous waste collection to Pope and Douglas counties and processes garbage from seven counties, including Pope, Douglas, Grant, Stevens, Stearns, Benton and Sherburne.

The plant receives more than 80,000 tons of garbage and recycling per year and produces clean renewable energy at its waste-to-energy facility for 3M, Alomere Health and the Alexandria Technical and Community College.

The household hazardous waste facility and recycling center are open year-round and serve more than 36,000 customers per year.

The original waste-to-energy facility opened in 1987, with the household hazardous waste and administrative building added in 1993, the recycling drop-off center added in 1997 and the material processing facility added in 2003.

In 2010, the waste-to-energy facility was expanded with a third combustor added. And just two years ago, Pope/Douglas Solid Waste added its organics recycling program.