

FREEPORT COMMUNITY LIBRARY

TRASH & RECYCLING AUDIT REPORT

INTRODUCTION

From Tuesday, January 20 through Thursday, January 22, 2026, Freeport Community Library (FCL) conducted a three-day waste audit to better understand the types and quantities of waste generated throughout the building. This effort supports the Library's ongoing sustainability goals, including work toward the Sustainable Libraries Initiative's (SLI) Sustainable Library Certification Program, and provides a clearer picture of how our current waste-handling systems are functioning. The audit included all areas of the Library — public spaces, staff spaces, restrooms, and workrooms — to create as accurate a snapshot as possible.

METHODOLOGY

FCL followed standard practices for waste audits that were recommended by SLI and other waste-management guidance materials. Over the three-day period, all trash and recycling generated within the Library was collected and set aside for sorting. At the end of the collection period, staff volunteers set up a sorting area using tarps and protective equipment. To start, two measurements were recorded: the total weight of waste placed in trash receptacles, and the total weight of materials put into recycling containers.



The recycling was then emptied out, examined, and sorted into predetermined categories such as "cardboard," "paper," "plastics," "aluminum," and "contaminants that should have been in the trash." These categories were weighed individually to create a more complete snapshot of the types of waste generated in the Library. The same procedure was then followed for the materials placed in trash bins, using categories like "single use plastic," "food and soiled packaging," "sanitary waste," and "items that should have been recycled."



FINDINGS

Across the three days, the Library generated 32.3 pounds of total waste. Of this:

- 15.9 pounds was disposed as trash
- 16.4 pounds was recycled
- 15.3 pounds of this recycling was correctly sorted and 1.1lbs. was contamination

The trash and recycling figures represent a 47.4% diversion rate, meaning nearly half of our waste (with weight as the defining metric) was kept out of the landfill stream.

Accounting for incorrectly sorted items placed in the recycling and trash, the Library had correctly sorted 87% of its total waste.

Trash Composition

The trash stream included:

- 6.5 lbs sanitary waste
- 3.0 lbs food scraps & soiled packaging
- 1.9 lbs shredded paper
- 1.5 lbs unrecyclable single-use plastics
- 1.7 lbs recyclable paper mistakenly thrown out
- One plastic bottle (unweighed)

These results highlight a few key observations. Sanitary waste and food-soiled packaging represent the largest categories and are the least likely to be diverted under our current system. However, the amount of recyclable paper and

shredded paper present in trash points to an opportunity for improved staff and patron education—and possibly system adjustments.

Recycling Composition

Recycling bins contained:

- 9.6 lbs paper
- 5.1 lbs cardboard
- 0.4 lbs recyclable plastics
- 0.2 lbs aluminum
- 1.1 lbs contamination (including a hardcover book and food-stained items)

The 6.7% contamination rate indicates that overall, recycling habits are fairly strong, but some clarification around recycling rules — especially regarding book disposal and food-contaminated materials — would likely reduce this number further.

General Patterns

Across the process, several themes emerged:

- Much of our recyclable fiber (paper & cardboard) is being successfully diverted.
- Confusion remains about where certain kinds of items belong, particularly small paper scraps, books, and food-soiled paper products.
- Food-related waste is a notable portion of our trash stream.
- Sanitary waste (paper towels, tissues, restroom waste) is the single largest trash category, which on one hand will remain a fixed waste stream and, on

the other hand, presents an opportunity to consider alternative products/options for the future.

ACTIONABLE ITEMS

Based on the audit findings, the Library has identified a set of next steps to improve waste reduction and diversion efforts. These are practical, achievable, and aligned with sustainability best practices.

1. Consider Public-Facing Composting Options

Food waste and soiled paper made up 3 pounds of the waste stream across just three days. FCL currently has no public-facing compost option, so patrons currently have no option to compost here. We could explore the idea of adding a compost element to the available public waste disposal options to reduce landfill-bound material.

Some library staff already compost their breakfast and lunch scraps in a gallon-sized compost bin that we then empty out into a 74-gallon composter outside, but participation could be improved upon.



2. Improve Locations of Trash & Recycling Collection Points

It appears that most of the recyclables that ended up in the trash came from patrons, likely because recycling bins are not always easy to locate in the

Library's public spaces. We also have fewer recycling bins out in the public parts of the building than there are trash cans. A review of bin placement — with an eye toward high-traffic areas and study locations — will help reduce convenience-based mis-sorting.

3. Upgrade and Clarify Signage

Clear, visual signage has been shown to improve accuracy and reduce contamination in the recycling stream. For both patrons and staff, there were evidenced misunderstandings of food-soiled packaging being put into the recycling stream rather than the trash. A grease-stained pizza box and McDonalds food packaging, for instance, should have been disposed of in the trash. Adding images of accepted items and clarifying rules around shredded paper, books, and food-soiled material will support better decision-making. We have the option of making no-cost signage, so this could be one of the easiest changes we could make.

4. Explore The Idea of Adding Hand Dryers to Bathrooms

Sanitary waste accounted for 6.5 pounds of our trash stream — our single largest category — and most of it was restroom paper towels. Investigating electric hand dryers for restrooms could reduce paper towel use significantly and support long-term waste-reduction goals.



5. Investigate Recycling Options for Shredded Paper

Since 1.9 pounds of shredded paper ended up in the trash, verifying our hauler's requirements — or identifying drop-off alternatives — could help divert this material in the future.

6. Continue Annual or Biannual Waste Audits

Repeating the audit will allow the Library to track progress, assess the impact of changes, and keep staff and patrons engaged in long-term sustainability efforts.

CONCLUSION

By conducting this three-day trash audit, library staff have gained a clearer understanding of the types of waste generated at FCL and the status of its current waste handling procedures. 87% of this waste had been accurately directed to its proper channel, demonstrating that pre-existing efforts were already largely successful. With an eye toward increasing sustainability practices, staff identified several actionable items for further exploration that could divert even more of this waste from landfills going forward. FCL will utilize these insights as we embark on our work in the Sustainable Library Certification Program.