



2025

ANNUAL REPORT

TOMPKINS COUNTY RECYCLING AND MATERIALS MANAGEMENT

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The Mission of the Tompkins County Department of Recycling and Materials Management (TCRMM) is to develop and implement a sustainable materials management strategy for Tompkins County consistent with the New York State solid waste management hierarchy that is environmentally sound, cost-effective, socially responsible and safe. This is accomplished through coordinated administrative, operational, and educational programs that maximize diversion with the 4Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rethink) as a focal point.

Director's Report

In 2025, the Department finalized its 10-year Local Solid Waste Management Plan, Rethinking Waste in Tompkins County: Fostering a Local Circular Economy. This plan outlines a path to be pursued for managing materials in an economical and environmentally sound manner that is consistent with the State policy and grounded in the 4R's. Identified as a priority in the County's Strategic Plan, work is well underway to achieve the aims set forth in this document, which will provide a road map for the coming years.

To improve customer service and ease of use while enhancing efficiency, new administrative permitting processes were implemented. This includes enabling electronic signatures for permit affidavits and generating electronic permit renewal reminders. Additionally, migrating from a stand-alone website to the County's site has made it easier and more convenient for residents to find departmental information while ensuring that a high standard of security is met.

Through a contract extension process for operation of the Recycling and Solid Waste Center (RSWC), the department was able to realize new cost savings while ensuring high quality customer service for the public. This was especially beneficial, considering that markets for recyclable commodities remained low in 2025 and consumer price index expenses continued to increase for major contracts. Despite these challenges, the department was able to remain on budget throughout the year.

Expansion of acceptable items and access also continued to be a focus in 2025. New this year, agricultural and other tires were accepted at the RSWC. Organics recycling has also expanded with on-farm composting support through a USDA-funded grant. A waste characterization project in conjunction with Stony Brook University transpired in the fall to better inform the department about what is currently in both the trash and recycling generated in the community. Additionally, a Back to Basics campaign launched in the fall to further support individuals in understanding the variety of offerings through TCRMM with an aim for saving money on disposal while reducing waste.

As we look ahead to 2026, TCRMM will continue to balance services and programs to ensure maximum participation while reducing waste.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve the Tompkins County Legislature and residents in reducing and managing waste in a manner that is environmentally sound, cost-effective, and socially responsible.

Leo D. Riley

Director of Recycling and Materials Management

Program Highlights

Recycling

This program provides recycling opportunities for County residents, businesses, and institutions. Through a contract with Casella Waste Systems Inc., the County received and transferred 9,230 tons of single stream recyclables at the Recycling and Solid Waste Center (RSWC). The facility includes a convenient public drop-off that accepts single stream recyclables, residential food scraps, and additional materials for recycling that aren't accepted at the curb. In 2025, 659 tons of corrugated cardboard and 944 tons of additional recyclable items were accepted at these drop offs. Other aspects of the recycling program include ReBusiness Partners, Borrow-A-Bin, and public outreach and education.



A waste characterization study was conducted to understand components of the waste stream.

Program Goals

- Provide a local facility to transfer, transport, and market recyclable materials collected through the curbside and drop-off programs while accommodating users.
- Provide educational information, direct assistance, and community support for recycling.
- Accept commercial recyclables from haulers, contractors, and educational institutions.
- Provide a program to comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws.
- Support an overall Tompkins County goal of reducing waste from 2.96 lbs/person/day in 2021 to 1.32 lbs/person/day by 2032.
- Reduce contamination in recycling streams.

Highlights

- In 2025, 9,230 tons of single stream recyclables were accepted at the RSWC.
- The RSWC accepted residential and commercial single stream recyclables, source-separated recyclables, and source-separated organics from residents and commercial haulers.
- Communications staff conducted outreach for recycling and food scraps recycling awareness. Utilizing in-person community events, and tours of RSWC, staff reached 42 students and 467 adults. Staff offered 6 presentations, 7 tours, and tabled at 3 outreach events.
- Staff regularly updated the RecycleTompkins.org website with timely information and continued to support the "Find My Recycling Day" and "What Do I Do With...?" tools, as well as Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) drop off event registration. Residents used these tools to view recycling schedules 139,063 times and searched for information about specific items 18,763 times.
- The ReBusiness Partners Program assists businesses and organizations in implementing the 4Rs by offering free technical assistance and educational guidance. During 2025, support was provided to eight entities in Tompkins County. Updates were made to signs available through this program, including providing Spanish translations of this material. Additionally, work was conducted with County staff to update best practices for recycling collection from within County buildings.
- A Back to Basics educational campaign was launched in the fall to introduce and remind Tompkins County residents of the 4Rs: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Rethink. The campaign will continue into early 2026 with ongoing educational posts.

Program Highlights

Curbside Recycling Collection

Through this program, the County provides bi-weekly countywide curbside collection of recyclable materials, which are transported to the County-owned RSWC. TCRMM contracts with Casella Waste Systems Inc. for collection through a competitive bid process. County staff monitors and tracks service requests from the public to ensure quality service from the contractor. Recycling bins are available for sale at the TCRMM offices, and R-decals are provided free of charge to allow for flexibility in collection receptacles. Public education is an important component of this program.

Approximately 48,511 homes receive curbside recycling collection as well as an estimated 2,230 small businesses.



2025-2026 Curbside Recycling Guidelines brochure.

Program Goals:

- Provide convenient, cost-effective residential curbside recycling opportunities through a ten-year contract with Casella.
- Monitor service calls and responses to maintain quality service for the curbside collection program and to minimize recycling collection complaints year over year.
- Enforce all applicable federal, state, and local laws for mandatory recycling.

Highlights

- A 2025-2026 Curbside Recycling Guidelines brochure was made available to Tompkins County residents. The brochure includes a 12-month recycling schedule calendar, as well as best practices for single stream recycling. Curbside Recycling Guidelines are available at the Recycling and Materials Management Office, municipal offices, Tompkins County Public Library, some grocery store service desks, and online at RecycleTompkins.org.
- In 2025, TCRMM tracked 676 service calls regarding curbside recycling collection service. This service-based contract was monitored closely throughout the year to maintain a high quality of service. There was an increase in service calls in 2025 due to staffing changes with the county's contracted hauler. The County worked with its hauler to resolve many of these issues.
- Public Space Recycling locations in Tompkins County were monitored and serviced throughout 2025. These locations included: Wood Street Skate Park (Ithaca), Hancock Street (Ithaca), Stewart Park (Ithaca), Tompkins County Courthouse (Ithaca), Tompkins County Human Services Building (Ithaca), Tompkins County Public Library (Ithaca), Montgomery Park (Dryden), Trumansburg's Main Street and two locations each at Greater Ithaca Activities Center (Ithaca). It is estimated that 1.93 tons of materials were diverted through this program in 2025.

Program Highlights

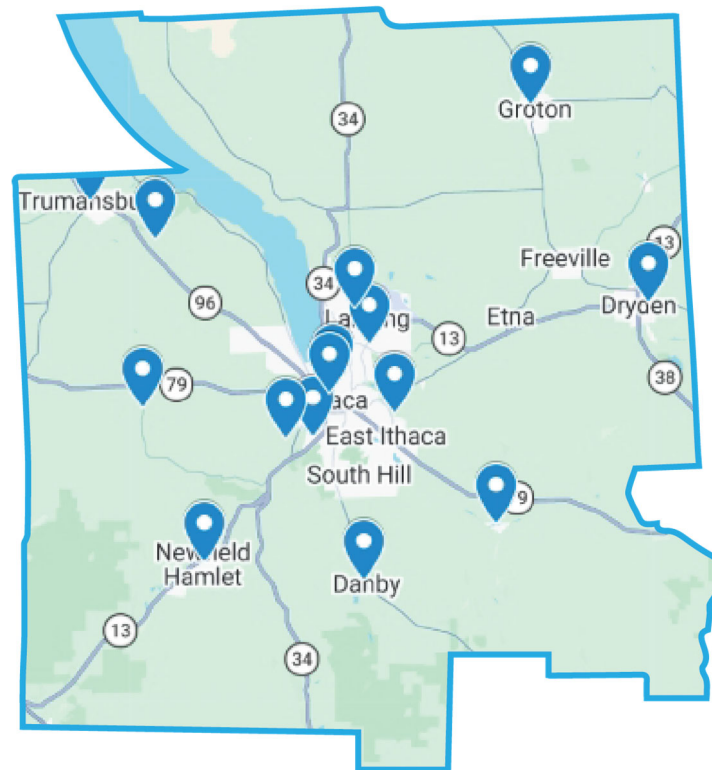
Organics

Through its Organics program, Tompkins County Recycling and Materials Management works to implement a sustainable materials management strategy for the organics segment of the waste stream, including food and yard waste. Through food waste prevention, food donation, food scraps recycling, yard waste recycling, and organics diversion education, TCRMM aims to reduce the amount of organic waste sent to landfills.

Food scraps and yard waste collected through TCRMM programs are recycled through a public-private partnership with Cayuga Compost in Trumansburg.



Resident dropping off food scraps at the East Hill Farmers Market Drop Spot.



Map of food scrap drop spot locations throughout Tompkins County.

Program Goals

- To implement strategies that adhere to the US EPA Wasted Food Scale.
- Provide a convenient food scraps recycling program for residents.
- Accept commercial organics from haulers, contractors, businesses, and educational institutions.
- Maintain support for home composting through a contract with Cornell Cooperative Extension.
- Provide yard waste disposal and recycling services at the Recycling and Solid Waste Center.

Highlights

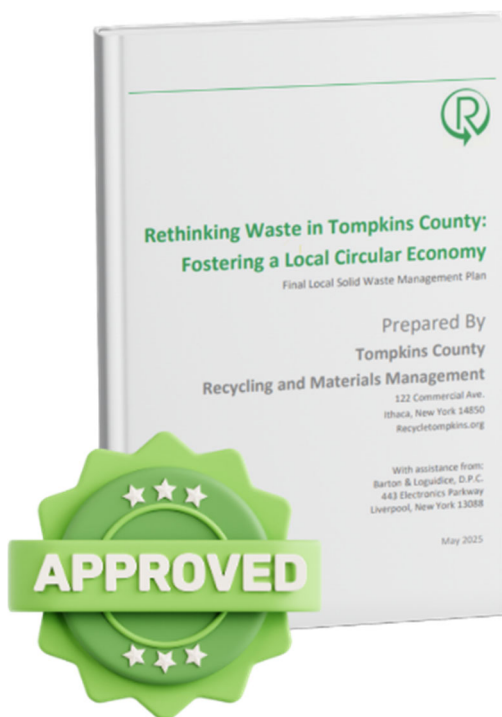
- Cayuga Compost processed 1,559 tons of food scraps, with approximately 751 tons collected by TCRMM. A contract between TCRMM and Cayuga Compost supported processing of all food scraps collected in Tompkins County.
- A total of 16 Food Scraps Recycling Drop Spot locations received residential food scraps including Brooktondale Community Center, Tompkins County Highway Department, Cayuga Compost, Cayuga Heights Village Hall, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Danby Town Hall, Dryden Town Highway Department, East Hill Plaza, East Hill Farmers' Market, Enfield Town Clerk's Office, Groton Town Clerk's Office, Hancock Street, Lansing Village Office, Newfield Town Hall, the Recycling and Solid Waste Center, and Trumansburg Department of Public Works sites.

- Maintained a longstanding partnership to support Cornell Cooperative Extension's (CCE) Compost Education Program. Through home composting, it is estimated that over 2,000 tons of food scraps and over 1,500 tons of yard waste are diverted each year. Compost Learning Collaborative sites at the Freeville Community Garden and Ithaca Community Gardens provide additional diversion opportunities for residents, diverting approximately 300 pounds in 2025.
- The Compost Club pilot program continued to grow in 2025, allowing registered participants access convenient self-serve drop off locations. The Enfield Drop Spot was converted to a Compost Club site following a survey that showed greater flexibility could increase participation.
- TCRMM continued work on grant project from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) which takes a systems-wide approach to provide whole-hierarchy support for reducing food waste in the commercial sector as well as promotion of on-farm composting. A prepared food donation pilot continued for select businesses in partnership with Friendship Donations Network. An on-farm composting workshop was held in partnership with TC3 Farm and Cornell Waste Management Institute, and several farms were provided one-on-one expert consultations.
- Tompkins County contracted with Buffalo Biodiesel to remove approximately 4.29 of fats, oils, and grease (FOG) material collected at the RSWC.
- Distributed 125 kitchen caddies to participants in the food scraps drop-off program.

Program Highlights

Waste Reduction

In 2025, TCRMM finalized the department's Local Solid Waste Management Plan after receiving approval from the NYSDEC. This plan, *Rethinking Waste in Tompkins County: Fostering a Local Circular Economy*, identifies a need to focus on waste reduction and reuse programming moving forward.



Tompkins County's Local Solid Waste Management Plan received final approval.

Through this program, Tompkins County Recycling and Materials Management supports the community, local economy, and environment by encouraging innovative waste reduction and reuse. Many of these initiatives are accomplished through partnerships with local organizations, such as Finger Lakes ReUse.

A Tompkins County Government Environmental Preferred Purchasing (EPP) Team continued its efforts to advance EPP by developing, maintaining, and communicating sustainable procurement resources for departmental use, and to monitor the progress of current practices. The County continues to be a GreenNY Purchasing Community. This demonstrates an ongoing commitment to EPP and provides additional resources to all county departments to support these aims.



In 2025, the “Wherever you go, bring a bag!” advertisement campaign launched at four bus shelters in high traffic areas across Ithaca.

Program Goals

- Reduce both the volume and toxicity of the waste stream by providing waste reduction, reuse, and green purchasing programs and education to businesses, schools, municipalities, and residents.
- Maintain, promote, and grow community efforts to address barriers and challenges to facilitate increased activity for waste reduction and reuse.
- Support an overall Tompkins County goal of reducing waste from 2.96 lbs/person/day in 2021 to 1.32 lbs/person/day by 2032.

Highlights

- TCRMM continued its program to utilize a portion of the funds collected from the Tompkins County \$.05 paper bag fee to purchase and distribute high quality reusable bags to individuals with fixed- and low-incomes in accordance with state and local law. Developed a reusable bag distribution campaign which featured targeted outreach, including a National Reuse Day promotional giveaway, a feature in the 4R Times Newsletter, and TCAT bus shelter advertising.
- Conducted work to inform short and long-term needs for reuse in the County.

- A partnership with Finger Lakes ReUse supported ongoing access for materials reuse, while expanding reuse activities that are available to the community.
- Developed materials for a reusable dish loan pilot and procured initial dishware for the initiative.
- Promoted the use of reusable containers when on the go through tabling and other outreach events.
- TCRMM continued to uplift the county's commitment to Environmentally Preferred Procurement (EPP) through work with the Tompkins County EPP Team, which continues to manage a platform for internal reuse and support departments to buy green.
- Supported local deconstruction and building materials reuse efforts by providing education and outreach, engaging with local stakeholders, and remaining apprised of initiatives through CROWD (Circularity, Reuse, and Zero Waste Development).



Reusable dishware is displayed at tabling events to showcase alternatives to disposable dishware when on the go.

Program Highlights

Old Landfills

Tompkins County has two closed landfills, the Hillview Road Landfill in South Danby/North Spencer, and the Caswell Road Landfill in the Town of Dryden. This program includes monitoring, maintenance, and leachate removal at the two sites, which are regulated by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC).



Ongoing environmental monitoring at the closed Hillview landfill helps ensure the surrounding ecosystem remains protected.

Program Goals

- Perform routine quarterly and annual reporting and inspections, regular maintenance, and leachate removal required by NYSDEC closure permits.
- Routine inspections to identify maintenance items to schedule for repair or budget for the following year, depending on the magnitude of the problem.

Highlights

- The Hillview and Caswell landfill sites have a total of 64 monitoring wells, including 11 residential locations. There are also 23 manholes and 18 cleanouts along the perimeter collection systems, and 88 gas vents.
- Of the 64 monitoring points, 13 were eliminated in 2013 in an agreement between the Hillview Road Advisory Committee and Tompkins County, by the DEC. These wells are no longer monitored on an annual basis but are still maintained.
- TCRMM staff worked with Barton & Loguidice (B&L) consulting engineers of Syracuse, N.Y., to perform groundwater and residential sampling.
- TCRMM staff perform weekly inspections to ensure that contractual pumping of two underground leachate storage tanks at each landfill are fulfilled. Leachate is hauled to the Ithaca Area Wastewater Treatment Facility (IAWWTF) for treatment.
- Monitoring wells routinely require maintenance including sanding, repainting, flagging, and concrete apron replacement, as required by the DEC.
- The closed landfills are mowed, plowed, and maintained during the year to remove rapid growth of vegetation as well as to provide a setting for accurate sampling. Each landfill footprint consists of approximately 30 acres that require mowing each July.
- In 2025, the amount of leachate removed from Hillview was 182,600 gallons, and from Caswell was 990,200 gallons.
- TCRMM records the daily amount of leachate collected. A three-year average of these records was used to budget handling 1,916,083 gallons of leachate in 2025.

Program Highlights

Household Hazardous Waste (HHW)

The Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) collection program directs the proper management of residential household hazardous waste and small quantities of hazardous waste from qualified non-residential generators (i.e., businesses and community organizations) through a contract with Clean Harbors, Inc. The hazardous waste vendor handles material in a hierarchy of first reusing viable products when practicable, then recycling eligible materials, followed by using material at a waste-to-energy facility, with the remaining material sent to a specialized landfill. Examples of materials accepted through the HHW program include paints and stains, lawn and automobile care products, and pesticides. The HHW program is a convenient way of keeping hazardous materials from accumulating in households and groundwater and is often the sole option for residents to safely dispose of these materials.



Clean Harbors and TCRMM staff working together at a collection event.

Program Goals

- Diversion of hazardous waste from the waste stream and the effective management of that waste.
- Compliance with NYSDEC permit required inspections, maintenance, waste management and reporting.

Highlights

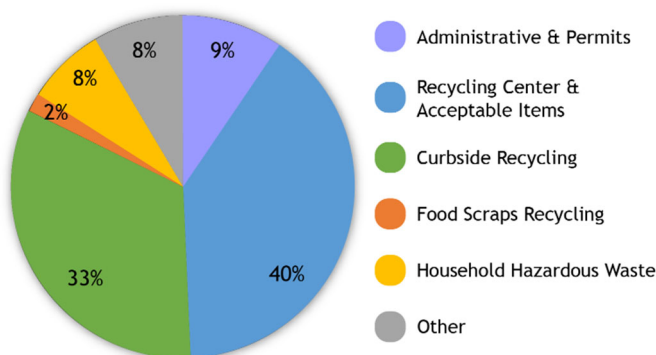
- There was a total of 1,287 residents at the six Household Hazardous Waste drop off events conducted in 2025. Residents used a new online registration form to schedule appointments.
- TCRMM served 12 Conditionally Exempt Small Quantity Generators (CESQGs) for disposal of non-residential hazardous waste and made an additional 18 appointments for businesses to bring in universal wastes such as fluorescent tubes.
- There was a total of 37,906 pounds of hazardous solids, and 9,283 gallons of liquid hazardous and universal wastes diverted from the waste stream in 2025.
- PaintCare, a product stewardship program, has been running in New York State since 2022. This initiative provides additional convenient collection points for residents to handle covered materials outside of the six annual collection days, though minimal impact has been noted at the facility to date.

Program Highlights

Administration

TCRMM administrative staff assist both customers and TCRMM staff. Approximately 24,072 customers were assisted in 2025, with administrative staff providing timely, accurate information about recycling, composting, trash disposal, household hazardous waste, and waste reduction programs.

Phone and Email Tracked Topics



RSWC and Curbside Recycling were the most popular tracked topics.

Highlights

- The TCRMM Administrative staff served approximately 24,072 customers in 2025. Admin answered 10,909 customer inquiries via telephone and email and completed 13,047 transactions.
- Front desk transactions included sales of permits, trash disposal coupons and punch cards, and recycling and compost bins. The front desk also distributed 116 food scraps recycling toolkits at no charge to residents.
- Administrative staff fulfill online sales of permits, punch cards, and coupons. To provide enhanced customer service, the department implemented a permit renewal reminder email system to proactively notify customers about upcoming expirations while reducing paper waste and saving time.
- The department also further streamlined the permitting process, introducing electronic signatures for permit affidavits so that paper forms are now obsolete.
- Administrative staff assisted customers with navigating the RecycleTompkins.org website and using the Recycling and Solid Waste Center.

Program Highlights

Disposal

In 2025, Tompkins County transported 16,589 tons of municipal solid waste (MSW) from the Recycling and Solid Waste Center (RSWC) through a contract to nearby landfills including Chemung, Hyland, and Ontario. This program also includes enforcement of Chapter 140 of the County Code to prevent violations related to trash tag, hauler licensing, mandatory recycling, and illegal dumping laws.



TCRMM staff speaking at legislative committee meeting.

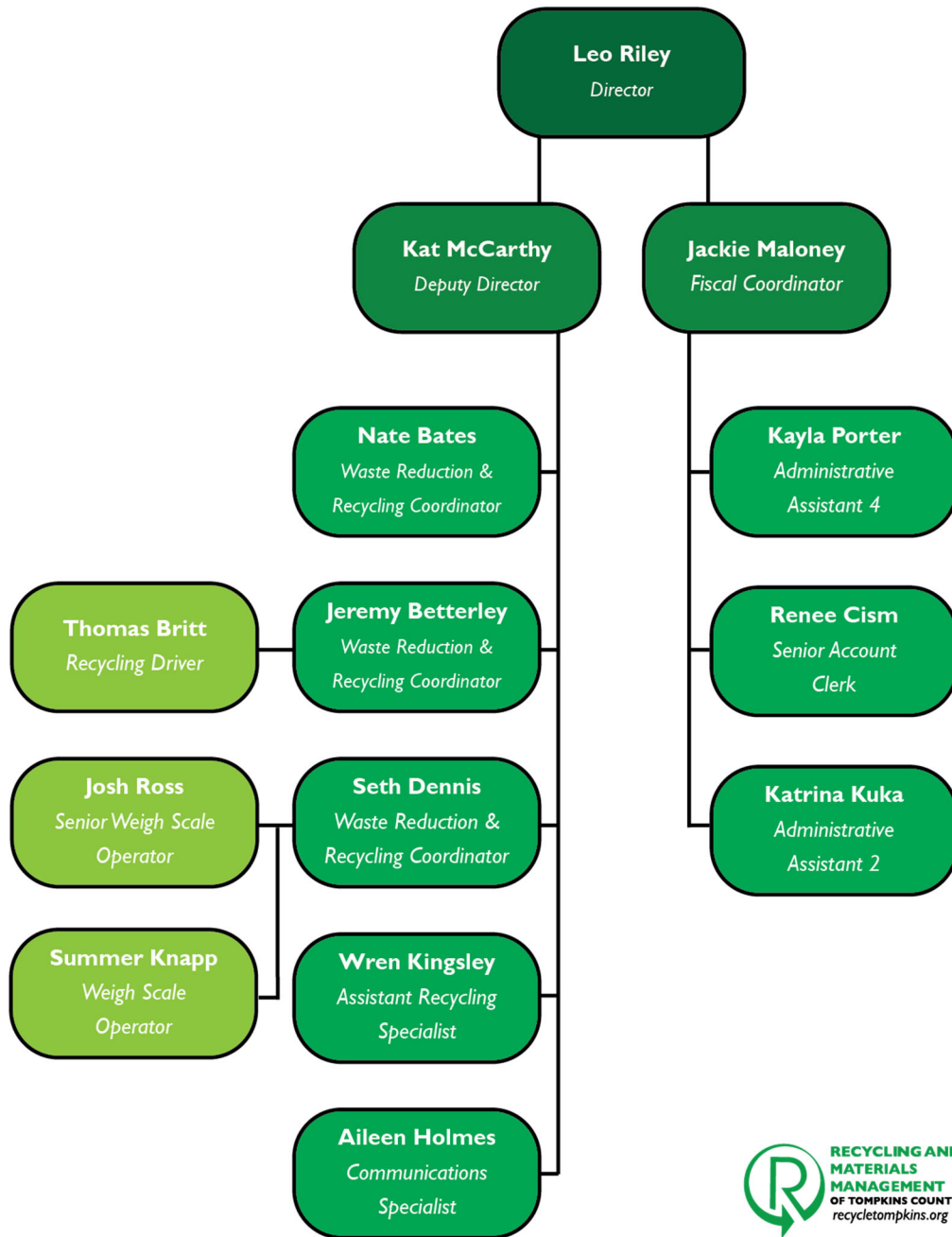
Program Goals

- To provide safe and environmentally sound disposal practices for Tompkins County waste generators.
- Identify and report illegal disposal violations in the County.

Highlights

- TCRMM issued 149 vehicle hauler permits and 30 hauler licenses in 2025.
- 27 County Code Violation cases were investigated.
- TCRMM continued to cull recyclables from commercial trash, diverting 92 tons from the landfill through recycling.
- Communications staff conducted awareness outreach to clarify common frequently asked questions related to trash tags.

Organizational Chart



Total Staff in 2025: 14



Financial Information

Financing Tompkins County Recycling and Materials Management enables the development, maintenance, and sustainability of an integrated solid waste management system that prioritizes recycling, composting, waste reduction, and other diversion activities to the greatest extent possible. The financing system is also designed to create incentives for diversion of materials from disposal.

TCRMM is enterprise funded and does not receive revenue from Tompkins County property taxes. Revenue is generated from the following sources:

- **Disposal Fees:** Waste is accepted at the Recycling and Solid Waste Center (RSWC) from Tompkins County residents, businesses, and licensed haulers. A disposal fee is charged to do so.
- **Solid Waste Annual Fee:** The annual fee helps to defray the costs of the Department's programs and services, exclusive of waste disposal. The annual fee pays for the Recycling and Solid Waste Center, curbside recycling collection, waste reduction programs, Household Hazardous Waste, and maintenance of closed landfills.
- **Recycling Revenue:** The Department receives revenue from the sale of recyclable materials.
- **Grants:** The Department actively seeks available grants to defray some of the cost associated with its programs. Grant sources include:
 - NYSDEC Municipal Waste Reduction & Recycling
 - NYSDEC Household Hazardous Waste
 - USDA Composting and Food Waste Reduction Cooperative Agreement
- **Miscellaneous Revenue:** Other sources of TCRMM revenue include the sale of permits, licensing fees, recycling and compost bins, and fines.