



Evaluating Tacoma's Wood Waste Streams and Circular Economy Potential

City of Tacoma | Environmental Services

Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability Committee
January 28, 2026



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OVERVIEW



Tacoma Wood Reuse Study

1. Background & Project Motivations
2. Key Findings
3. Existing Wood Disposal Landscape
4. Wood Waste Disposal & Generation Estimates
5. Opportunities to Improve Wood Reuse Systems
6. Potential Next Steps

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BACKGROUND



Issue

- **Tree pruning/removals are necessary** for urban forest maintenance.
- Generates **“Woody Biomass.”**
- Under current practices is **often disposed as waste** or compost.
- Does not meet City goals for climate and sustainability.

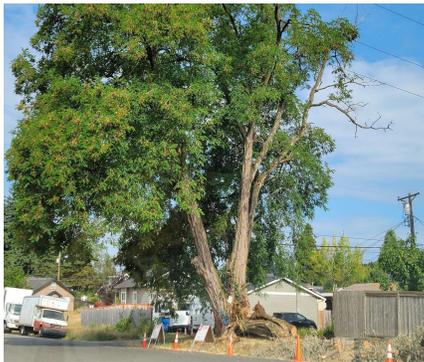
Projected Benefit of Addressing

- Can **save time** through efficiency improvements.
- Can **save money** through reduced disposal costs in City operations.
- Can **provide environmental benefits** through waste diversion and emissions reduction.
- If taken further, could **provide workforce development benefits** and **revenue generation** potential.

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OPPORTUNITY EXAMPLES



2025 Hazardous Tree Assistance Program removal
Black locust tree set for pilot salvage by local mill was chipped, chunked, and **discarded due to lack of a crane and logistical support.**



2024 North Union Avenue removal
City removal of maple after failure into street **Usable wood was sent to landfill, chunked for firewood, or chipped into mulch**

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RECENT SUCCESS



- A two-person **City arborist crew** was established in **2025** to support removals, maintenance, and planting across PW and ES projects
- The crew's work is projected to add **approximately 220 tons** of woody biomass to the City's managed material stream each year
- Arborist crew has already begun **diverting wood chips** from pruning and removals to **ES Open Space restoration sites** across Tacoma



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PROCESS



COT Government Partners



- Open Space
- Urban Forestry
- Solid Waste
- TAGRO
- Public Works

Regional Government and Interagency Partners



- Parks Tacoma
- Tacoma Public Utilities
- Pierce County
- JBLM Base
- Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department

Private Partners

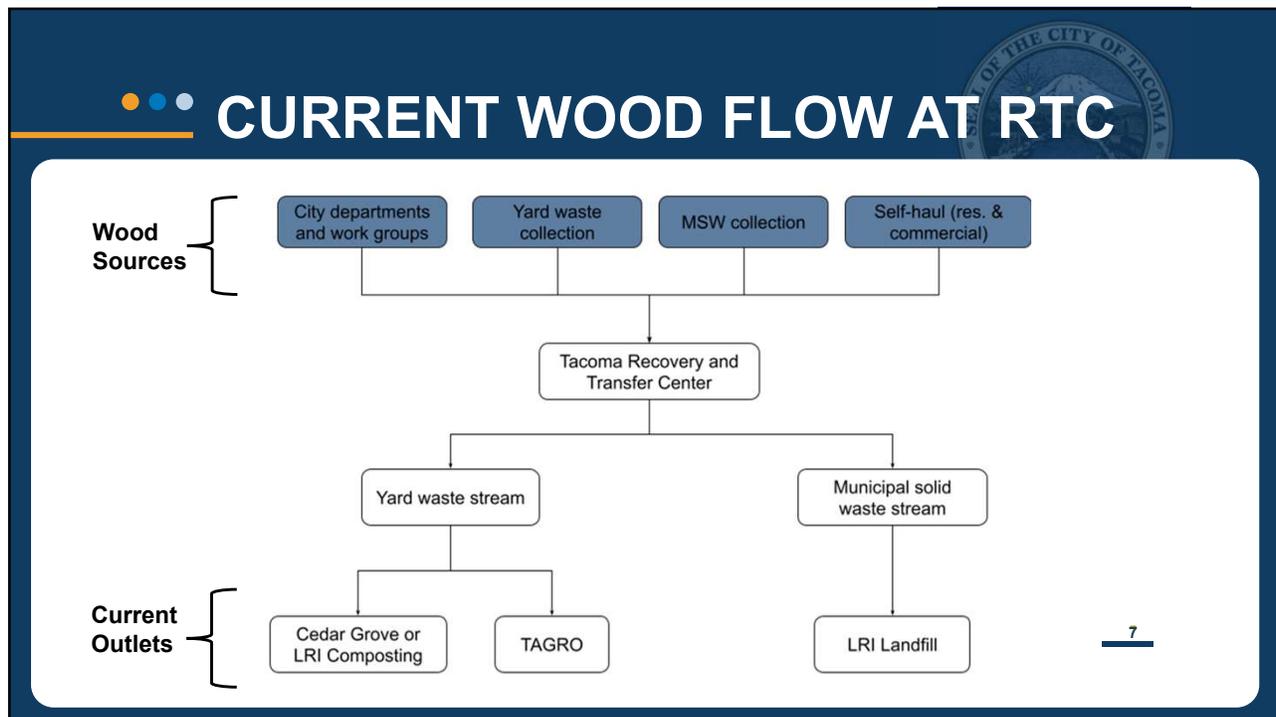


- DTG Recycling
- LRI/Waste Connections
- Cedar Grove
- Wane + Flitch
- Hunter's Tree Service

- **Collaborator Engagement & Communication**
 - Over 25 collaborators from City work groups, partner organizations, and private industry
- **Best Use Assessment & Action Planning**
 - The study identified five clear opportunities to improve Tacoma's wood-reuse system
- **Biomass Characterization & Analysis**
 - Estimated current generation and disposal volumes utilizing primary datasets, waste characterization studies, and market research

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KEY FINDINGS

- Tacoma's wood reuse challenge is multifaceted, but can be characterized as a **lack of systems and infrastructure** to capture and utilize existing woody biomass.
- Wood generated from City operations has the potential to be more predictable, traceable, and cleaner than public drop-offs. **However, we would need to adjust data collection to inform decision-making.**
- New permitting requirements, salvaging initiatives, and City arborist crew developments position Tacoma to be a regional leader.

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GENERATION & DISPOSAL CHARACTERIZATION

Data

Existing datasets **significantly underrepresent** the amount of tree work being performed across the city.

Disposal

The RTC receives **>57,000 tons of woody material annually**, roughly 95% of which is recoverable and/or compostable. However, **only about half of this volume is currently diverted** through composting or internal programs.

Generation

Cambium estimates that annual City operations and permitted projects **remove ~400 trees and maintain ~2,300 trees**.

Utilization Opportunity

TAGRO receives ~1,070 CY in chips from RTC, compared to the >30,000 CY of chip material purchased externally, highlighting the City's **significant unmet demand for clean wood fiber**.

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OPPORTUNITIES: NEAR-TERM



Improve Wood Waste Data Collection and Integration

Standardize wood waste tracking across City work groups and interagency partners to capture source, volume, species, and processing outcomes, enabling better forecasting and investment planning.



Revise Project Specifications and Code to Encourage Salvaging and Reuse

Incorporate “reuse-first” requirements into capital project bids, prioritize salvaging logs over chipping, and revise outdated code classifying large logs as waste.

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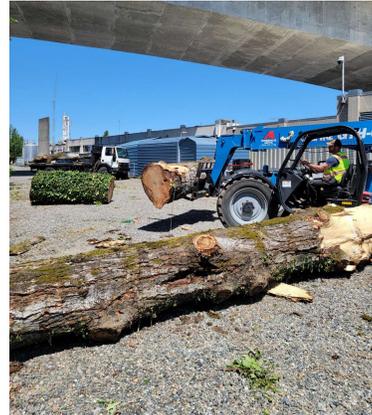
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OPPORTUNITIES: MID-TERM



Invest in a Centralized Chip Depot and Salvage Sort Yard Program

Establish a right-sized chip depot and salvage yard to balance supply and demand for chips, aggregate logs for milling, and potentially support emerging technologies such as biochar production.



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OPPORTUNITIES: LONG-TERM



Develop Workforce and Partnership Capacity

Build a green jobs pipeline in wood recovery, processing, and product manufacturing, in partnership with local organizations and educational programs.



Support Emerging Technologies and Regional Initiatives

Explore aggregation of volumes with Pierce County and neighboring jurisdictions to support shared processing facilities and market development.

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POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS



- Staff to receive IPS Committee feedback (1/28/26)
- Begin to address near-term data collection issues
- If IPS directs further discussion/analysis of pathways to consider, staff can work to create an Implementation Strategy

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