

Ei Roskaa-“No Rubbish” Recycling and Composting Project in Lake County

By: Katee Rose



Example photo of Facility from Biocycle.

A very exciting project is in the works in the Crystal Bay Township. Funds have been secured to move forward with a new recycling and composting facility in Lake County. The majority of the funds will be coming under the greater Minnesota recycling and composting grant from the MPCA (Minnesota pollution control agency). These grant funds will be used to help reduce the amount of recyclable materials entering landfills, by helping communities establish best practices to improve local reuse, recycling, or composting program efficiency and effectiveness. This new recycling and composting facility will be named Ei Roskaa, which in the Finnish language means No Rubbish.

The Ei Roskaa project will focus on reimagining and installing a permanent recycling collection system by developing a more traditional and permanent site for the standard recycling items in our waste stream, as well as add new types of items collected, and divert materials from the landfill. The project strives to achieve the goal of dealing effectively with our waste concerns without adding to other environmental concerns for our community, i.e. climate friendly technological solutions will be implemented in the build and design of the facility. The Ei Roskaa project goal is to work towards a zero waste system. Waste to Resources is the ultimate goal!

There has been a major lack of access to recycling services in the more rural areas of this region. During COVID19, and with the absence of recycling options in the rural and remote communities, the need and ultimate use of the Thelma and Louis (mobile recycling trailers) were solicited, and overwhelmingly used. The challenge this temporary set up exposed was the lack of ongoing monitoring of the units which caused some abuse and frustration, ultimately leading to the removal of the unit. The need for a better solution was the number one priority at the annual Community Strategic Planning meeting. The new approach of this facility is intended to solve the current specific challenges and create a potential model for other rural areas throughout MN and other states.

There are several ways to implement the recycling services, although the suggested options for rural areas are to partner with high waste producers, such as restaurants, schools, grocery stores etc. That way there are minimal collection points to collect the largest amount of organic waste. There will also be an onsite community collection for residents to drop off their organic, mostly food, waste. Although the exact location of the site is yet to be determined, there will be clear signage to communicate where it is located, as well as what can be composted, how the composting process works, how it helps, and the collection information.

This new facility will not only help with less waste going to the landfill, but will be an additional resource to local gardeners and farmers. Organic fertilizers are better for the environment, and as folks who grow food around here know... the soil could use some added nutrients. There is an added perk that is being discussed about the new composting facility and its potential to have a patronage incentive program. This means that after dropping a certain amount of your kitchen compost off, you will be given an amount of broken down compost

for free. The site will also be selling finished compost for around \$75 a cubic yard.

It is estimated that this facility will be able to produce 118 tons of finished compost. That means the facility is anticipating that they will physically remove 27 cubic feet of organics (primarily food waste) from the landfill each day. The average weight would be 1,090 pounds a day, or 397,850 pounds (199 tons) of waste a year. Annually, 9,855 cubic feet of waste would be removed. This would look like around four 40 foot shipping containers.

The site will contribute to the reduction of solid waste disposal costs and landfill issues while also providing a local fertilizer and other soil amendment resources for gardeners and farmers, resulting in less overall miles for farmers to obtain this material, having additional local and regional benefits biological, chemical and physical soil properties for nutrient management, retention of water (less runoff) and increased carbon sequestering in the soil. This model addresses the lack of manures and compost available for the increasing agricultural sector of the economy.

The new recycling and composting site will be focused on designing the facility to use renewable energy sources (towards net zero building goals) and minimal but effective technologies that meet facility and community needs holistically.

The Moccasin Mike landfill located in Superior Wisconsin has a projected full date sometime in the year of 2026. Solutions on how to slow our waste accumulation down is an important task that the county is looking at. A projected 199 tons of organic waste will be composted. At \$54 per dumping yard, that would be over \$10,000 of the tipping fee (fee based on amount) saved on diverted waste alone, not to mention reduced truck expenses, fuel and labor.

The total population of Lake County is 10,703, and recently there have been record amounts of tourists. This means there is quite a bit of waste, compost material and recyclables that accumulate in the area. There is an estimated 7,600 tons of waste per year in Lake County. Currently, 20 percent of that (1,580 tons) is recycling and 30 percent of that (1800 tons) is organic material. The EPA estimates that 75% of the American waste stream is recyclable, but only 30% is recycled nationally.

If this model is successful it could be a solution for rural Minnesota, including potentially duplicating this model in Silver Creek Township, Clover Valley, Silver Bay and Two Harbors, thereby removing 1,000 tons or more of organics from the landfill! There will be much to learn from this pilot project, and it will take a significant amount out of the waste stream.

Lake County's Christine McCarthy, Environmental Services Director/Solid Waste Officer, along with Margaret (Sissy) Houle, Solid Waste Technician, and Mark Udenberg, Solid Waste Coordinator, provide the backbone of the solid waste work in the county. Christine and her team have creatively tackled the challenges of solid waste management and look forward to applying their skills in leading the creation of a rural composting system that could greatly reduce the amount of waste going to the landfill.

Educational programs, physical structure designs, planning and development will occur in year one of the grant. Physical aspects of this objective will be installed in year two of the grant and Educational and Outreach programming will continue into year three, along with further evaluation and operational tweaks to improve the project's effectiveness. The effectiveness and efficiencies of the compost will be tested, looking at weights and the amount of food waste and carbon used, as well as the amount of finished compost made.

The Ei Roskaa project will focus on the successful composting of a portion of the organic waste, primarily the problematic food waste (14% of the total waste stream) by building a viable collection and composting facility and system for this rural service area. They want to achieve the goal of dealing effectively with waste concerns without adding to other environmental concerns for the community, i.e. climate friendly technological solutions.

Every grant requires a certain amount of funds matched. "It is important to note that the County Board of Commissioners are in full support of this project and will be helping to contribute the necessary "in kind" funds required to match for the project to happen," says Lake County Solid Waste Officer Christine McCarthy. "We are enthusiastic about this project and we know this is important for the community, not only in Finland, but are hoping that this is something that can be a good model for the region, not just in Lake County, but that other areas can utilize what we learn from it and create additional locations for these types of facilities."

On May 24th, from 7-8pm at the Finland Community Center, there will be an open to the public gathering for interested residents to learn more about the project goals and submit their ideas in the approach of this new project for the county! "In the northeast region there is limited space for dumpsites and anything we can do to extend the life or time we have is a good idea to look into... We need input from both sides of the spectrum. I would highly encourage everyone to attend the meeting," says Lake County Commissioner Pete Walsh.

After everyone has a better idea of the project, an Ei Roskaa task force will be established of interested community members. The task force will help to research, identify and determine the final design through program development and planning, including helping to determine a good location for the facility, as well as help to establish compost drop off and pick up protocols.

Feel free to reach out and contact David Abazs through email: dwabazs@umn.edu about getting involved. Be sure to keep an eye out for notices to learn more about the project and possibly join the task force. Let's work together to do what we can to limit our waste.



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