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A winning game plan for Broward's waste future | Opinion



Joe Cavaretta / South Florida Sun Sentinel

Lines of recycle and trash cans await pickup in Oakland Park, Thursday, Feb. 20, 2020.



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Broward County has a waste crisis. We generate about 20,000 pounds of waste every minute, which is about 10.6 billion pounds every year. Our county landfill is nearing capacity and the waste-to-energy facility is at capacity. Our garbage must go somewhere. This crisis will cost us a lot more to manage if we do not change our behavior.

Right now, our recycling rate in Broward County is approximately 39%, which is embarrassing. The state goal is 75%. At this pace, future disposal costs will skyrocket. This crisis is too big for any one city or the county to solve alone. We need our cities and county to build lasting partnerships with our residents and business community, along with implementing a long-term strategy to manage the waste streams.



Mike Ryan is mayor of Sunrise.

The Broward County Solid Waste Authority's new Master Plan outlines a roadmap to divert a large percentage of our waste from costly disposal in landfills. We can make recycling easier for everyone, keep valuable waste commodities local, protect our natural resources, and extend the life of our current facilities, while proving this change in behavior makes economic sense.

This America Recycles Day on November 15, 2025, the Solid Waste Authority of Broward County is teaming up with the Florida Panthers and other local companies who have proven they can achieve high recycling and reuse goals and are saving money on trash hauling and getting financial rebates. Recycling and reuse of waste commodities can make economic sense.

At Amerant Bank Arena, the back-to-back NHL champion Florida Panthers set out to reduce trash costs while building a circular economy from waste. This year alone, the team recycled more than 200,000 pounds of materials. They collected 100,000 pounds of cardboard, a 48% increase from last year, and baled 16,000 pounds of aluminum, the equivalent of roughly half a million cans. Why does this matter? Reportedly, recycling aluminum [uses 95% less energy](#) than producing it from raw materials.

The Florida Panthers are not alone. City Furniture has a proven model to manage their product packaging and resulting waste by building in-house recycling centers at their four warehouses throughout Florida. In 2024, City Furniture recycled 7.5 million pounds of cardboard, plastic and Styrofoam and donated over 1 million pounds of used furniture to Habitat for Humanity. These efforts reduced trash-hauling expenses, created beneficial value from their own circular economy for product packaging, and diverted waste otherwise destined for landfills through technology-assisted recycling and smart reuse.

Each of us can also make small but powerful changes that make a real difference. Start by recycling right. Aluminum cans, cardboard and paper all belong in your recycling cart, but make sure everything is clean and dry before you place it inside. Keep food waste, liquid, plastic bags, cords and hoses out of recycling, because contamination from this type of waste can send an entire load to the landfill instead of the recycling facility, which will cost you more in contamination penalties.

Our next big mission is tackling food waste, which is damaging to our landfill and our environment. Fortunately, across Broward County, we are seeing businesses and schools partnering to compost food waste to protect the limited capacity of our landfills and help return valuable nutrients back to the soil.

On America Recycles Day, the Florida Panthers are launching phase one of a new composting program. All food scraps from the kitchens and leftover buffet food at the end of events will be collected and sent to a local composting farm. The projected estimate is that many tons of food scraps will be sent to composting.

The Florida Panthers want fans to know you can also start composting as well. Collect food scraps like fruit peels, vegetable trimmings, coffee grounds, and eggshells in a small container. Mix them into a backyard compost pile with leaves and yard waste or contact local composters for collection.

When we partner with the large waste producers in our community like malls, hospitals, the airport, the seaport and our hospitality industry, we have a real opportunity to achieve our economic and environmental goals together. The Panthers and City Furniture have proven what is possible when a team commits to the fundamentals and becomes champions for a cause.

Check with your city or recycling service provider to see what other materials you can recycle, or contact local composters. Together, we can begin to solve our waste crisis, increase our recycling rate, ensure that Broward County's future is cleaner, stronger and more sustainable for generations to come.

Mayor Mike Ryan of Sunrise is chair of the governing board and executive committee of the Solid Waste Authority of Broward County.