

Wyandanch

Community Advisory Board

In This Newsletter

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Fall Events

- **Long Island Cares**
September 3, Wyandanch Public Library, Delivers fresh, high-quality foods.
- **Wyandanch Union Free School District**,
September 4, First Day of School!
- **Q31 Film Festival**,
Wyandanch Plaza, September 12
- **Fall Festival: Fall in Love with Community**, Geiger Park, October 4. 10 to 4 pm

Editor:
Scott Carlin

CAB Coordinator:
Dr. Scott Carlin
[NYSCHECK.ORG/Wyandanch](https://nyscheck.org/Wyandanch)



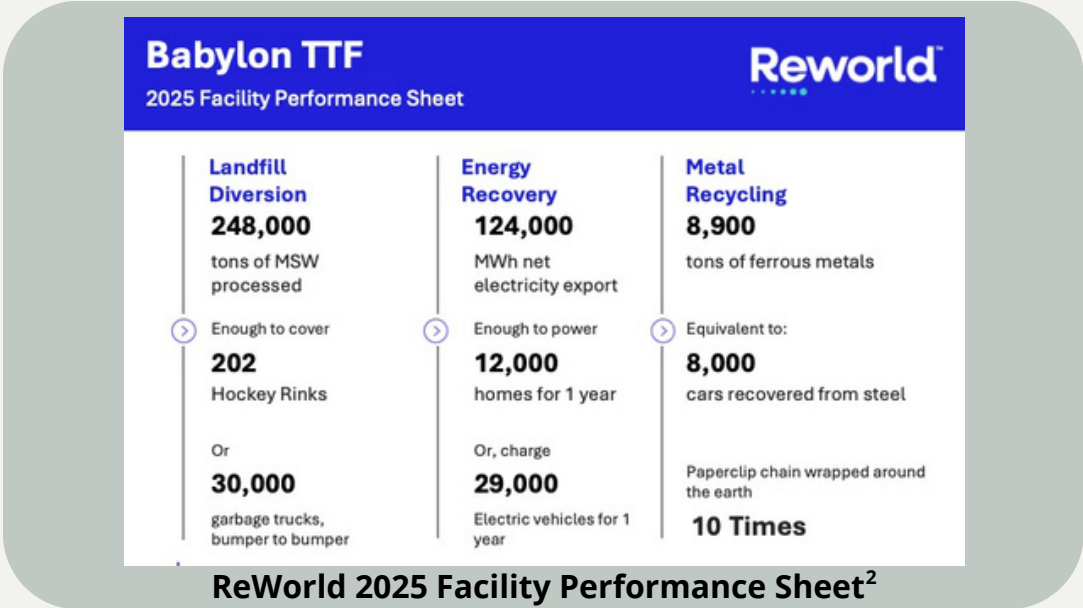
Zero Waste Long Island

By Zachary Lee, CAB Intern



We live in a throwaway society, and Long Island is paying the price. No society in human history has ever had the capability to manufacture such a large quantity of products and wastes as ours. Long Island and New York City are two of the premier urban regions in the world for consumerism. But not all communities share equally in this opulence. Current laws direct waste management toward lowest cost solutions, even if those solutions have potentially harmful effects. For Long Island that means harmful incinerators.

Long Island’s current waste strategy relies heavily on burning household garbage at major incinerators across the region, including the Covanta-Hempstead Incinerator in Westbury, the Reworld Babylon facility in West Babylon, and the Reworld Huntington facility in East Northport. The Babylon facility processes 250,000 tons of municipal solid waste annually for the Town of Babylon, generating 124,000 megawatt-hours of electricity and recovering roughly 9,000 tons of recyclable metal each year. The Huntington facility serves both the Towns of Huntington and Smithtown, combusting upwards of 340,000 tons of waste annually. Long Island towns have lobbied Albany to reclassify waste-to-energy incinerators as "renewable energy."²



After incineration, the residual ash is trucked to landfills. The Town of Babylon has its own landfill; Brookhaven Town operates a the larger Brookhaven Landfill, located adjacent to a majority Black, Latinx working-class community. Open since 1974, the Brookhaven landfill is now a 270-foot mountain of waste nearing the end of its life. Town officials say it will close in 2027 or 2028, and the consequences will hit Long Islanders directly through higher taxes, steeper disposal costs, and tens of thousands more diesel trucks on already congested roads.³ Or, Long Island could adopt less expensive zero waste policies.

The current Brookhaven landfill is an alleged environmental health threat. Dozens of people associated with Frank P. Long Intermediate School in Bellport have filed lawsuits over illnesses allegedly caused by the landfill. North Bellport has the second-highest asthma emergency department rates in Suffolk County. Brookhaven is seeking another permit extension to extend the landfill’s life. Meanwhile, environmental advocates continue to push back against the effort, with Long Island Progressive Coalition climate organizer Monique Fitzgerald noting that the island needs to reduce its waste instead of trying to burn it, as incineration will never truly solve the problem.⁴

Recycling on Long Island

A 2023 Stony Brook University study adds another layer to the problem: only about 25–30% of Long Island trash gets recycled, slightly below the national average, with plastic recycling rates as low as 30%, driven by widespread confusion about what is actually recyclable.⁵

Zero Waste Revolution

Many cities and states in the United States are exploring zero waste policies. The goal is to reduce the production of wastes or convert wastes into resources. The Zero Waste International Alliance defines zero waste as **"the conservation of all resources by means of responsible production, consumption, reuse, and recovery of products, packaging, and materials without burning and with no discharges to land, water, or air that threaten the environment or human health."**⁶

In 2022, Governor Hochul proposed making manufacturers, not taxpayers, pay for the packaging waste they create, a concept known as **extended producer responsibility**. That same year, New York also adopted the nation's strongest statewide ban on expanded polystyrene foam food containers.⁷

In New York City, Mayor Mamdani reinstated mandatory composting fines on his first day in office in 2026, building on a program that already collected more than 163,000 tons of organic material in 2025, more than double what the city collected in 2022.⁸

In 2024, California **shut down** its last two solid waste incinerators. In response, Long Beach, California is now pursuing anaerobic digestion instead, which turns organic waste into biogas and compost.⁹

Schools and Zero Waste

NYC public schools had been throwing away 4 million harmful styrofoam trays per week, over 3 billion trays over 20 years. These are used for just 20–30 minutes before being shipped to landfills and incinerators. Within one year of NYC-based Cafeteria Culture's **"Trayless Tuesdays"** campaign, all 1,800 NYC public schools eliminated 100 million styrene foam trays - saving money and waste.¹⁰

In 2019, Cafeteria Culture released Microplastic Madness, an award-winning documentary co-created with students that has since been screened in over 45 countries.¹¹



The film follows 56 fifth graders from P.S. 15 in Red Hook, Brooklyn, a community on the frontline of the climate crisis. The students acted as citizen scientists; they collected local data, led community outreach, and testified at City Hall. They then turned their focus back to their own cafeteria and eliminated all single-use plastic. Today, **Plastic Free Lunch Day** reaches over 4,100 schools across the nation, and NYC Public Schools have achieved a 68% reduction in single-use plastic items.¹²

Here on Long Island, **Herricks High School students** conducted a rigorous, multi-phase study of waste management in their school cafeteria, inspired by Cafeteria Culture.

Starting from no existing food waste reduction program at Herricks, the students set out to test whether introducing composting, recycling, and sorting signage could meaningfully reduce school cafeteria waste and carbon emissions.

From February to April, the students collected baseline data, introduced recycling and composting signage, waste volunteers, and promoted a video encouraging sorting. All wastes were separated and weighed in three categories: food waste, recyclables, and true waste. They used EPA's Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator to convert waste measurements into carbon emissions.

The results were encouraging. True waste, sent to landfills or incinerators, dropped from a baseline of 30.4kg to 12.2kg by the final phase, a reduction of nearly 60%. Carbon emissions similarly decreased. A follow-up survey of 21 students found that participants rated climate change as serious, but they felt less certain about their personal ability to make a difference.

The student researchers concluded that Cafeteria Culture's approach was effective in diverting food waste and recyclables and improving student behavior, but noted that stronger incentives, more staff cooperation, and a longer program timeline would be needed to maximize impact. Their recommendations include school-wide assemblies, better signage, partnerships with local recycling companies, and structured rewards, offering a practical **roadmap** for any Long Island school ready to take the next step toward zero waste.

No Time To Waste

Friday evening March 27
6 - 8:30 pm
Milton L Olive Middle School

Presented by the Earth Rangers and Friends

Meet Zero: our new
Zero Waste superhero



The country of Tuvalu is about to disappear because of rising ocean levels. Too much trash—especially plastics—is contributing to climate change. Reducing waste helps our communities and our health.

Meet our new superhero and learn ways you can move towards zero waste.

This is for anyone who lives in Wyandanch.

- ◆ Dinner included
- ◆ Prizes

Questions? Want to help by bringing food? Email: starflexcp@aol.com

An Earth Ranger is someone who cares both **about** the earth and **for** the earth. Earth Rangers understand the importance of learning about the earth's life systems and enjoy experiencing the natural world, but they also know that some of the living things on the earth are in trouble and how they can help.

Wyandanch Schools have also explored zero waste issues in their schools. Laurie Farber's Starflower Experiences hosts an annual event, No Time to Waste to encourage reductions in plastics. Recent events have introduced the Zero Waste superhero! (See the flyer.)

In 2023, Wyandanch students participated in a national Planeteer Alliance campaign to reduce plastic consumption.¹³

Wyandanch students have hosted food sharing tables; these allow students to swap foods they would prefer to eat with their friends. Laurie Farber has helped mentor students the past several years on this project.

Laurie Farber has also worked with Wyandanch schools to develop composting programs to reduce wastes that would otherwise go to the incinerator. Hopefully, composting programs can be expanded and improved over the next two years.

Education on zero waste is a critical step to building a genuine zero waste Long Island. New York City has already made major investments and commitments to Zero Waste. Zero Waste New York provides information on zero waste efforts throughout New York State.¹⁴

Sources

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