

# Partnership on Waste and Energy 2023 Annual Report

## Letter from the Chair

The Partnership on Waste and Energy (Partnership) is a joint powers board comprised of the Ramsey/Washington Recycling & Energy Board and Hennepin County. Established in 2017, the Partnership is the organization through which Hennepin, Ramsey and Washington counties collaborate on solid waste management and energy issues. By pooling our knowledge and resources, we enhance our ability to make progress.

The work done in 2023 showcased the Partnership's dedication to innovative environmental stewardship and proactive legislative advocacy. The year's legislative milestones included improving waste management systems, advancing renewable energy and bolstering climate resilience. We advanced bills that secure essential funding for local waste reduction, address the impact of emerald ash borer and lay the groundwork for product stewardship of packaging materials. In our communities, we implemented the Stop Food Waste Challenge, which engaged residents in food waste reduction actions and demonstrated how collective action can drive change.

We look forward to building on the 2023 achievements to advance next generation environmental solutions in 2024.



**Victoria Reinhardt**

*Ramsey County Commissioner and 2024 Partnership Board Chair*



## Governance & Administration

The Partnership is governed by a board of three county commissioners, including the chair and vice chair of the Ramsey/Washington Recycling & Energy (R&E) Board and a Hennepin County Commissioner. In 2023, the three members of the Partnership Board were Washington County Commissioner Fran Miron, Ramsey County Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt and Hennepin County Commissioner Debbie Goettel.

The chair of the Partnership Board rotates annually. In 2023, the chair was Commissioner Goettel. R&E serves as the administrative agent for the Partnership, providing accounting, procurement, communication and planning services.



# Common Goals

The Partnership enhances solid waste management and energy policy through collaborative efforts across Hennepin, Ramsey and Washington counties. Working with a shared vision has enabled significant progress in recovering resources and moving materials up the [solid waste hierarchy](#).

United by common goals, the Partnership works to:

- End Waste
- Advance Renewable Energy
- Enhance Community Health and Resiliency

The Partnership responds to climate change through legislative work, education, research and development. This work connects with state and county climate planning, including the [Ramsey County Climate Equity Action Plan](#), [Hennepin County Climate Action Plan](#), [Washington County Comprehensive Plan section on Resilience and Sustainability](#) and [Minnesota Climate Action Framework](#). These plans include ambitious goals that harness innovation and develop the next generation of climate-smart systems and technologies.

Waste processing is another core commonality of our partnership. Between the Hennepin Energy Recovery Center (HERC) and the Ramsey/Washington Recycling & Energy (R&E) Center, over 760,000 tons of waste from our communities are processed, not landfilled, each year, all while producing enough electricity to power over 38,000 homes annually.

By working together, the Partnership leverages shared expertise, effort and advocacy to go beyond what the counties could do alone. We share the lift to advance shared goals such as:

- Policy that reaches beyond current public health and environmental goals to align materials management with renewable energy and advance equity and climate resilience
- Collaboration among state and local entities that maximize the value of waste, resources and energy
- Frameworks that design waste, toxicity and pollution out of the marketplace and keep products and resources in use for an equitable circular economy
- Preventing waste at the source is the highest priority, followed by using waste as a resource, including through emerging technologies and developing markets

The Partnership is committed to leading waste prevention, stewardship, market development and energy policy to advance the connection between waste and energy for community and environmental health benefits across the metro for years to come.



2023 HERC tour, from left: Hennepin County Commissioner Goettel, Washington County Commissioner Bigham (Partnership alternate), Ramsey County Commissioner Reinhardt

## Legislative Efforts & Partnering on Policy

Through its legislative advocacy efforts, the Partnership seeks to end waste, promote renewable energy and enhance the health and resiliency of its communities while advancing equity and responding to the challenges of a changing climate.

Each year, the Partnership Board adopts a legislative platform. In the 2023 legislative session, Partnership activities advanced the following areas:

- › Redirecting Solid Waste Management Tax receipts from the General Fund into SCORE grants to counties
- › Allocating funding to address the ongoing issue of emerald ash borer and wood waste management
- › Laying the groundwork to adopt product stewardship policies for packaging
- › Restoring funds borrowed from the Metropolitan Landfill Contingency Action Trust
- › Securing consumers' right to repair electronic products
- › Establishing consumer and waste industry protections from per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), a forever chemical
- › Obtaining a position on the state's Clean Transportation Standard working group
- › Supporting organics management through anaerobic digestion and compostable product standards and labeling requirements

Partnership Board members, staff and lobbyists engaged with policy makers on these and several other topics and continued to collaborate with partners toward common goals. In addition, the Partnership provided written and verbal testimony and created policy position statements to communicate its interests.

## Product Stewardship

Product stewardship is a policy approach that holds producers responsible for managing their products and packaging for the materials' full life cycle to minimize the environmental and social impacts.

The Partnership partners with the Minnesota Solid Waste Administrators Association (SWAA) Product Stewardship Committee to advance a shared vision of product stewardship across the state. This includes:

- › Supporting efforts that reduce lifecycle impacts of products and packaging
- › Reducing financial burdens associated with disposal on local government and taxpayers
- › Establishing measurable and enforceable goals

In 2023, the Partnership continued developing a bill in Minnesota to implement extended producer responsibility for packaging and paper products. This work included developing draft bill language informed by 2022's committee process and stakeholder feedback.

The Partnership also collaborates to advance policies related to other products, such as carpeting, mattresses, batteries and electronics.



# Zero Waste Challenge

As the climate impacts of wasted food become better known, measures to prevent food waste have become an important focus. Almost half of food wasted happens at a household level, meaning that improving knowledge and skills of residents can have a major impact.

The Stop Food Waste Challenge is a month-long online challenge for residents to make better use of the food they buy. Participants create or join a team to take the challenge with their family, friends or neighbors. The platform allows participants to learn more about wasted food and improve cooking, planning, shopping and storage. Participants select their goals from suggested actions and track their progress throughout the month.

In August, the three counties joined together to offer the Hennepin County online challenge to all residents of the three counties under the Partnership. We recruited 36 partner organizations, such as farmers' markets, grocery stores, cities, corporate offices and neighborhood associations, which increased promotion and engagement with residents.

The challenge recruited about 600 participants across 75 teams, completing over 4,800 actions to reduce waste. The impacts of these actions included reducing greenhouse gas by almost 4,600 pounds, preventing 2,330 pounds of wasted food and spending 1,760 minutes learning.



## Financials

Each year, the Partnership Board approves a budget for the following fiscal year, which aligns with the calendar year. The Partnership is funded with contributions by Hennepin County and Ramsey/Washington Recycling & Energy. In 2023, the Partnership budget expenditures were as follows:

Personnel	R&E staffing support to the Partnership for planning, accounting, communications and contract management	\$27,700
Communications	Design of professional materials, legislative position statements, reports and web content	\$7,450
Lobbying Services	Contracts with lobbying firms Capitol Hill Associates and Fryberger Law Firm	\$99,975
Product Stewardship	Contract with the Product Stewardship Institute to work on product stewardship policy	\$12,120
Zero Waste Challenges	Contract with Northwest Earth Institute for online Stop Food Waste Challenge platform	\$11,850
Insurance	Organizational insurance	\$1,445
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$172,390</b>