



Finn Harrison / WDAY News

Logan Jacobson, right, the city of West Fargo's director of public works services in the sanitation division, takes part in Cleanup Week in 2023.

## Changes for the better

West Fargo public works sees benefits in new garbage collection, recycling, billing services

BY WENDY REUER  
The Forum

### WEST FARGO

After making several changes in garbage collection and recycling, West Fargo officials say the systems have created a more streamlined process.

In March 2024, the city renewed its recycling contract with Waste Management. The recycling program proved popular in West Fargo, saving money on landfill costs the city pays to haul garbage to the Fargo City Landfill. Residents are not billed separately for the recycling program, but the city raised its sanitation rates by 17% in 2024, in part to help pay for rising recycling costs and hauling garbage to Fargo.

After much debate, the city also decided to change its follow truck and bulk item pick up in 2024, along with giving residents who tend to have more garbage each week a new 96-gallon bin,



Chris Flynn / The Forum

The West Fargo Public Works building at 810 12th Ave. NW in West Fargo on March 4.

which costs \$3 more than the 64-gallon bin.

Logan Jacobson, director of public works services, said despite the demise of the follow truck program, new software has helped trucks continue to pick up additional items when requested.

Calls for missed collections decreased from 30 to 50 calls per week in 2023 to two to three calls per week in 2024.

The West Fargo sanitation data was part of the

2024 annual report by Public Works Department Director Matt Andvik, who said he has considered compiling an annual report for the past couple of years.

"When most people think of public works, they don't think of public works until something goes wrong," Andvik said Monday, May 19, at the West Fargo City Commission meeting.

Andvik said the report gives the public a view of how his department,

which includes 90 full-time and 14 seasonal employees, operates on a roughly \$26.7 million annual budget. West Fargo's Public Works Department has eight divisions that maintain the city's streets, sanitation, forestry, water and sewer systems.

"We're eight divisions but one team," Andvik said. "We see ourselves out there as one team, such as during Cleanup Week, or if big storms come through, all of the divisions help each other out."

In 2024, the city's street cleaners swept up 442 tons of debris from West Fargo streets, he said. The city sent about 25,000 tons of garbage to the Fargo landfill in 2024, and there were more than 15,000 visits to the West Fargo transfer station.

The water department, which regulates the sending of West Fargo water to Fargo, sent more than 930 million gallons of sewage to Fargo in 2024, Andvik said. About 260 gallons went to the city's

existing lagoons, most of which are still in the process of being decommissioned.

The department expected to finish updating its residential utility billing software before Memorial Day, Andvik said, a process that has taken more than two years. The overhaul came after the public work staff found utility billing errors that almost cost residents more than \$1.4 million.

In January 2023, the city discovered billing errors when the department began to gather detailed information for a sanitation study. An analysis by The Forum found the city lost out on more than \$1.4 million in revenue due to the errors. This included an estimated \$1.2 million undercharge for water and sewer use by Cargill, one of the city's largest water users.

The company and city initially agreed that Cargill would pay about \$509,000, roughly half the amount it was underbilled. In June 2023, Cargill volunteered to pay

the remaining \$679,401.

The Forum also found other billing errors to multiple customers, if not discovered, would have cost the city an additional \$377,000 in lost revenue annually. The city also under-billed about \$11,000 per month or \$132,000 per year for dumpsters that should have been charged to the customers, The Forum's analysis found.

In August 2024, Andvik presented a new policy for handling underpayment and overpayments. His department also worked to implement a new billing software system that will make online and automatic payments easier to complete for residents.

"We are in the final phases, we hope to have all the online portal up and running," City Administrator Dustin Scott said. "We are at the very end of that conversion process."

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## UNDERPASS

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on Center Avenue once Main closes, just with train traffic, so alternate routes are encouraged," Curtiss said.

First Avenue, which has been closed since last spring, will remain closed as MnDOT continues work in the area.

Ames Construction, the lead contractor for the project, plans to finish work on First Avenue by the end of August, before school starts, Ames Construction Project Manager Brady Helland said at the open house. He anticipated Main Avenue would be closed through October.

Crews working on the underpass saw a warm, dry start to spring.

"It's been pretty dry, so we've been able to, once the frost came out of the ground, get started kind of where we left off last year," Curtiss said.

Crews used the warm weather to advance work on the first railroad bridge, between Center Avenue and First Avenue. BNSF Railway will soon be able to switch from running trains on a temporary shoo-fly track to running them over the new bridge.

Through the summer, crews will continue underground work around First Avenue and construction of the railway bridge between



Alyssa Goelzer / The Forum

Construction continues on the 11th Street Underpass on May 19 in Moorhead.

Center Avenue and Main Avenue. In the Hornbacher's parking lot, crews will install a retaining wall where the roadway

will drop beneath the rail bridges.

"It'll be a little more above ground this year, and it'll feel like progress



Alyssa Goelzer / The Forum

Construction continues on the 11th Street Underpass on May 19 in Moorhead.

as you pass by," Curtiss said.

The next open house meeting for the project will be 9-10 a.m. on June 17 at the Hjemkomst Cen-

ter's Willow Room.

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