



Litter Task Force

Final Report | April 1, 2025



Background: Litter was identified as a key issue to address in the 2021 Union County 2050 comprehensive plan. In 2021 Union County approved a differential rate structure to impose higher fees on loads brought in without a covering to reduce litter blown out of the back of vehicles. This strategy has reduced the incidence of unsecured loads being brought to the county landfill, but with sustained growth projected in the county, vigilance is necessary. Volunteer groups such as Union County Litterbusters play a key role in advocating for litter clean-up, which benefits public safety, aesthetics, and wildlife. In support of this advocacy role, a strategy considered in the comprehensive plan process was to appoint a litter task force, which would identify additional strategies for addressing litter in Union County.

2022 Committee: As a recommendation found in the comprehensive plan, the Board of Commissioners appointed a committee in early 2022 to identify strategies to address litter, which met for six months. This committee recommended eight strategies, listed below. These recommendations were later recommended by the Planning Board. The Board of Commissioners received these recommendations in March 2024 and asked that staff work with a new committee for up to a year to evaluate the strategies for implementation costs and viability.

2022 Recommendations	Implementation
Apply for Keep America Beautiful designation	New Program
Establish a formal litter task force committee	BOCC Approval
Fund a new position within the County to coordinate litter reduction initiatives	New Program
Enhance multi-agency anti-dumping enforcement efforts	Expanded Program
Shift hours of convenience center sites	Expanded Program
Expand hazardous material disposal program to make it available year-round	Expanded Program
Add a fixed cost fee for use of County solid waste facilities	Expanded Program
Advocate for statewide bottle deposit bill as part of the County's legislative agenda	Advocacy

2024 Committee: Staff conducted a new recruitment process, and a four-member Union County Litter Committee was appointed by the Board of Commissioners in June of 2024. This

committee held its first meeting in August 2024. Scott Abramson was elected chairman, and Bob Reichman was elected vice-chairman. Rodger Skirvin and Loretta Melancon also served on the committee. Bjorn Hansen from the Planning Department and Caleb Sinclair from Solid Waste served as staff support to the committee. The group met a total of nine times, completing its work in April 2025.

The committee evaluated each of the eight recommendations of the 2022 committee, as well as one identified as part of this review process, with recommendations for whether to implement or not.

Keep America Beautiful, Establish a Formal Litter Committee, and Fund a New Position: The committee heard from a representative of the national [Keep America Beautiful](#) program, as well as from the [Aiken County \(SC\)](#) and [Charlotte](#) program coordinators. The national representative, Malloy Coffey, said that program affiliates can be non-profit, government, or a hybrid. Hybrids are able to accept donations, if there is a non-profit established, but a government program may be most appropriate for Union County due to its size and resources. The three goals of the program are to end littering, improve recycling, and beautify communities. She said a 2020 nationwide litter study said there were 50 billion pieces of litter on the nation's roads and waterways, or 152 pieces per person. The Aiken and Charlotte representatives appreciated the program, as it provided structure and brand recognition to their specific programs. The Aiken program uses an [interactive online map](#) to display segments of roads evaluated, cleaned, and their current status. Periodic evaluation of area roads is a requirement of a Keep America Beautiful program. They also are able to apply for grants through the national association. They cautioned that a litter program should focus on managing the issue, recognizing that without sustained effort it will not improve.

Program implementation and Operations: A 6-9 person community team [sets up the program](#), with a 5-15 member community board. There is a one-time \$1,650 application fee and approximately \$1,000 per year membership fee. A coordinator is highly recommended as a new position to oversee the program and working with volunteer groups from throughout the County, with an annual salary estimated in the \$60,000 to \$70,000 range. Materials and training costs are estimated at \$30,000 to \$50,000 per year, which would cover supplies and marketing materials for the program.

A second employee position would be recommended to augment existing Solid Waste staff efforts to pick up trash, particularly large bulk items, and support volunteer efforts. This would result in a two-person team, which would use a truck

dedicated to these efforts. The annual salary for the new position is estimated at \$50,000 and the new truck is \$55,000.

Committee recommendation: The committee supports this program, as well as staffing and material recommendations, as a helpful strategy to facilitate volunteer clean up events, raise community awareness, learn through networking and peer support, and access grants to improve the program. This program could be called *Keep Union County Beautiful*.

Enhance Multi-Agency Anti-Dumping Enforcement Efforts: This was one of the first strategies evaluated by the committee. Representatives from Environmental Health, Zoning, and the Sheriff's Department met to discuss how each of their departments play a role. Environmental Health can send citations for allowing dumping. The state Department of Environmental Quality can also fine the owner if classified as an unpermitted landfill, but that is rare. The Sheriff's Department can investigate and install surveillance cameras with the owner's permission.

The group reviewed the web pages for planning, environmental health, and solid waste to note that there were three separate violations reporting processes. The Sheriff's Department could also take complaints, but the frequency that it occurred was unknown. The Department does have an app with 12,000 users, so they may have an effective reporting tool. As a result of the discussion, a consolidated web page with all reporting options was created and linked under Planning and Solid Waste's web pages. The committee acknowledges that this is a continuing issue that can be addressed through a Keep Union County Beautiful program that identifies and advocates for enforcement of dumping clean up requirements.

Committee Recommendation: The County departments have sufficient authority to address dumping issues, but the issue is the lack of attention and coordination between departments. A litter coordinator position, reporting to the Solid Waste Department, could follow up on enforcement actions and ensure issues have been routed to the appropriate department.

Shift Hours of Convenience Center Sites: Union County convenience centers operate three days (Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday) per week, from 7 AM to 7 PM. The 2022 committee felt this limited schedule may deter residents from taking their waste to a facility. The 2024 committee acknowledged these concerns, but felt the additional cost would not be worth the added convenience to residents.

Committee recommendation: Do not change existing hours of operation.

Expand Hazardous Material Disposal Program: Union County currently holds one countywide hazardous material collection event per year, typically in the spring. This event costs approximately \$30,000 and collects 40,000 pounds of hazardous materials, which is considered an cost-effective ratio. The 2024 committee recognized the need to reduce these materials from the waste stream, but expanding the program to convenience center sites would significantly increase cost and permitting requirements for the Solid Waste department.

Committee recommendation: Do not implement an expanded collection program.

Add a Fixed Cost Fee for Use of Solid Waste Facilities: The 2022 committee felt that a broadly-based revenue source that allowed for the elimination of dumping fees at the landfill or convenience centers would encourage greater utilization of the facilities and reduce illegal dumping. This fee would be charged to all residential property owners in Union County, likely on a sliding scale based on whether they live in a municipality that provided solid waste services. The 2024 committee noted that Union County already allows for a reasonable amount of waste to be brought to County facilities for free through its “Trash Pass” program, and that many residents pay for private curbside service and would not benefit from this initiative.

Committee recommendation: Do not implement a fixed cost fee program.

Statewide Bottle Deposit Bill: Bottle laws were implemented in multiple states across the county in the 1970s to address litter and reduce energy consumption. Several more have been proposed in other states in the past decade but were not implemented. One state, Delaware, repealed its bottle deposit law. The committee reviewed materials on the effectiveness of bottle deposits in increasing recycling rates, which impacts the amount of litter along roadways. The recycling rates in these states have been decreasing, mainly due to the declining value of the deposits, which have not kept pace with inflation. Three deposit-refund bills were introduced in the NC legislature between 2007 and 2011. None of these bills were passed by the legislature.

Despite the lack of progress in expanding this program in North Carolina or elsewhere in the United States, the committee recognized the usefulness in assigning a monetary value to litter, with an incentive to not throw the containers out of vehicles or otherwise litter.

Committee recommendation: The committee recommends that a bottle deposit bill be included in the Union County legislative agenda when working with state legislators on Union County priorities.

Illegal Dump Site Cleanup Grant Program: The committee recognized that some illegal dumping is happening on private property by people who do not own the property. This creates enforcement issues when the owners say they did not create the issue. The committee felt that a grant program for property owners to hire a trash hauling company to pick up bulk materials could be an effective incentive to clean up the sites. This issue was identified by the 2024 committee.

Committee recommendation: Fund a \$5,000 annual grant program to support property owners by reimbursing them for cleaning up sites deemed by staff to not be their fault.

Conclusion: The committee reviewed the eight strategies identified in 2022. Some, such as the permanent committee, multi-agency anti-dumping enforcement efforts, staffing recommendations and Keep Union County Beautiful, are best implemented together. This bundled approach dedicates resources and structure to address the issue. The remaining strategies are stand alone initiatives. Not all were supported, and an additional strategy was recommended. Together, they provide resources, support property owners, and foster community bonds by working on issues that affect everyone. A list of the strategies and the committee recommendations is listed below.

2024 Recommendations	Implementation Process	2024 Committee Recommendation
Apply for Keep America Beautiful designation and implement program	New Program	Implement
Establish a formal litter task force committee	BOCC Approval	Implement
Fund new positions to coordinate Keep America Beautiful program and support litter reduction initiatives	New Program	Implement
Enhance multi-agency anti-dumping enforcement efforts	Expanded Program	Implement
Advocate for statewide bottle deposit bill as part of the County's legislative agenda	Advocacy	Implement
Fund illegal dump site cleanup grant program	New Program	Implement
Shift hours of convenience center sites	Expanded Program	Do not implement

Expand hazardous material disposal program to make it available year-round	Expanded Program	Do not implement
Add a fixed cost fee for use of County solid waste facilities	Expanded Program	Do not implement