

Watertown City CouncilFebruary 24th, 2026

Agenda Item:	Compost Site
Request for Action:	Discussion & Provide Staff Direction
Employee/Dept.:	Mike Loehrs, Public Services

Background:

The compost site continues to have increased numbers of illegal commercial dumping taking place every year. With the current emerald ash borer running rampant through most nearby cities it has been shown that we are a popular dumping site for contractors to get rid of their brush/logs for free.

In the past the city has gotten all the brush chipped for free because the contractor could sell the wood chips to the coal plant in St. Paul and they would use them to heat their facility. More recently the price keeps going higher because St. Paul is no longer accepting wood chips and contractors have no place to take the chips and are forced to store them themselves. The rise in the cost also has to do with the higher trucking/equipment costs that the contractors have.

For the last five years the price consistently keeps increasing from \$5,000.00 in 2021 up to \$31,020.25 in 2025. The reason for such a prevalent increase in price is due to the massive increase in cubic yards of brush that are being dropped off, it was around 840 cubic yards in 2021 all the way up to 4,995 cubic yards in 2025.

The current brush pile was chipped in August of 2025 and to date it is estimated that there is already around 2,400 cubic yards of mulch onsite.

Discussion:

After discussing it over with Dan, he and I came up with five possible options that the city could choose from. We listed all the pros and cons with each scenario and they are as follows:

Option #1: Operate as is with a CameraPros

Familiarity for residents
Maximum flexibility for residents
No hourly restrictions
No gate cost

Cons

Hard to police
County hesitant to prosecute if driver is unknown
Staffing time involved with monitoring cameras and follow-up
Removal costs continue to increase year after year

Option #2: Automatic Gate with CameraPros

Maintains flexibility for residents
Able to track who is dumping and when
Grinding/removal costs would decrease

Cons

Higher upfront cost (+/- \$55,000.00)
Staff involvement with managing key fob/code system
Key fob/codes could easily be shared

Option #3: Attendant with Gate and Camera

Pros

Significantly decrease illegal dumping
Decrease grinding/removal costs

Cons

Higher upfront cost (+/- \$55,000.00)
Staffing cost of the attendant
Hours restricted due to attendant availability
Small structure needed for attendant

Option #4: Gate and Accept only Leaves/Grass Clippings while Brush/Branches go to Minnesota Topsoil

Pros

Should significantly decrease illegal dumping
Would be able to track who/when is dumping
Grinding/removal costs decrease

Cons

Still hard to enforce if illegal tree dumping takes place
Residents no longer have just one site to dump at
Residents would have to prove their residency of Watertown
Minnesota Topsoil has set hours

Option #5: Close the Site. Everything is taken to Minnesota Topsoil

Pros

No illegal dumping
No gate cost or fob/code management
Yard waste is still accepted at no cost to Watertown Residents (Normally \$6/CY)
Watertown-based contractors can dump yard waste for no charge (would be charged for tree waste)
Minnesota Topsoil is okay with trying a short-term contract initially to see if the arrangement works well

Cons

City would be charged \$10.00/CY of brush (Normally \$15.00/CY)
Minnesota Topsoil has set hours of operation M-F 7:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and Saturday 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
Residents would need to prove Watertown residency