CAFES Ottawa
Community Action for Environmental Sustainability

From throwaway to circular

What a circular economy means for the planet, for Ottawa — and for us

Angela Keller-Herzog, Executive Director, CAFES

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TONIGHT

Three zoom levels, one thread

1 The big picture

How products are designed, sold and regulated — and why Europe is ahead

2 Ottawa

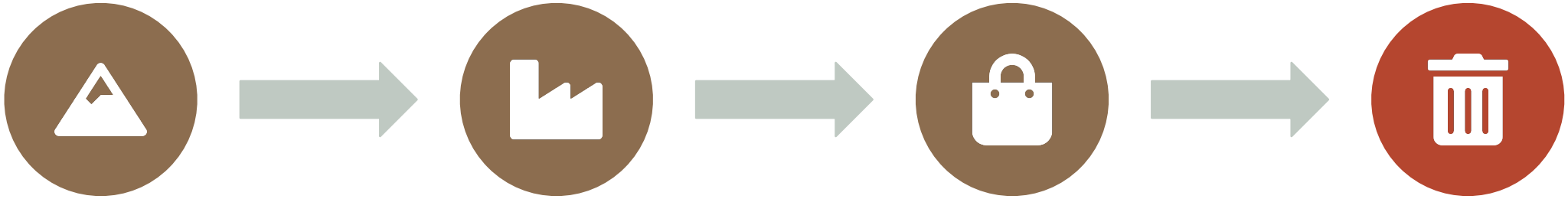
What we throw away, what the City plans to do, and what we should keep an eye on

3 Us

The habits that matter most — and what CAFES is asking of the City

Personal action and system change aren't rivals — each one makes the other possible.

We run a straight-line economy



6%

of the materials entering Canada's economy come from recycled sources.

Almost three-quarters of what we consume ends up wasted.

Source: WSP, Advancing Canada's Circular Economy

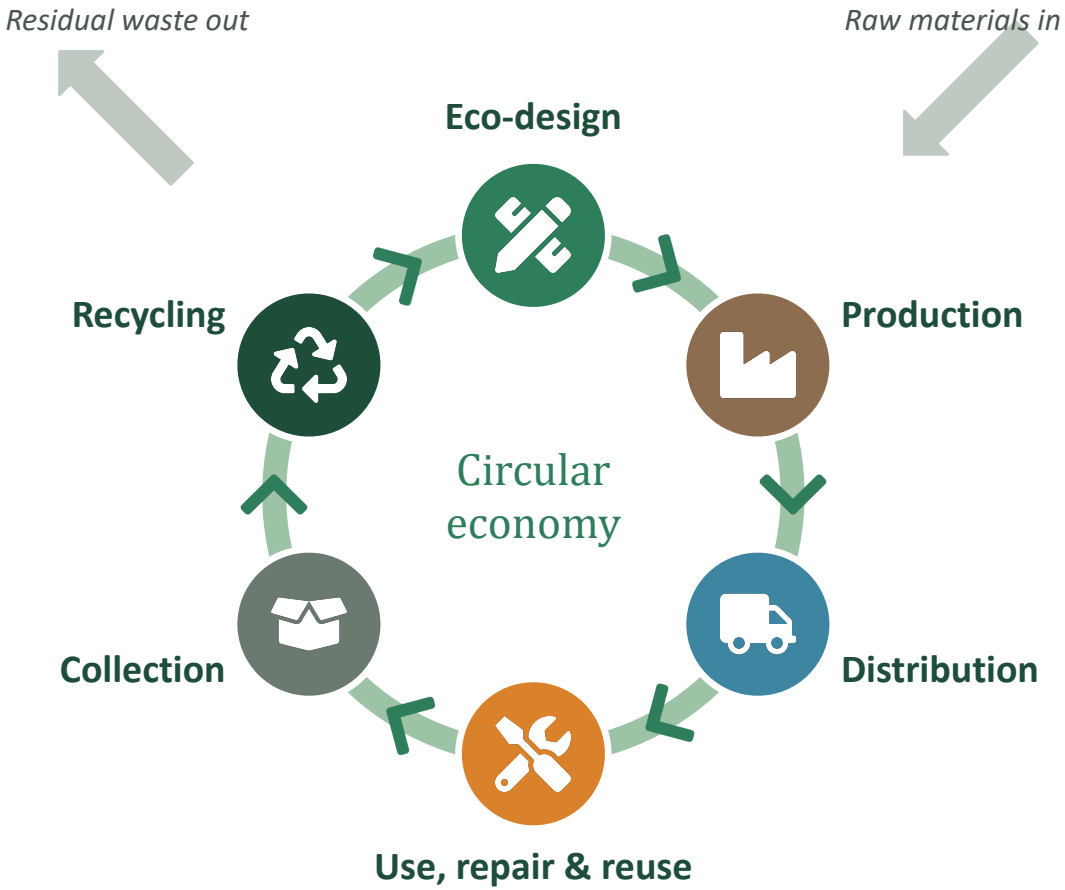
Circular is redesign, not nostalgia

It is not…

- Going back to pre-industrial life
- Just “better recycling”

It is…

- Designing waste and pollution out from the start
- Keeping products and materials in use at their highest value
- Regenerating nature — healthy soil, clean water
- Clean tech and new business models: next level, not step back



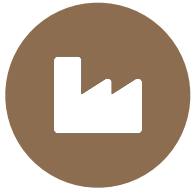
Both ends shrink as the loop tightens.

It's a climate strategy too

45%

of global greenhouse gas emissions come from making the products and food we use

Source: Ellen MacArthur Foundation, Completing the Picture (2019)



Making stuff

Steel, cement, plastics, textiles — energy-hungry materials, every time we buy new

Food

Growing, shipping and then wasting food; rotting food makes methane

Landfill

Landfill methane is a major part of Ottawa's waste-related emissions

Europe is writing the rulebook

Ecodesign rules

Durability, repairability and recycled content become legal requirements for products

No more trashing new clothes

Large companies banned from destroying unsold clothes and shoes since July 19, 2026

Right to Repair Directive

Applies from July 31, 2026 — repair becomes the easier option

Packaging Regulation

New EU-wide packaging rules apply from August 2026

Producers pay for textiles

Mandatory producer responsibility for textile waste across the EU

Circular Economy Act

Proposal expected Nov 11, 2026. Goal: double the EU's circularity rate by 2030

The hook: make producers responsible, and make repair the normal choice.

Next up: the EU Circular Economy Act

Status: proposal expected Nov 11, 2026 — not yet published. Then 1–2 years of negotiation with Parliament and member states.

One market for recycled materials

EU-wide “end-of-waste” rules replace 27 national systems

Producers pay — one EU system

Harmonised, digital EPR — fees could help recycled beat virgin

Pull demand

Recycled-content thresholds and green public procurement

E-waste overhaul

Recover critical raw materials; only ~40% recycled now

Mixed-material packaging?

Not banned by name — but tested out:

2030	Under 70% recyclable → off the EU market
2035	Must actually be recycled at scale
2038	Only 80%+ recyclable allowed

Packaging Regulation (PPWR) — already law, not part of the CEA

Watch: better recycling markets — or actually using less?

Make repair cheap. Make obsolescence illegal.

France: the Repair Bonus

- Discount taken off the bill at certified repairers
- ~1.9 million repairs supported, €62M paid out, average €33 each (Jan 2026)
- Covers clothes and shoes too: about €7 to patch a hole
- Critics say it's still too small to beat cheap new goods

Québec: Bill 29 (2023)

- Canada's first law banning planned obsolescence
- Spare parts and repair information must be available
- Parts must be installable with common tools
- Corporate fines up to 5% of worldwide revenue

Ontario has no equivalent law.

What's in our garbage bag?

58%

58% of what Ottawa households put in the garbage could have gone in the blue, black or green bin

City of Ottawa curbside waste audit, 2018–19

The City only handles household waste
Business, institutional and construction waste is mostly private — and mostly out of sight

Ecological costs

River

Microplastics in every Ottawa River sample; 70–100% are fibres, largely from washing synthetic clothes. Higher downstream of the sewage plant.

Soil

Plastic fragments slip through organics processing and end up on fields.

Air

Landfill methane, and the emissions from burning waste.

River data: Carleton University & Ottawa Riverkeeper

What the City is getting right

- **98.5% of households within the 3-item garbage limit**
  up from 85% in 2022
- **73% of curbside homes use the green bin**
  up from 69% in 2022
- **Apartment green bins: ~half of 1,050 buildings in**
  plus resident Waste Reduction Champions
- **Repair Cafés, Drop & Swaps, a new Reuse Directory**
  and the Circular Fair at Lansdowne on Oct 10
- **Community Grants doubled, now have a waste stream**
  $102,000 per year

Curbside + multi-residential. Source: SWMP update, June 2026

Where we need to keep our eyes open

The Circular Economy Strategy is still at the “baseline” stage

Internal City engagement comes first. No targets, timeline or budget in the June report.

The climate impact isn't counted yet

Two years in: GHG impacts “will be quantified with future annual reporting.”

Waste-to-energy is a threat (antithesis of circular economy)

Site review for a facility under way; staff report to Council in Q1 2027.

Monitor and hold accountable the new producer recycling regime

The Blue Box is now run by producers through Circular Materials, under Ontario's extended producer responsibility rules.

Sub-strategies in silos — and none public yet

Bulky waste, construction, textiles, food, events, behaviour change, plus a separate circular strategy.

Proof it can be done closer to home

Toronto

- 10-year Circular Economy Road Map (2025)
- One of the first North American cities with a dedicated circular economy unit

Guelph-Wellington

- “Our Food Future”: $10M federal Smart Cities prize
- Better food access for ~8,000 people, 50 community projects, $1.5M of edible food recovered

Montréal & Québec

- Montréal adopted a circular economy plan
- Backed by provincial law against planned obsolescence

Vancouver, Toronto and Montréal are moving faster. Ottawa risks falling behind.

Our biggest impact: changing the system

Personal habits matter — advocacy multiplies them.

At home

1. Refuse / reduce
2. Share / borrow
3. Repair
4. Reuse / resell
5. Recycle & compost

Best first — landfill is the last resort

Neighbourhood & ward

- Repair cafés and swaps in local community centres
- Composting and Waste Reduction Champions in apartment buildings
- Lending and sharing hubs
- Community associations working with ward councillors

City-wide systems

Under municipal jurisdiction:

- By-laws: single-use items, deconstruction
- City procurement (~$1B a year)
- Zoning and land use
- City facilities, parks and events
- Waste services and community grants
- A Circular Economy Strategy

Reach and impact grow

Advocacy learns from best practice: Toronto and Montréal strategies and by-laws · Québec's repair law · France's repair bonus · EU rules

Product design, packaging and repair rights are set by the province, federal government or EU — outside City control, but they show what's possible.

Ready-made ways to plug in

Repair & borrow

Ottawa Tool Library; free Repair Cafés (next one Sat. Nov 14)

Second-hand

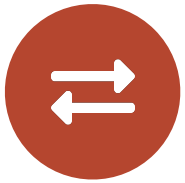
Habitat ReStore, thrift shops — donate and buy

Food

Foodsharing Ottawa (City-sponsored workshops); containers in the car; leftover recipes

Apartment composting

Ask about the City's apartment green bin; become a Waste Reduction Champion



Swap & give away

City-supported Drop & Swap events and Giveaway Weekend

Find reuse options

The City's upcoming Reuse Directory of local reuse and repair services

The City holds the biggest levers

By-laws, procurement and an engaged civil society — but it hasn't switched them on yet.

One Circular Economy Strategy

Comprehensive and resourced, by end of 2027, with per-capita waste reduction targets

Circular procurement

Put circularity into the City's $1 billion in annual spending

Single-use items by-law

Ask-first for utensils, accept reusables, reusable dishes for dine-in, fees on single-use take-out

City leadership

Reusables at City facilities, parks and festivals; no single-use plastic bottles; water refill stations

Deconstruction by-law

Salvage materials from pre-1960 homes; 70% diversion of demolition waste

Permanent reuse & repair centre

Donate, repair, upcycle and learn — one central site or east, west and south hubs

How to pay for it: reallocate savings from producer responsibility (EPR) to the circular transition.

One habit. One ask.

One thing you'll do — and one thing you'll ask of a decision-maker.

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Ottawa's environment and climate network, where we connect and act together

Sources

- City of Ottawa, Solid Waste Master Plan Update, ACS2026-PWD-SWS-0003 (June 2026) — tonnage, set-out study, CE Strategy, waste technologies, GHG reporting
- City of Ottawa Curbside Residential Waste Audit 2018–19, via Capital Current / CTV — 58% divertible
- WSP, Advancing Canada's Circular Economy — 6% recycled material inputs
- Ellen MacArthur Foundation, Completing the Picture: How the Circular Economy Tackles Climate Change (2019) — 45%
- European Commission (Jul 17, 2026) — ban on destroying unsold clothes and shoes; Packaging Gateway and Landbell — Right to Repair Directive, PPWR, textile EPR
- EUWID (Oct 2026), EPRS briefing, ERP — Circular Economy Act status and expected levers; Keller and Heckman, Measurlabs — PPWR recyclability grades
- ecosystem.eco (Jan 2026) — France Repair Bonus figures; Assemblée nationale amendment 3127 — bonus amounts
- Québec Bill 29 (2023, c. 21); Torys, Osler, Chambers commentary
- Carleton University & Ottawa Riverkeeper microplastics studies (via Water Canada, Global News)
- City of Toronto, 10-Year Circular Economy Road Map (2025); City of Guelph & Wellington County, Our Food Future final report (2023)