

An Open Letter on Leaves

Dear Neighbors,

Autumn is here, and I have a humble request: Put the rakes away, and mow.

In other words, please consider **not** having the city pick up and dispose of your leaves this fall, be it through our street collection program or at our self-deposit station.

I ask this because starting this fall we are no longer able to dispose of the leaves we collect at the two nearby locations we had been using. Instead, we are now faced with having to truck all the leaves we collect to a landfill in Muskego, almost an hour away.

This is a problem for a number of reasons.

- First, it is extremely costly for taxpayers. From the labor costs of picking up the leaves and trucking them to the landfill to the fuel costs associated with that work, we expect to spend more than \$20,000 on leaf collection and disposal this fall, if nothing changes.
- Second, it makes the whole process much more inefficient. Taking an entire leaf crew off the street for several hours to travel to and from the landfill is an inefficient use of labor and equipment when our crews could be back on the street collecting more leaves.
- Third, it is bad for the environment. While the landfill does compost the leaves we give them, the extra fuel it takes to make the trip alone makes this bad for our planet. Plus, leaves being left in the street can be washed into area waterways, causing water quality issues. And piles of leaves can, and do, clog sewer drains during rainstorms.

My hope: We can reduce the amount of leaves we pick up this fall and every fall going forward. Even a 10% reduction would make a difference.

So, what I am asking taxpayers? Instead of raking your leaves into the street, please consider mulching them with your lawnmower, like I do. Or composting them. Or saving a few bags of leaves in your garage to use for mulch next spring. Anything that keeps us from taking your leaves on an hour-long truck ride. That's not good for anyone.

As we do this, I also pledge the city will take a hard look at longer term solutions here – ways we can better offer this service in the years ahead. I expect we will continue to pick up and dispose of homeowners' leaves. But something has to change.

Thank you for working with us on this issue.

Sincerely,

Erik Brooks
Mayor, City of South Milwaukee

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has some good tips for homeowners in dealing with fall yard waste. Check it out [here](http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Recycling/Tips.html), and click on the "Fall Yard Care" tab. And please note that there are certain requirements around composting in the City of South Milwaukee. You can learn more in Chapter 26 of our municipal ordinances online at our city website, or contact the Health Department at 414-762-2222 for more information.

<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Recycling/Tips.html>