

DECONSTRUCTION AND SALVAGE

INTRODUCTION

Construction and demolition (C&D) waste is one of the largest contributors to landfills, accounting for millions of tons of discarded materials each year. Traditional demolition methods waste reusable resources, release hazardous toxins into the environment, and erase historic character from communities.

Without policies to encourage deconstruction and material salvage, municipalities miss opportunities to:

- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and landfill waste
- Preserve historic materials and architectural character
- Support local reuse markets and workforce development
- Promote sustainable and resilient community growth

Deconstruction is the careful dismantling

of buildings to recover materials for reuse, recycling, or resale rather than sending them to the landfill. Municipal resolutions and ordinances create a framework for this practice.

This tool helps municipalities:

- Promote environmental sustainability by diverting up to 90% of C&D waste from landfills
- Support a circular economy by keeping valuable materials in the community
- Create local jobs—deconstruction generates six times more employment than demolition
- Preserve community heritage through the reuse of historic materials and architectural features
- Reduce project costs by lowering tipping fees and providing affordable building materials



Salvaged building materials from deconstructed buildings can be reused and diverted from landfills. This can include windows, doors, bricks, wood framing, etc.

APPLICABILITY

Municipalities can:

- Begin with public education and outreach on material reuse benefits.
- Pass a resolution to set community priorities and signal local government support.
- Identify pilot projects such as historic home removals or municipal-owned buildings for deconstruction efforts.
- Establish partnerships with local nonprofits, salvage yards, and workforce programs.
- Develop an ordinance to phase in requirements, expanding gradually to cover more building types.

IMPLEMENTATION

Municipalities can adopt deconstruction in two key steps:

- Pass a Resolution of Support
 - Establishes a public commitment to sustainable building practices.
 - Recognizes benefits of deconstruction and reuse for environmental, economic, and cultural reasons.
 - Encourages partnerships with nonprofits, salvage businesses, and workforce training programs.
 - *Example:* Auburn, New York's 2024 resolution officially supported deconstruction and material reuse.
- Enact a Deconstruction Ordinance
 - Creates enforceable requirements for deconstruction in certain building removals.

- Includes:
 - Clear definitions (deconstruction, salvage, reuse, certified contractors)
 - Phased implementation starting with pre-1960 or historic homes
 - Permitting process requiring pre- and post-deconstruction documentation
 - Standards for safe handling of hazardous materials and proper storage of salvaged items
 - Penalties and enforcement for non-compliance
- *Example:* San Antonio, Texas phased in rules over three years, starting with the oldest residential structures

SUCCESSFUL CASE STUDIES

Where has this been used successfully?

- San Antonio, TX: Adopted a phased ordinance covering historic and pre-1960 homes, with 112 homes and hundreds of tons of waste diverted from landfills (as of April 2025)
- Auburn, NY: Passed a resolution encouraging material reuse and supporting local circular economy initiatives. The resolution can be found on the Auburn City Council Meeting Minutes from May 2, 2024.
- Minnesota: Multiple counties offer grants and incentives for deconstruction and salvage projects like Carver County (Building Material Reuse Grants) and Hennepin County (Building Reuse Grants).

