



# A 19th-Century Club Meets 21st-Century Wasted Food Solutions

**How Elm City Club rebuilt composting and food donation through local partnerships**

Tucked into the heart of downtown New Haven, where long-established institutions sit alongside a vibrant food culture and an increasingly ambitious climate agenda, Elm City Club has emerged as a model for how different organizations can advance modern sustainability solutions. After their informal composting and donation program lost momentum, the Club partnered with CET to rebuild the programs in step with New Haven's wasted-food strategy. With support from local haulers and food rescue partners, Elm City Club, located at 155 Elm Street, has relaunched a more intentional approach to composting and food donation efforts, improving operations while contributing to a citywide movement toward a more resilient food system.





**Sandra Gervais, General Manager at Elm City Club**

## The Start

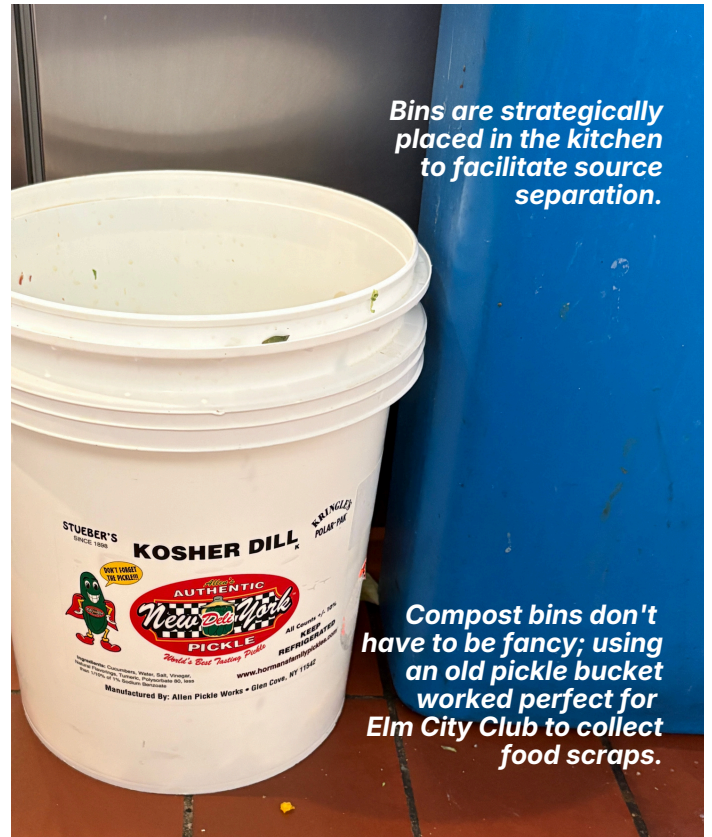
Founded in 1892, the Elm City Club blends historic character with modern comfort, offering contemporary event and catering spaces, a full-service restaurant and bar, meeting rooms for members, and 14 lodging rooms for members and guests. The club is known for its up-scale dining experience and exquisite lodging, but is also making moves to be recognized for their environmental impact. While the club had composted in the past, the program had lapsed, prompting leadership to take a more intentional approach to rebuilding it for long-term impact.

***"[Reducing food waste is] not as big of a deal as you think," said Elm City Club General Manager Sandra Gervais. "It really is not difficult, just changing habits."***

## The Work

While composting was an obvious place to start when it came to waste diversion, the club also wanted to reduce wasted food produced by its catering and events. Elm City Club also needed to align with updated city and state expectations around food-scrap diversion. This led the club to partner with CET to explore its options around composting and donation. CET came equipped with clear support and connections to local compost haulers and food rescue partners.

CET worked closely with Elm City Club to identify strengths and pain points within its current operations. A strong sustainability and food waste prevention culture already existed at the club; things like menu cycling and root-to-stalk cooking were commonplace. A single-stream recycling program, a history of composting and food donation, and a team of employees willing to engage and improve diversion practices made any necessary changes easier to implement.



***Bins are strategically placed in the kitchen to facilitate source separation.***

***Compost bins don't have to be fancy; using an old pickle bucket worked perfect for Elm City Club to collect food scraps.***

With CET's help, Elm City club pinpointed opportunities where it could improve, including implementing regular waste tracking to enhance purchasing and portioning, creating a dedicated donation program for catered events, and establishing consistent food scrap separation in prep and washing areas. The club held routine staff recycling refreshers to update employees on changes and to keep current practices fresh. Updated training was also integrated into onboarding for new staff.

## The Partnerships

CET connected Elm City Club with grant partners and local service providers, helping the Club re-establish relationships with compost haulers and food rescue organizations. The Club partnered with Haven's Harvest for regular donation pickups from catering and events, restarting food donation at scale. CET also facilitated connections with Yale Properties staff, strengthening informal collaboration and relationship-building across neighboring institutions.

CET then helped the Club design an easy-to-follow system pairing donation and composting, ensuring that food was always directed to the best possible outcome. What could not be donated had an immediate, appropriate outlet: composting.

*The club ensures there are dedicated and clearly marked bins for separating waste.*



## The Impact

Through a strong commitment to restarting and sustaining waste-diversion practices, Elm City Club is already seeing measurable environmental and community benefits.

### 2025 Estimated Annual Impact:

- 11.7 tons composted
  - → 6.55 tons CO<sub>2</sub> avoided per year
- 1.56 tons donated
  - → 3.59 tons CO<sub>2</sub> avoided per year
- 2,600 meals donated annually
- Haven's Harvest reports:
  - Five pans recovered
  - ~120 lbs every two weeks

*"The easier you make it, the better off you are."*

*Sandra Gervais, General Manager at Elm City Club*

## The Future

As New Haven accelerates its citywide effort to reduce wasted food, Elm City Club stands out as an early adopter translating that vision into real, measurable change. With CET's support and strong partnerships across the city, the Club now diverts more than 13 tons of material each year and donates over 2,600 meals, demonstrating how private institutions can make a tangible contribution to community well-being. Their progress shows what's possible when businesses, nonprofits, and the City move together toward shared infrastructure, shared impact, and a shared commitment to keeping food where it belongs: feeding people or enriching the soil, not going to waste.