

# BEST PRACTISES IN PLASTIC-FREE SOLUTIONS

The BALTIPLAST project co-financed by Interreg BSR helps to drive the transition to a green and resilient Baltic Sea region.

## Tallinn's circular economy development plan 2035

TALLINN, ESTONIA



**TALLINN**, the capital of Estonia, is a vibrant and diverse city with the population of 460 000 people, representing over 140 nationalities. Tallinn is known for its forward-thinking approach to public services, and the city offers free public transport to its residents, making it an environmentally friendly and convenient place to live.

Tallinn is an important promoter of the smart and circular consumption model and a creator of a system for circular products and services that support it. Tallinn operates resource-efficiently by reducing primary material consumption, increasing waste recycling, and actively promoting reuse, providing businesses and residents with various opportunities to participate in the circular economy.

Tallinn is an important promoter of a smart and circular consumption model and the creator of a system of circular products and services that support it. Having mapped the transition to a circular economy, the city prepared the *Tallinn Circular Economy Development Plan 2035*.

# Challenges and actions

Tallinn participated in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) programme “The Circular Economy in Cities and Regions” from 2021 to 2023. As the outcome of the programme, the report “The Circular Economy in Tallinn” was published.

According to the report, Tallinn has the **greatest potential to transition to a circular economy** in the following areas: **built environment, food systems, public events and tourism, textiles, and green procurement**. In addition, Tallinn lacks a clear vision for the transition to a circular economy. To date, there is no document that serves as a basis for understanding the city’s rationale for moving towards a circular economy, actions needed to reach clear goals and how to measure their achievement over time.

As a result, in January 2024 the preparation of the *Tallinn Circular Economy Development Plan 2035* was initiated. The objective of the development plan was to refine the strategic goal “*Green Transition*” of the *Tallinn 2035* strategy, **creating a systematic framework for managing the city of Tallinn and its cooperation relationships**. It also aimed to contribute to the development of a **sustainable governance model for Tallinn**, which other cities can use as a reference. This development plan was partly created within the BALTIPLAST project.

City authorities play a key role when it comes to public procurements and consuming products and services. With this strategic document, the city of Tallinn wanted to prioritize, among other areas, what products and services are used and offered in the city. For that, it was analyzed what measures the city can implement for the prevention and reduction of single-use plastic products and packaging and what are the goals and targets of circular products and services.

**It was decided that Tallinn will focus on single use plastic reduction in tourism and public events and areas related to administration in the authorities of the city of Tallinn.**

The development plan focuses on following areas: 1) awareness of circular economy, 2) green and circular procurement, 3) circular products and services, 4) food and bio-economy, 5) built environment, 6) waste management.

## Brief description of activities:

- In 2024, a **steering group** of the circular economy development plan 2035 was created. This group engaged different stakeholders: politicians, Ministry of Climate, Technical University, different circular economy experts. **2024-2025**: the steering group gathered several times during the preparing progress of the document. The main idea was to **give expert feedback** and **contribute to the circular economy development plan 2035**.
- **2024-2025**: several meetings and seminars with SEI Tallinn to **map the focus areas and main activities** and to plan and write the strategic document.
- **Spring 2024**: 12 stakeholders engagement events were held for **municipal employees**. The focus was on built environment, sustainable food/bioeconomy, circular products and services. The aim was to bring out the focus areas and map the challenges and steps needed to be taken to move towards circular economy. For each focus area, circular economy goals were defined, along with the necessary strategic directions, specific activities, investments, and indicators for achieving them by 2035, as well as links to the UN Sustainable Development Goal. As a result, draft of the strategic document was performed.

- **Spring 2024 and autumn 2024:** 3 circular economy trainings were carried out to **higher city leaders, deputy mayors and heads of the departments**. The aim was to bring out the importance of circular economy and jointly agree on the importance of reducing single-use materials incl. single-used plastic, reducing the amount of waste generated and moving towards reuse where possible.
- **Autumn 2024:** 3 stakeholder engagement events were held engaging **universities, private companies, NGOs**. The focus was on green procurements, built environment, sustainable food/bioeconomy, circular products and services. Main ideas were gathered, analysed and added into the draft of the strategic document.
- **Winter 2025: engagement of city authorities.** The document was made available for the engagement and feedback. Many meetings with different city authorities were held to structure the main actions, indicators and responsibilities.
- **Spring 2025: public engagement of the document** took place. The document was made publicly available for the engagement and feedback.
- **Spring 2025:** the **final document** is introduced to the city council and planned to be adopted at the end of spring.

## Timeline

Timeline	Actions
<b>February 2024</b>	Preparation of the Tallinn's circular economy development plan was launched by the City Council.
<b>February 2024</b>	Steering group of the circular economy development plan 2035 was created. Between Feb 2024 – March 2025 the steering group gathered 4 times.
<b>April–June 2024</b>	Focus areas of the strategic document were mapped and workshops for city authorities were carried out. As a result, draft of the strategic document was prepared.
<b>Autumn 2024</b>	3 external stakeholder engagement events were held. All proposals were analysed and added to the document.
<b>Winter 2025</b>	City authorities were engaged. The document was made available for the engagement and feedback. Many meetings with different city authorities were held to structure the main actions, indicators and responsibilities.
<b>Spring 2025</b>	Public engagement of the document took place. The document was made publicly available for the engagement and feedback.
<b>Spring 2025</b>	The final document is introduced to the city council and planned to be adopted at the end of spring.

## Target groups

All city offices and departments

Private companies, NGOs, universities

Citizens

Tourists

Waste management companies

## Results

As a result, the most comprehensive circular economy related strategic document is formed and adopted. This development plan sets new circular economy standards to all city departments. According to the development plan, Tallinn is a key promoter of a smart and circular consumption model and a creator of a system supporting circular products and services. The city's urban space and built environment are developed according to circular principles. Tallinn operates resource-efficiently by reducing primary material consumption and increasing waste recycling. Tallinn is a progressive advocate of reuse, repair, and sharing culture, offering businesses and residents comprehensive opportunities to contribute to the circular economy. Tallinn is a place where entrepreneurs can test and develop innovative circular solutions and business models, serving as an example for other municipalities in Estonia and internationally.

Through these efforts, the city organization contributes to achieving a forward-looking higher goal: making Tallinn a fully circular and climate-neutral city by 2050. To realize this vision, Tallinn has set the following objective: **By 2035, the entire city organization will operate in accordance with circular economy principles.**

## Piloting the solution

The city of Tallinn contributed to the development and later followed the BALTIPLAST *Guidelines for strategic documents to reduce single-use plastics and plastic packaging at the municipality level*. The city participated in several meetings and discussions with partner cities and countries regarding the ongoing and potential upcoming regulations related to single-used plastic reduction.

Together with SEI Tallinn it was decided that the strategic document formed within BALTIPLAST project will be involved with the Tallinn's first circular economy development plan 2035. In addition, the concept of the strategic document and areas related to single use plastic reduction in the city of Tallinn were mapped and actions to reduce single-used plastic were included in the document.

Many presentations about the city of Tallinn's experience with developing regulations related to reducing single-used plastic packaging in the city of Tallinn were prepared and given. City of Tallinn gave detailed overview about the pros and cons of the current plastic reduction related regulations in the city of Tallinn. This provided great input for other project partners and other municipalities who can adopt similar guidelines and regulations that the city of Tallinn has adopted without making the same mistakes. The success of the great initiatives lead by the city of Tallinn can be a catalyst for replication in other cities contributing to a more sustainable environment.

# Enablers



- + **Strong support and cooperation** with the stakeholders and interest of target groups
- + **Early stakeholders' engagement**
- + **Political will** to perform strategic development plan related to circular economy
- + **Right timing**

The systematic and planned implementation of circular economy principles in urban planning and management (including within the city's own operations and activities) helps Tallinn to:

- + **Support and facilitate the transition** from a linear economy to a circular economy by designing and constructing urban spaces (including residential and business environments) in a circular manner, offering circular products and services, and raising awareness – thus enhancing the city's economic competitiveness.
- + **Engage and collaborate with stakeholders** (such as residents, institutions, businesses, and organizations).
- + **Create conditions** for the adoption of innovative waste management systems, energy- and material-efficient solutions, circular business models, and circular design practices, including supporting the creation of new jobs and business opportunities (new circular economy business models and enterprises).
- + **Establish test environments and innovation labs** (including digital services) in cooperation with businesses, residents, and the city to address the challenges of linear economic models.
- + **Improve long-term resource security and resilience**, as resource efficiency and the ability to operate under circular economy principles help society and local businesses develop sustainably and better withstand crises.
- + **Ensure cost savings** through resource efficiency.
- + **Contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions** and air pollution.
- + **Achieve a cleaner living environment**, thereby improving the health and well-being of city residents.

# Barriers



- **Political and legal gap.** A possible lack of political support and regulatory barriers (both at the national and local levels) may hinder the development and implementation of a legal framework that supports the circular economy. The absence of a comprehensive vision, leadership, or political will may lead to fragmented circular economy initiatives and a lack of accountability. An insufficient legal framework and inconsistent regulation between levels of governance (national vs. local) reduce the capacity to respond to the needs of the circular economy.
- **Financing gap.** The transition to a circular economy requires investments and adequate incentives to support it economically and financially. Inadequate funding leads to financial risks, causes business activities to stall, results in essential investments being omitted, and prevents private sector involvement.
- **Capacity gap.** People's skills and capacities (especially within the city organization) should meet the needs related to the transition to a circular economy. A lack of competent personnel and technical solutions hinders the creation of links and partnerships across value chains, as well as efforts to prevent resource waste and the generation of waste. In addition, insufficient data on the city's material flows and circular activities hampers planning for the circular economy transition and the assessment of the effectiveness of related activities.
- **Awareness gap.** Limited awareness of circular economy principles among different stakeholders hinders the broader application of those principles. Lack of awareness and prevailing attitudes may also slow down the behavioral changes needed from city leaders and staff, entrepreneurs, and residents to enable the transition to a circular economy.

## Key takeaways

When there is a political will to perform strategic development plan related to circular economy, right timing, right people, great cooperation and early stakeholders' engagement then a comprehensive strategic document can be formed. Clear vision and strategically planned activities can strengthen support and cooperation between different stakeholders (e.g. city authorities, businesses, citizens).