

Regional councillors get update on cart-based garbage collection

By Bill Rea

There are still a lot of questions out there regarding the cart-based garbage collection coming soon to Peel Region. There's really not that much to be concerned about, according to Peel's Director of Waste Management Norman Lee. Lee recently made a lengthy presentation to Regional councillors on what's in the works.

Bi-weekly cart-based collection is due to come into effect in January 2016.

Council approved that in April 2013 after a pilot project the previous year. Lee said there have been about 10 updates to council. "It's going to be a tough slog in the first weeks of 2016," Lee observed, as he outlined the changes that are due to come in.

While household organics will still be collected weekly, garbage and recycling will be collected every other week. Garbage will be picked up one week, and recycling the next. Blue boxes will be eliminated, to be replaced with larger garbage, recycling and organics carts, with residents receiving their carts sometime in the fall. As well, many residents will see their collection day change. Lee said Peel's 3R programs (reduce, reuse, recycle) have compared favourably with programs in other municipalities in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), but that is not the case with the Green Bin program for organics. Participation has been lagging, and he said that's why the weekly organic collection is slated to continue. He also said many people currently put their organic waste in the garbage.

A couple of alternatives to bi-weekly collection were considered, including increased user fees, reduced bag limits, increased bylaw enforcement, etc. Bi-weekly collection was found to have the greatest potential for increasing diversion. "It would also result in lower cost, reduced GHG (green house gas) emissions and fewer injuries," Lee observed.

Council, in November 2011, approved the pilot project involving more than 5,800 households in four separate collection areas (including part of Ward 1 in Caledon). Lee said the concerns raised at the time involved people finding space to store the carts, smells from diapers and pet waste, the ability of seniors to maneuver their carts, dealing with long driveways in rural areas, etc. "None of these were found to be major issues," he said.

He also said it took a couple of cycles for people to get the hang of the system, but once they did, there were few issues with the carts. Lee added most people indicated they were able to easily adapt to bi-weekly collection, and the majority thought it was a good idea. There were also improved diversion rates.

"At the end of the pilot, the residents in the cart areas didn't want to give back the carts," Lee observed.

A couple of other conclusions from the pilot showed that people wanted some choice of the size of cart they use (there was no choice in the pilot) and there should be some "walk-up" service to help people with mobility issues.

Lee said the region has been divided into three zones, with different collection contract for each. The contract for the northern portion, including all of Caledon and much of north Brampton, was awarded to Emterra Group.

The new system will start the first week of January 2016. Lee said the current phase involves cart selection, which needs to be done by the end of March, with carts being delivered in the fall. He added the Region is working on creating wide-spread awareness of the upcoming changes. Things are going well when it comes to engaging residents in selecting their carts. In addition to mailings, advertisements, mobile signs, etc., Lee said there have been 26 open houses all over the region. There have also been lobby displays throughout Peel and information available at many facilities.

There are still a couple of concerns being raised.

One of them involved the use of the March of Progress graphic to promote the program. There have been some complaints that it was offensive (a naked man is depicted), but Lee said its use was put before focus groups, and it was given a high ranking. He said it's based on an "iconic image" that's been around since 1965, and it was not deemed offensive.

"It has done its job," he said.

There have also been concerns raised that there is no phone number to call for information. Lee explained they are trying to engage some 310,000 households, so they're trying to move people toward digital.

He added a phone number is now available.

People who don't choose a cart size by the end of march will have one selected for them. There will be the chance to change carts after a 90-day trial, but there will be a fee charged. Lee said the idea behind the fee is to avoid frequent or hasty exchanges, as well as to cover the costs the Region would be put to. He added the fee has not yet been set, but staff is proposing \$25.

"If people end up with a default cart, they're not going to go that far wrong," he said.

Mississauga Councillor Karen Ras suggested there be a grace period before the fee is assessed. She commented people would have to go through a few cycles before they get the hang of the program.

In Toronto, waste management costs are covered by user fees, but Lee said there are no plans to do that in Peel.

Some people have been wondering where their carts can be stored. Lee pointed out they will be replacing existing boxes, adding they could be put in garages, beside houses or in backyards.

The carts will be coming with a 10 year warranty. If one is lost or stolen, people should contact the Region and they will be replaced at no charge.

Caledon Councillor Annette Groves wondered about diapers and pet waste, commenting she understood York Region has a program to deal with them. Lee said he would have to check that, adding they are put in Green Bins in Toronto, but they have the technology there to deal with it.

Mississauga Councillor Pat Saito was concerned about problems putting out carts in winter, commenting January is a bad time to start the program.

Mississauga Councillor Nando Iannicca agreed, warning there could be a bad snow storm the first week of January. "You picked a pretty vulnerable time," he told Lee.

Lee countered they had thought about starting it in October, but warned the collection contracts are due to expire Dec. 31 and they couldn't get them extended.

"It's an adjustment, but I think it works fine," Caledon Mayor Allan Thompson remarked.



Ricardo Figueroa and his daughter Johanna, 12, of Caledon village were checking out the sizes of bins available at a recent open house at Caledon Village Place. Photo by Bill Rea