

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE - MAY 10, 2011

YORK REGION'S REQUIREMENT TO USE CERTIFIED COMPOSTABLE BAGS IN THE GREEN BIN

Recommendation

The Commissioner of Engineering and Public Works recommends that York Region be advised that the City of Vaughan is supportive of the Region's initiative to eliminate plastic bags from the green bin program, and as such, will undertake an ongoing education and promotion campaign to assist the Region in this initiative.

Economic Impact

Funds for the promotion and education of residents has been included in the approved 2011 Operating Budget

Communications Plan

On March 24, 2011, Regional Council approved a Region-wide education program to be in effect from April 2011 to July 2011, informing residents of the requirement to use certified compostable bags in the green bin program, effective May 1, 2011. A budget of \$357,000 has been allocated for the Region's program, includes newspaper ads, direct mail, transit advertising, and in store displays.

City staff have started to develop an education and promotion program specific to the compostable bag initiative. The plan is to use the waste collection calendar, the Public Works newsletters, the Greening Vaughan website, public events, and other methods to help inform residents of this change.

Purpose

To inform Council of the steps being taken to comply with the Region's intent that certified compostable bags be used in the Green Bin program effective May 1, 2011.

Background - Analysis and Options

The City's Greening Vaughan waste management program has received awards both provincially and federally, including a prestigious award from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Green Municipal Fund (2008).

The Greening Vaughan program was designed to be innovative, flexible, and convenient for residents. The Greening Vaughan program was a 3-phased program, implemented over a two year time frame. This phased-in approach provided residents the opportunity to become fully informed about each component of the program, prior to moving onto the next phase. It also mitigated the concern of overloading residents with too much program change at once

The post Greening Vaughan curbside diversion rate (2010) is 68%. A 2010 survey also shows the participation rate continues to be strong.

Similar to the waste programs implemented by all the area municipalities in York Region, the decisions made by Vaughan, and the Region, focused on maximizing diversion of all residential waste and specifically household organic materials.

A significant factor in the high participation and diversion rate has been allowing residents to use plastic bags in the green bin program. The use of plastic bags eliminated the “yuck” factor. By allowing residents to use plastic bags to divert all organics including food scraps, diapers, pet waste and sanitary products, waste collection was changed to a bi-weekly service.

Comparing data across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), it indicates that in 2009, York Region’s Source Separated Organics (SSO) program was the most successful program in terms of public participation and the amount of material set out by each household. Table #1 illustrates a comparison of the Region’s capture rate of SSO compared to other Regions in the GTA.

TABLE #1

Municipality	Accepted Materials	Kg per Household
York Region	Plastic bags, diapers, pet waste	318
Toronto	Plastic bags, diapers, pet waste	225
Durham Region	Certified Compostable bags, no pet waste or diapers	151
Peel Region	Certified Compostable bags, no pet waste or diapers	117

In late August 2009, Regional Council made a decision to discourage the use of plastic bags and encourage the use of certified compostable bags in the Green Bin system for two key reasons:

- the Region’s contracted SSO processing facilities were experiencing temporary processing disruptions; and,
- certified compostable bags are thought to be a better environmental choice than plastic bags.

On December 16, 2009, Regional Council approved the mandatory use of compostable bags in the Green Bin effective May 1, 2011 and requested local municipalities to amend their collection by-laws. In 2010, Vaughan’s waste by-law was completely re-written and it included provisions for the use of certified compostable bags in the green bin program.

York Region is asking residents to switch from plastic to compostable liners in the Green Bin to create a more sustainable and environmentally-friendly program. Plastic bags, which must be removed during the composting process, are disposed of in a landfill. Certified compostable liners are made from cornstarch and plant-based material that breaks down completely during the composting process.

York Region’s SSO Facilities

York Region does not currently have an SSO processing facility of its own, and relies on three private processing facilities: “We Care Environmental” in Malborough, Massachusetts, “Universal Resource Recovery Inc.” in Welland, Ontario and “Orgaworld” in London, Ontario.

These contracted SSO processors have largely overcome the technical challenges associated with plastic bags, diapers, pet wastes and sanitary products, to create a compost product that complies with the Ontario Ministry of the Environment’s unrestricted use standards, applicable to all SSO derived compost. The Region’s SSO processors continue to make processing improvements to overcome the challenges associated with odours generated by processing organics.

In order to have more control over SSO processing, York Region is constructing its own processing facility in partnership with Dufferin County. The York/Dufferin SSO facility contract is expected to be awarded in April 2011. It is anticipated that the new facility will be equipped to handle the composition of York Region's current SSO stream.

Vaughan's Recommended Approach to the use of Certified Compostable Bags

The Region has been informed of the extensive challenges associated with curbside "enforcement" of the compostable bag requirement. When the Greening Vaughan program was launched in 2005, the City did not engage in pro-active enforcement for either the participation in, or compliance with, the various waste programs that Greening Vaughan comprises. The City's waste management successes can be largely attributed to the extensive promotion and education campaign, and the efforts of Vaughan residents to inherently "do the right thing" for the environment.

Vaughan's waste management promotion and education programs have received many awards from the Recycling Council of Ontario. The current curbside diversion rate of 68% speaks to the residents' commitment to making the programs work, and "doing the right thing" for the environment.

Due to Vaughan's previous successes and the manner in which they were achieved, staff have started to develop a series of articles, advertisements, and other media related items to educate the residents on why this change is necessary, as well as the environmental benefits of using certified compostable bags. Although the Region has its own advertising program, residents tend to rely more on the local municipality for information related to programs delivered at the local level. By focusing staff's efforts on education, rather than enforcement, it is anticipated the results will be the same, in that residents will use certified compostable bags in the green bin program.

It is anticipated that audits will take place throughout the year to determine the success of the promotion and education campaign. Based on the results of the audits, efforts may increase or decrease in terms of getting the message out about the change from plastic bags to certified compostable bags for the green bin.

Waste Management Service Delivery in York Region

In York Region, waste management is a two tier responsibility and waste management services are delivered in partnership with the Region. This partnership approach has been extremely successful in launching single stream recycling and Green Bin organics. As a result of our innovative two tier partnership, York Region has been recognized with numerous diversion awards and according to Waste Diversion Ontario, has the highest diversion of all GTA regional municipalities.

This partnership is further demonstrated, given the goal of the City's education program is in line with the Region's overall strategy to eliminate plastic bags from the green bin program.

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council, and complies with the following Vaughan Vision 2020's Goals and Objectives:

Goal:	Service Excellence
Objective:	"Lead and Promote Environmental Sustainability"
Objective:	"Pursue Excellence in Service Delivery"

Conclusion

Given that the Region has mandated the use of certified compostable bags in the Green Bin program effective May 1, 2011, and that the success of Vaughan's previous waste management initiatives have been largely based on an effective promotion and education campaign, staff will continue to develop and roll out an ongoing education and awareness campaign, promoting the environmental benefits of using certified compostable bags, in order to support the Region's initiative to eliminate plastic bags from the green bin program.

Attachments

N/A

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