

COUNCIL - APRIL 26, 2004

LEAF AND YARD WASTE COLLECTION FREQUENCY FOR 2004

(Item 2, Clause 6, Budget Committee Report 6)

Recommendation

The Budget Committee recommends:

That yard waste pick-up service be provided during the months of April, May, October and November and that yard waste pick-up service not be provided during the months of June, July, August and September.

Purpose

To set a service level for leaf and yard waste collection that is sustainable, and encourages environmentally friendly alternatives to handle such materials.

Background - Analysis and Options

Prior to 2003, the City provided residents with 8 weeks of leaf and yard waste material collection in the Spring, and another 8 weeks of collection in the Fall of the year. In 2003, the City provided once per week collection of this material throughout the summer as well, for a total of 34 weeks of collection.

In York Region, Vaughan was the only municipality to provide such a level of service. The attached table outlines the collection frequency of the other area municipalities for 2004.

	Markham	Newmarket	Richmond Hill	Aurora	Vaughan 2002	Vaughan 2003	Vaughan 2004
April	2		2	1	2	4	4
May	2	2	3	2	4	4	4
June	3	2	2	1	2	5	
July	2	1	1	1		4	
Aug.	2	1	1	1		4	
Sept.	2	1	1	1		5	
Oct.	2	1	2	2	4	4	4
Nov.	3	2-3*	3	4	4	4	4
	18	10-11*	15	13	16	34	16

* Depending on the location in Newmarket, some areas receive one extra week of collection

In reviewing the numbers, the previous total of 16 weeks of collection was more in line with the service provided by other area municipalities, and took into account the reduced growth rates of grass during the hot dry periods that often take place during the summer. The previous level of service also encouraged homeowners to take responsibility for their leaf and yard waste materials through such environmentally sound means as grasscycling and backyard composting.

Grasscycling is the act of leaving the grass clippings on the lawn to decompose and provide natural fertilizer to the soil. It saves time, money, and the environment. One of the reasons that the grass on golf courses is so green is that the turf specialists do not bag or rake up the grass clippings. Instead, grass clippings are left on the ground to decompose and provide natural fertilizer to the soil.

The City employs the same approach on all of its properties and sports fields. By leaving the clippings on these fields and lawns, the City saves hundreds of dollars in fertilizer, and hundreds of hours of labour saved by not bagging or raking the grass clippings.

The same benefits apply to homeowners as well. Grass clippings are 90% water. Once cut, the clippings quickly dry out and start to break down into their organic compounds of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium (1 bag of grass clippings is equal to approximately 100 grams of fertilizer). The moisture cools the landscape and reduces the need to water the lawn. This latter point is especially important during periods of watering restrictions or outdoor watering bans. Further information on grasscycling is available on the City's web site.

Backyard composting is also an excellent way of dealing with leaf and yard waste materials, as well as kitchen organics. In 2003, the City decided to subsidize the sale of backyard composters to encourage homeowners to deal with their leaf and yard waste materials on-site. The current price that these are offered to the residents for are \$15.00 plus taxes. In conjunction with the Region of York, the City's Public Works Department is planning to hold a composter truckload sale in June, and later in the Fall of this year. These "event sales" will offer composters at even further reduced prices. These events will be promoted through local papers and in the new waste collection schedule. By continuing to subsidize the sale of backyard composters, the City provides a low cost environmentally friendly way for residents to deal with their leaf and yard waste materials, as well as kitchen organics.

Residents who have excessive amounts of materials, or branches that are too large for backyard composting, can take these materials to the Region's facility in Newmarket for processing at no cost. From April 1 to November 30, the site is open Monday to Friday 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with the hours being extended on Tuesday evenings to 8:00 p.m.. From April 1 to November 30, the site is also open on Saturday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.. Further details regarding this site are available on the City's and the Region of York's web sites.

In addition to the environmental benefits, the City will save money through reduced collection costs. The additional costs to provide summer collection in 2003, were over \$550,000, and do not include the additional promotion and collection schedule production costs. By returning to the previous 16 week collection period (8 in the Spring + 8 in the Fall), these additional collection costs, which were originally included in the 2004 Draft Operating Budget funding envelope, can be reduced, but not eliminated completely. It is noted that the elimination of the summer yard waste collection was included in the list of initiatives identified to achieve the \$10 million reduction in the budget short fall (Attachment 1, Item 1 of the April 16, 2004 Budget Committee agenda).

In order to deal with the Asian Long-Horned Beetle (ALHB), a separate leaf and yard waste collection system had to be implemented to collect materials from within the Regulated area. The initial estimated cost to provide this additional service was approximately \$120,000 for the 8 week Spring collection. Based on revised housing information, this cost has been reduced to approximately \$82,500 for the Spring collection period. These additional costs to deal with the ALHB will also be incurred again during the Fall collection period. As such, a total of approximately \$165,000 will be required to provide the 16 weeks of collection to the residents within the Regulated area.

If Council agrees to return to the previous collection frequency of 16 weeks total for leaf and yard waste materials, and provide the necessary special collection services in the ALHB Regulated area, the total budget reduction shown in Attachment 1, Item 1 of the April 16, 2004, Budget Committee Agenda, would now be approximately \$410,000 instead of the \$575,000 shown. This revised amount takes into account the additional collection costs in the ALHB area which had not been identified as being required at the time the budget reduction initiatives were being prepared (\$575,000 initial budget reduction - \$165,000 for new ALHB collection = \$410,000 new budget reduction).

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2007

This report recommends a change from the priorities previously set by Council and although the necessary resources have been included in the 2004 Draft Operating Budget, the budget has yet to be approved.

Conclusion

Providing a total of 16 weeks of collection for leaf and yard waste materials will result in the City providing a sustainable level of service that is in line with the other area municipalities in York Region. In addition, it will encourage residents to seek out and use environmentally sound methods of dealing with these materials, such as grasscycling and backyard composting.

Attachments

N/A

Report prepared by:

Brian T. Anthony, CRS-S, C. Tech.
Director of Public Works