

2015 will bring changes to your curbside garbage pickup

By Brock Weir

The arrival of 2015 brought with it a number of changes related to what will and will not be picked up from your curbside waste collection, but there are more changes in store for the year ahead for Aurora residents.

As of January 1, all those using curbside waste services will be prohibited from disposing of e-waste and batteries. There is also a set maximum of five extra 'bulky items' that will be collected in addition to your garbage bags and cans, as well as your green bins and blue boxes.

According to Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure and Environmental Services, however, these changes are just the beginning for what Aurora has in mind for the next eleven months.

The first priority, he says, is the formal launch of the Clear Bag Program, which will shift residents away from the black and green bags used by most households today, towards clear plastic bags.

The intention of the controversial program is to help deflect certain materials from getting into the waste stream and ensure waste gets into their proper channels. Although the program experienced considerable questions and concerns from the last Council before it was given a tentative greenlight, Mr. Simanovskis says plans are underway to begin a 'soft launch' of the program this summer.

'It will be a two part program,' says Mr. Simanovskis. 'There will be a soft launch through advertising, promotional campaigns, and ensuring all retailers have stock on clear bags. Our first step obviously is to go back to the new Council and get approval for the program in early February. Then we go to the soft launch in the spring.'

A 'hard launch' will follow, along with a compliance review at the end of the year, he adds.

'What we are really going to do is encourage use. There will be stickering, so once we hit a threshold date where we're looking for clear bags throughout the community, if people are still using opaque bags there will be stickers indicating they need to move to the clear bags and there will be an opportunity for them to comply.'

'If there is education or information required, we will provide some additional information to those residents who might not be aware of the program. It is no difference to compliance now. If somebody puts inappropriate material in the blue box, that material is stickered and left behind so the resident is made aware of its suitability or other avenues of recycling.'

The last time around, one of the main concerns expressed by Council and residents alike surrounded privacy of what they dispose of, as well as the value of converting, he adds.

'With privacy, the main thing for me is I am trying to promote material from getting into the garbage stream that is better off recycled. It is not your everyday garbage, it is things like yard waste, grass clippings, soil, and maybe even construction material - the things that can be hidden in a black bag. From a privacy perspective, we're totally on board with not changing the behaviours in the home. If you're using a used grocery bag for your waste collection, you can continue to do that. You can put the grocery bag into the clear bag so privacy remains intact.'

As for the efficiency of the system, Mr. Simanovskis says Aurora has heard from other municipalities who have clocked 'substantial reductions' in deflecting material that shouldn't be in the stream into their proper channels.

Outside of the clear bag programs, Aurora is also looking at ways to join forces with the Region of York to reduce food waste. Ideas are still being kicked around on how to do this, he says, but a pilot project is in the offing to recruit 'volunteer residents' to see how they can 'optimise the use of both the street bin and backyard composters.'

Indeed, although what form this program will eventually take remains to be seen, there will be an increased emphasis on reviving the popularity of backyard composters.

‘They will sort their green bin materials in such a way that they can fully benefit their organic needs in their back yards, as well as dispose of materials that are suitable for green bin disposal but not suitable for back yards,’ says Mr. Simanovskis of the volunteers. ‘What we are trying to create is a program that basically brings both of those worlds together. Although some still backyard compost, it isn’t necessarily a first choice option for a lot of people. We’re just trying to create some awareness about the benefits [of composting] and if done with just select materials, that makes sense and it is a really good way to manage waste and recover some of that nutrient value in your own garden.’

Part of this could be making backyard composters more readily available at Town Hall, but that is an idea still in the incubation stage. If there is a cost savings in reducing the amount of material collected through green bins, Mr. Simanovskis says he would be interested in looking at using some of those savings to subsidize composters to encourage more use.

‘As we develop and look at the cost benefits, that would be the kind of model I would like to support,’ he says.