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New garbage contract addresses old complaints ? but at a cost

By Brock Weir

Aurora is set to renew its garbage and waste removal contract with Green For Life (GFL), a move which is hoped to address the myriad of winter garbage complaints levelled by residents a few short years ago, but the new deal will come with a big price tag in 2018.

Council is set to sign off on the new $2.3 million contact this week after giving it the tentative go-ahead at the Committee level last Tuesday. The $2,290,000 contract is Aurora's portion of a larger contract shared by York Region's six northern municipalities (N6), which is valued at $10.3 million, and will go into effect in 2018.

?In an effort to find cost efficiencies through leveraging common services, the municipalities of Aurora, East Gwillimbury, Georgina, King, Newmarket and Stouffville collaborated to provide waste collection through a common contractor,? said Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure, in a report to Council. ?This (N6) Partnership has resulted in an overall annual operating savings of $1 million over the previous service arrangements since its initiation in 2017 to December 31, 2017.?

Nevertheless, Aurora's new garbage contract will see costs rise by 28 per cent in 2018, leaving a $503,000 budget pressure.

?We asked our consultant to provide some comfort as to the rates that we're seeing within this proposal,? said Mr. Simanovskis, addressing cost concerns voiced by Councillor Jeff Thom. ?A 30 per cent increase was a number [staff] were expecting based on where the current contract rates are, knowing the savings that we actually saw in 2007 when that initial contract came in. When you look at actual comparators of other municipalities [with similar models] these costs are not out of line. The consultant verified that we're not seeing a huge discrepancy from what you would expect in the industry, and we did have two compliant bidders in the process.

?It is a fairly substantial increase, but knowing where the current contract is and the anticipation with these new rates is that we will see new vehicles on the roads, so this includes a whole new fleet and there is also additional services. We're anticipating a higher performance service level.?

The promise of a ?higher performance service level? was welcome news to Council members who had previously identified shortcomings with GFL service following the aftermath of the ice storm just before Christmas in 2013.

Extensive service failures occurred well into the New Year, leading Council to consider new providers.

?When we [gave the contract in 2007] to Turtle Island and they sold it to GFL there were some challenges, as we all remember, which was coupled by a pretty brutal winter,? said Mayor Geoff Dawe last week. ?It seems to me they have managed to get back in line in terms of what we should be.?

This is something Mr. Simanovskis said was kept in mind when they developed the RPF for this contract.

?We were very cognizant of the concerns that we have experienced both through GFL as well as what our consultant had brought to the table with regards to industry trends within the solid waste sector,? he said. ?A couple of areas we really focused in on were increasing our number of instruments we have at our disposal to actually enforce the contract in key areas we felt we didn't have as much strength as we could have used in the contract that is expiring this year. Another area we increased attention was on the customer service element so the term of reference for this contract actually had quite a significant requirement for customer service support and Newmarket staff who have their customer service centre were actually heavily involved.?

Service increases include added elements to make it ?more flexible? as a waste collector, such as battery collection curbside, a customer service call-centre, and GFL taking over the management, delivery and distribution of green and blue bins to new property owners.

Also included is an option where the door is open for participating municipalities to move to a two-bag limit for garbage collected bi-weekly to ?increase diversion? and boost revenue.?

?Estimated revenue for Aurora for a two bag limit based on a $3 bag tag cost is $100,000 annually,? noted Mr. Simanovskis in his report.

Councillor Paul Pirri, however, poured cold water on that option.

?I don't think we're going to be leveraging those fees any times soon,? he said. ?I think the residents of Aurora, rightfully so, from time to time, need more than two bags.?

The recommendations were carried at the Committee Level and head to Council this week for final ratification.

?[GFL] have established a good service record, they have been responsive, and the odd time that I do call, there is someone live on the phone who is responding,? said Councillor John Abel. ?That is what we want. [Along with] snow plowing, I think garbage

collection are the two main services that people gauge how we're doing.?