

Garbage tags could provide flexibility beyond three-bag limit: Council

Since Aurora began enforcing a three-bag limit on garbage collection, the community has seen a significant reduction in the amount of waste going to landfill. But, in some cases, a three-bag limit isn't cutting it for residents and some flexibility is in order.

This was the view that Mayor Tom Mrakas and Councillor Harold Kim presented to Council last week in a joint motion which could lead to a bag tag program for the Town of Aurora.

Approved by Council on February 23, the motion has tasked municipal staff with drafting a report on various options for a garbage bag tag policy to be implemented as soon as possible.

Among the reasons cited by lawmakers for adding some flexibility for waste collection were households with large families and homes that have tenanted secondary suites such as basement apartments.

"It just seems like a more pragmatic solution to have a tag system," said Councillor Kim. "There are a lot of options out there and this motion is asking staff to look at those options and see which is the best solution for Aurora."

Mayor Mrakas, however, already had one particular option in mind: allocating households a specific number of tags each year and letting them use them as they see fit.

"There is one thing that is in common with almost every single municipality that provides a limit and that is there is a tag policy in place," he said. "The difference with some of them [is] you get a full amount for the year and I believe that is probably the best approach. I think if we provide everyone with a full amount for the year we have 26 weeks of garbage [collection] you provide 78 tags to everyone. It becomes a very simple process for GFL and our waste diversion: if you don't have a sticker, it does not get picked up. You can still get extra tags on top of that, but this also, I believe, allows us to follow our strategic goals [from an environmental perspective]."

Although Council has not yet pinned down a specific bag tag method, the motion calling for options was warmly received.

Councillor Wendy Gaertner, for instance, said she has received feedback on the three-bag limit from a resident with "quite a large family" and options would be welcome.

"There will be families who have more than one generation and they need that," she said. "For homes that have registered secondary dwelling units I don't think we should be charging them for extra bags of garbage because they are providing affordable housing."

Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Operations, said legal secondary units are a "challenge" with the three-bag limit and there are a variety of ways to address that.

"One of the options that we provided to Council was to provide tags to those residents so they could tag the additional bags," he said. "If you had three dwelling units, you would be able to put out nine bags. Six of those bags would be tagged. There is also a system where you can put an icon on the building itself identifying the number of dwelling units on that icon and when the garbage collector comes to that site, they are aware there [is more than one] dwelling unit."

Whatever options ultimately come forward, however, Councillor Michael Thompson sought re-assurances they would fit into the Town's stated commitments on waste reduction.

"As a whole, we have made a strategic commitment to reduce waste and continue to look at ways to do that," he said. "We all know there are some costs to it not just from a financial perspective, but a social perspective as well. I would be interested seeing in that report any evidence or anecdotal information that supports a bag tag policy as being able to reduce our waste or not. I would be

interested in knowing how this can help us further align with our strategic goals when it comes to the reduction of waste in the environment.?

Since Aurora began looking at ways to reduce the amount of waste going into landfill, the figures have dropped by 31 per cent, said Mr. Downey, a five-year low.

?We have never put so little garbage in landfill, so it has had a very positive impact,? said Mr. Downey. ?There are some challenges and I think that we need to address those challenges and [the report will tackle] some of those challenges. Secondary dwelling units are an issue and people want to know how we can deal with secondary units more effectively. I believe the bag tag system will help with that. We will be providing some options. As you know, Aurora has the highest bag limit within York Region, so no one [municipality] has more than three bags. We are already at the upper level, however there are situations where people may want to put out more bags and this report will help address those things.

?I am very happy to say we have had a very dramatic impact in just the first month.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter