

More than three garbage bags? They might be left on your curb

Non-compliance with three-bag limits for waste collection could prompt a crackdown and new measures from the Town.

Council is considering a public education campaign to drive home the limits of residential waste pickup.

Potential new rules have been drafted in response to what is described as 'non-compliance' with the three-bag limit set in 2002.

'Based on previous reports to Council on this issue specific to residential waste collection, there appears to have been compliance problems for many years,' said Jim Tree, Manager of Parks and Water. 'This may be a result of non-enforcement and a lack of public education on the matter. This, coupled with the fact the Town continues to remove all waste placed at the curb, there is a definite expectation in the community that this is permitted.'

That could soon change. The issue has been tracked for the past 12 months to 'gain a better understanding of the problem and its magnitude' and this tracking has identified 'several' residential hotspots where homeowners are in non-compliance. In some cases during the study, residents questioned staff as to their presence in the neighbourhoods and it was found many homeowners were not aware there was a bag limit on the books.

'As stewards of the environment, the municipality should be much more active in engaging with our residents to reduce the amount of waste entering the landfill and incineration,' said Mr. Tree. 'Staff suggest the focus should not be aimed at a reduction in costs associated with enforcing bag limits, but rather what we can all do to reduce waste. For example, for the past three (3) years, the Town of Aurora's total volume of solid waste exported was 6,192.30 metric tonnes in 2017, 6,193.00 metric tonnes in 2018, and 6,496.46 metric tonnes in 2019. In this day of heightened environmental awareness, it seems reasonable that the Town demonstrate leadership in striving to reduce solid waste. Introducing a 'Bag Tag' program in response to allowing increased solid waste collection might be seen as counter-productive to this goal.

'When compared to many other municipalities in the GTA, the Town of Aurora has a generous limit on the amount of residential waste placed at the curb such that any move to enforce the current limits could quite easily be accommodated by the majority of our residents.'

Rather than modify the three-bag limit, staff propose an extensive communication plan. These measures include posting information online through various channels, electronic notice signs placed strategically around Aurora, and placing door-knockers at all residences.

There comes a time when actual enforcement of a by-law may be the only means of gaining public attention and compliance, added Mr. Tree. A reduction in the amount of solid waste entering the environment, whether it be landfill or incineration, can only be viewed as a positive step. Most residents would support a reduction and react positively to any efforts aimed at education and awareness. We cannot expect complete compliance with the three bag limit no matter how much notice is given.

The education campaign was expected to carry through October 1 before penalties are considered, but COVID-19 has thrown that proposed timeline into disarray.

Certainly our timeline was to have it implemented in 2020 of this year, Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Operations. However, based on what we're into right now, I don't know that that is advisable. Depending on how things unfold with regards to COVID and how quickly we can get back to a new normal, [we can] put together a timetable with regards to this plan.

What we have done is outline a plan. We have put a proposed timetable in it but I don't think that's the appropriate timetable now.

When the timeline is clear, however, and the education campaign concludes, there will be penalties.

Should someone be found in their first non-compliance, GFL will be directed to remove the excess waste and place a written notification at the home indicating non-compliance and this would serve as a warning that any future garbage overages will not be removed. A second instance of non-compliance would see the issuance of a written notice of bylaw violation and excess waste will remain at the curb. In the third instance, waste will not only remain at the curb but Bylaw Services will be asked to attend the residence and follow up with the resident and this may include a charge.

CONCERNS RAISED AT TABLE

Speaking to the matter at the Committee level, however, some Councillors raised concerns over what was being proposed.

Councillor Wendy Gaertner, for instance, said a couple of suggestions in the education plan made her uncomfortable, including sending bylaw officers to the door in the case of a third infraction.

If we start with an education program and then we become aware of [an infraction], we start with education and, as per the report on the third infraction, we would move to more progressive enforcement, said Techa van Leeuwen, Aurora's Director of Bylaw Services. We would engage with the property owner or the occupant in terms of taking further steps in enforcement. We knock on doors all the time and that is how we respond to complaints, have those conversations and then take appropriate action.

The Councillor also pointed out that Aurora is the only one of

York Region's 'northern six' municipalities that does not have a bag tag program for curbside garbage pickup, questioning that should this new framework be enacted whether those performing waste pickup would need to keep track.

'Depending on when this happens and how it unfolds, we're giving you a process here at this point,' said Mr. Downey. 'In the final stage, when we actually execute it, if the Town is going to enforce the three-bag limit, if you put out five bags of garbage, they will only pick up three. Two bags would be left on the curb.'