

Waste diversion could save money on garbage costs: staff

By Brock Weir

Faced with an increase in the cost of waste removal of over half a million dollars come 2018, Councillors say they hope deflecting waste out of the typical garbage channels can help reduce costs overall.

Responding to the new 2018 Garbage Contract shared between York Region's Northern Six (N6) Municipalities, which is expected to get formal approval from Council this week, Councillor Wendy Gaertner questioned whether the increased cost of \$503,000 was the result of Aurora's growth and having more garbage to collect. She questioned whether further efforts to divert waste out of landfills, such as the recently revived backyard composting program, would reap cost benefits.

'It was highly successful and it is still successful,' said Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure. 'The Region was a partner in that initial pilot and we secured a number of new residents last year and we want to continue that program going forward. Speaking from Regional Staff, there were a lot of accolades with a number of initiatives and pilots that have been tried throughout the Region, and our compost pilot being one that was identified. [It was] very successful. If we can get a fairly high percentage of residents using that program, it would result in reduced tonnage which is going to improve our bottom line directly.'

This was a message the Councillor said needs to be communicated because a reduced tonnage of collected garbage will ultimately save taxpayers' money.

'There is a lot of work that is going on as part of the York Region Municipal Partnership around waste diversion,' said Mr. Simanovskis, responding to Councillor Gaertner's question on whether provincial legislation to make manufacturers responsible for addressing and collecting their packaging, currently being examined by Queen's Park, could have an impact on the bottom line as well. 'The Region does have a representative on [the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO)] that is lobbying on our behalf to ensure that we, the municipalities, both within York Region as well as Ontario, have fair access to funding because a lot of that program is focused on actually having the full cost recovered for those materials and the industry is of a different opinion as to how that collection program could be delivered.'

'Needless to say, it is a complex question and it is being followed closely by the committee that is formed around York Region's municipalities as well as York Region and any information that comes forward that is beneficial or informative to Council will be brought forward when it is available.'

Examining waste diversion programs coming from York, including the Region's SM4RT initiative, Mayor Geoff Dawe, Aurora's representative at the Regional table, said the Region has 'been doing an incredible amount of work on waste collection, on diversion, and getting people to use the green bin process.'

'They have invested heavily in the green bin process,' he said. '[This issue] is complex in many ways. One of them is tonnage on recycling is going down because packaging material is getting lighter. We encourage people to use less waste, but we're paying more for it because it doesn't weigh as much.'