

Canada Post targets August 17 for town-wide community mailboxes

By Brock Weir

Canada Post has set a timeline of August 17 to have keys delivered to thousands of Aurora homes that will lose their door-to-door mail delivery this year ? but Council has called foul in the Crown Corporation in revealing this deadline ?at the eleventh hour.?

Representatives from Canada Post found themselves in the hot seat appearing before Council last week as elected officials vented their frustration ? a frustration which was shared by residents across the community, they said ? over a perceived lack of communication between the post office and the community not just on the placement of new community mailboxes but also with residents who have expressed concerns over the delivery itself.

?In Aurora, everyone will be converted this year,? said Andrew Walasek who, along with Isaac Ransom, represented Canada Post at the meeting. ?The keys will be distributed on August 17. In Aurora, we have been through this process quite a ways and will be actually looking at implementing [this] a little later this year.

Since Canada Post announced their decision to eliminate door-to-door mail delivery last year, a raft of complaints has been rolling in from residents, many of whom have appeared before Council in a variety of venues to express their frustration. This was a frustration shared by Councillors, who lamented it has taken this long to have representatives of the postal service appear before them to answer questions. The process started in November, noted Councillor Tom Mrakas.

Canada Post, however, countered they were invited to come to last week's Council meeting and they did so.

?We have had discussions with some Councillors and we will continue to look at individual issues,? said Mr. Walasek. ?If you receive any [issues] from constituents, even once the boxes are in, we are still open to moving boxes, shifting boxes, and it is an ongoing process.?

While this was comfort for some Councillors, others questioned the sincerity.

?Though it would have been great to have had you gentlemen come at the beginning of this process to delegate to Council, I think part of the frustration both from Councillors' point of view and the public has been the so-called ?meaningful consultation' didn't happen,? said Councillor Jeff Thom, referencing one pillar of Canada Post's five point plan to turn a profit through this conversion. ?While I do appreciate that you gentlemen have come out tonight, it would have gone loads further if we had some consultation and perhaps a delegation early on in the process. It would have helped if we had this a few months ago.?

This concept of ?meaningful consultation? was a challenge from the beginning, as was Canada Post's pledge to share feedback received by Canada Post from residents about the conversion process with each respective complainant's elected representatives, agreed Councillor Michael Thompson. Councillor Thompson questioned whether Canada Post had shared the concerns they had received from residents with Mayor and Council and after a series of winding answers, and an intervention from Mayor Geoff Dawe urging Canada Post to answer the question, the answer eventually boiled down to a ?no.?

?I have not received any emails from Canada Post with regards to residents' concerns,? said Councillor Thompson. ?However, I have certainly received lots of emails from residents about their concerns. I hope you understand we often get feedback from our residents and they have received your notifications at their door, or in their mailbox, and they have contacted [the customer service number] to express their concerns.

?[One of our concerns] was there was the response from the frontline and customer service people at Canada Post saying the municipality had signed off on these locations which, as representatives of the residents, that certainly concerned me greatly because it wasn't to my knowledge that we had signed off. I think the hope was always that this would be a collaborative process. The residents know their neighbourhood. They recognize the challenges. They see it every day, they live it every day, and so they felt

their feedback was important and there were times it seemed their feedback was being ignored.?

Looking ahead to the August 17 deadline, Councillor John Abel underscored what he believed was the importance in a quick turnaround time on the part of Canada Post to respond to concerns received from residents over the placement of community mailboxes and the end of door-to-door delivery itself. Time is of the essence in addressing these before that date but, as Councillor Abel said he himself had been waiting for over a week for a response to an enquiry he made on behalf of one Aurora resident, he was skeptical this would be met.

?This has been going on for a long time and you have just come to our Council right now at what I would call the eleventh hour and you're telling us we have been given an opportunity of two or three weeks during the summer to review this,? said Councillor Abel. ?The likelihood of this being completed in three weeks, I am a bit skeptical.?

In response, Mr. Walasek reiterated that the invitation to appear before Council was only recently extended and once that was received, they were on hand for last Tuesday's meeting, and the following evening's Accessibility Advisory Committee, where the nitty-gritty of placing the individual community mailboxes was examined a bit further. He also added that even if these mailboxes were placed by August 17, Canada Post would still review residents' concerns and the door remained open for looking at alternate locations.

?We're looking forward to better communication with Canada Post as we go forward,? said Mayor Dawe. ?I am sure you have had feedback from residents that has not been shared with us, so I look forward to getting that. You did engage with me early and there is no question about that, and whatever you sent me I forwarded to Councillors, but there has obviously been a serious breakdown in terms of dealing with the public, those who are most affected.?