

Clear Bag garbage program heads to committee for further debate

By Brock Weir

Aurora residents will have a few more weeks to wait before finding out if clear garbage bags are the way of the future.

Councillors sent back the proposal to require all homeowners to dispose of their garbage curbside in clear garbage bags, rather than standard black and green bags, as early as January 1, 2015. It is part of an effort to make the sorting of garbage easier in making sure it gets into the right channels for proper disposal.

Councillors voted last week to send the proposed program back to Aurora's Economic Advisory Committee for a further look following a presentation by Dave Douglas, whose company, Vision Quest, has implemented similar programs in communities throughout Canada, most notably Markham.

"Today, over 400,000 Canadian households participate in similar programs with proven results of sustainability, an increase in the diversion of waste through increased curbside recycling and source separated organics," he said.

Mr. Douglas presented five of what he viewed as the most "frequently asked questions" related to the clear bag program, many of which have cropped up at the Council table since the program was first proposed through a motion by Mayor Geoffrey Dawe in November.

The first was the availability of clear garbage bags to consumers. This is of paramount importance, said Mr. Douglas, and generally six months is enough lead time to get local retailers on board. An additional factor was the lead time to make sure homeowners and businesses are also on board, and being able to handle an expected surge in demand for blue boxes and green bins for recyclables and compostable material. Other concerns included enforcement and privacy.

"Although the social marketing of neighbours following neighbours by placing clear bags curbside will provide a very high level of influence towards participation, a town bylaw requiring the utilization of clear bags will provide the regulatory enforcement tool, if required," he said.

"The inclusion of a privacy bag component, specifically a smaller opaque bag placed inside the clear bag offers the opportunity to dispose of some items with discretion. I think it is extremely important to keep in mind that a transition to a clear bag program for garbage is a change in the status quo and, right or wrong, change always comes with some levels of resistance, however small it might be. Based on my experiences across Canada, these programs always succeed in the end."

While Mr. Douglas provided answers to his top five FAQ, Councillors came into the meeting armed with a few of their own, particularly in regards to privacy. Councillor Michael Thompson, for instance, said that was his top concern and asked Mr. Douglas to elaborate on how other municipalities tackled that issue.

A solution, he said, would be that one standard-size privacy bag on the curb with all the remaining bags being part of the clear program. The preferred option of municipal staff, however, was all other bags being opaque "such as standard grocery bags" all held within a larger clear bag.

Despite the opportunity to have their questions answered, some Councillors were still unconvinced and decided to seek input from the advisory committee.

"If we are going to charge [Green for Life] with scrutinizing this, they are already slow enough as it is and I have a real big issue with that," said Councillor John Abel.

Added Councillor Thompson: "[The presentation] raised the question for me of who is picking up the garbage if it gets left over [in a non-clear bag]? It raised more questions than answers and there is no opportunity to explore it in-depth so we can have an informed

opinion tonight.?