

Clear Bag launch could be delayed pending further talks

By Brock Weir

A 'soft launch' date for Aurora's 'clear bag' garbage program could be delayed further into this summer.

Council delayed a final decision on whether to implement a program to get Aurora residents to use clear garbage bags rather than the traditional black and green, pending further information from Aurora's Economic Advisory Committee and Town Staff.

The new program, if endorsed, will encourage residents this summer to make the switch to clear bags this summer before a switch becomes mandatory with the start of 2015. Municipal staff say the purpose of the switch is to essentially provide a window into what is going into the system and to better manage waste diversion by making sure waste that is not supposed to be in the garbage system is funnelled into the proper channels, such as batteries and paint cans.

Residents concerned about privacy can use opaque bags, such as grocery bags and kitchen catchers within the clear bags, which was a concern of Councillors when this program was first floated, but questions remain. Among these, is just what type of 'policing' will be done curbside.

According to Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure and Environmental Services, 'policing' would be done on an 'as-identified' basis by current contractors and there is no intention of having bylaw officers on patrol to check what is in these bags.

'Enforcement would only be if there was clearly non-compliant material within the bags or dangerous goods that would be of harm to collectors,' he said.

This did not satisfy Councillor Paul Pirri who questioned the entire point of implementing the program if it is not going to be policed.

'If we are going to be doing this for the environmental benefits, that is something we can talk about,' said Councillor Pirri. 'There are a couple of studies I would have liked to see beforehand, maybe look at the composition of the garbage bags within a municipality right now to see if it would be of a benefit. It isn't my intent to call this a token gesture, but I have a hard time seeing what else it would be.

'I don't disagree with the intent, but this just doesn't sit well with me.'

This was a point several Councillors said they wanted further information on. Councillor Michael Thompson said he was still waiting for a further report to come back on issues previously identified with the program from Council rather than word the Environmental Advisory Committee signed off on the plan in mid-February.

'If we're going to implement a project like this, we have to understand the rationale behind it and what the true benefit to the community is,' he said. 'There is all this unanswered.'

Councillor Sandra Humfries said she agreed, citing additional concerns, particularly whether retailers were ready for the switch in having stock on hand, challenges experienced by the City of Markham in its early days of implementing the program, and what they did to clear those hurdles and make it successful.

'If we want to launch this program, that has good intentions behind it [but] let's do it properly,' she said. 'Let's have a good implementation plan. We may miss our July 1 target date, but I think going through the process will avoid substantial issues.'