

Clear garbage bag program could be ushered in with 2015

By Brock Weir

Clear garbage bags could be coming soon to a curb near you.

Aurora Council will consider implementing a 'clear bag' program for local trash collection by January 2015. If recommendations coming from General Committee are approved at Council next Tuesday, Aurora can expect a 'soft launch' of the program this summer with the program itself being ushered in at the start of the New Year.

A clear bag would literally provide a window into what is going into the York Region waste systems and ensure items are being funnelled into the proper channels. If adopted, Aurora would follow the lead set by Markham, which implemented a similar program last year.

According to this week's staff report, benefits of moving away from the black or green standard garbage bags to clear plastic include 'cleaner' waste before it heads for disposal, increases diversion rates out of the garbage system and into recycling or composting streams, cost savings by minimising sorting, and a decrease in injuries of waste collectors in the cases of broken glass and sharp objects that can otherwise go unnoticed in black bags.

If approved this month, clear garbage bags will be required by January 1. Accordingly, and following in the footsteps of Markham, there will be no limit to the amount of clear bags you can put out on your curb. If you do not use clear bags after January 1, 2015, garbage in dark bags will be tagged and left for residents to deal with before the next garbage day.

'An unlimited number of typical grocery bags can be used for household waste collection and placed within the clear bag for placement at the curb,' noted Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure and Environmental Services, in his report. 'If inappropriate material is identified in a clear bag, the bag will be tagged with the violation and left for the resident to re-sort and place out the following collection week.'

Currently, black and green garbage bags are the go-to items for consumers in most stores. Through the plan laid out this week, Aurora plans to hire a consultant to work with local retailers to ensure clear bags are readily available not only by January 1, 2015 but also for the 'soft launch' this summer.

'Incentive programs such as a gold star award could be used to reward those residents that adopt the clear bag transition early,' said Mr. Simanovskis. 'This was a feature of the Markham program that gained great popularity as residents earned their stars.'

The Clear Bag program was initially brought to the Council table in November by Mayor Geoffrey Dawe. At the time, he told Council that the intent is not to 'turn Aurora into the garbage police [but] is looking at ways to improve our waste diversion rate.'

Markham introduced their clear bag program in April to help weed out improper items from getting into the system, such as paint cans and batteries, as well as items such as organic, compostable waste and textiles. Safety also played a factor in introducing the program, helping garbage collectors avoid any nails, broken glass, and metal that would otherwise be concealed by dark bags. Since the introduction, the City's statistics report their waste recovery has increased by almost 70 per cent.

Implementing a program would also be an extension of the Region's SM4RT Living program, York Region's integrated waste management plan, which would provide incentives and programs to encourage reuse and recycling.