

Councillors question \$5 price of future garbage bag tags

Council decides this week whether a new program to sell garbage bag tags for anyone looking to dispose of more than three bags of trash will kick off January 1, but the price of each tag has been called into question right out of the gate.

As The Auroran reported last week, Council is considering a plan to put a bag tag program in place by the start of 2022. If ratified this week, residents can expect to pay \$5 per tag for each garbage bag they put on the curb above and beyond the current three bag limit.

Aurora currently has the largest per-capita waste rate amongst York Region's Northern Six municipalities, but since the Town launched its three-bag-maximum education campaign last year, the total tonnage has seen a steady decline.

Implementing a bag tag program is seen as the next step towards bringing down the level of waste.

On their first sweep of the proposed bag tag program, however, Councillor Michael Thompson questioned whether the \$5 price tag ? the highest among the Northern Six municipalities that have similar programs ? was more for the Town to recover costs or whether it is designed to be a deterrent.

?Most of the municipalities are costing out their bag tags at \$2 or \$3,? said Councillor Thompson. ?If we are able to break it down to a per bag price, we must have a total for what the administrative cost is to this program and how many tags we estimate to be able to get out.?

Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Operations, replied that total costs can't be given right now because the data just isn't there.

?We had to come up with a number,? said Mr. Downey. ?When we brought forward the three-bag limit policy, we didn't attach a bag tag system. We believe that Aurora has a generous garbage bag system right now. We have the highest number of garbage bags out in York Region. We have the highest per capita garbage of any municipality in the N6. This is one area where we don't want to be number one in, but we are.

?We're trying to discourage people as much as we possibly can from putting out additional garbage. If we find there is tremendous push-back [to the tag costs] or Council wants us to reconsider, we approve a fees bylaw every year and we can look at reducing that. I will also have better numbers for you because we have never administered a bag tag system. We're not even sure how we're going to sell them.?

While Councillor Thompson said he doesn't want the Town to lose money, he wanted it done ?at a reasonable rate.?

Supporting the \$5 price tag was Councillor Harold Kim.

?There has to be a balance between service and deterrent,? he said. ?I suspect, as Mr. Downey has indicated, there is not going to be a huge uptake on this. I think it is only a small fraction of the municipality that will eventually need the extra baggage, but it is nice to have that option.?

Of greater concern to Councillor Kim was the timing of the program. While the recommendations from staff call for a start date on January 1, he said he wanted it fast-tracked to November.

This suggestion didn't get off the ground, with Councillor Rachel Gilliland stating she liked the idea of the New Year as a ?fresh start.?

?It will be easy for the residents to identify the beginning of something new,? she said. ?Something implemented on December 1, it

is a very busy time with a lot of different holidays and faiths, people running around, and who knows where this pandemic will be. It could be some added stress.?

Avoiding any undue stress on residents was a theme of Councillor Gilliland's concerns which included seeking assurances from staff that there would be some breaks within the program for people who have extra garbage on their curbs if they are moving, or if they have a secondary suite on their property.

?This happens now even without a tag system and quite often people will call and say, ?We have an extraordinary circumstance and we're going to be putting out more garbage than we do normally,' so we make some accommodations for that,? said Mr. Downey. ?One of the benefits of starting January 1 is we can start with our public campaign identifying some of the nuances that are related to that.?

Replied Councillor Gilliland: ?Based on our history, a lot of people are already adhering to the three bags. This is just solidifying it that much more to encourage people to be a little more aware and cognizant and recycle more; just be a little more aware that this is our way of stepping forward and being a little more environmentally conscious as well.

?That education program, I think, will really help with the residents on what they can do to help address that.?

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