

Garbage bag limit to be considered next year

By Brock Weir

You may not know it as it is not strictly enforced, but Aurora has a three bag limit for the amount of trash you put out on your curb every other week.

This could change next year, however, as York Region's Northern Six (N6) communities look for ways to 'harmonize' waste collection across the area in a bid to hammer out a new contract with waste collectors by mid-2017.

As far as garbage is concerned, Aurora is part of York Region's N6 collective, bringing together the Towns of Aurora, East Gwillimbury, Georgina, King, Newmarket, and Whitchurch-Stouffville, to bid on large-scale contracts in an effort to keep costs low.

Their current contract for waste collection expires in August of 2017 and according to Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure and Environmental Services, 'harmonization' across the system could be key to making sure taxpayers get the best bang for their buck.

This, however, includes limiting garbage bags and instituting a bag tag service whereby residents can purchase tags at a fixed price per bag to leave more curbside than the policy allows.

'The bylaws regulating bag limits and bag tags for the collection of garbage varies for each municipality,' said Mr. Simanovskis. 'Aurora is one of two municipalities that do not have a fee for service tag program. This creates challenges in enforcing any bag limit as the resident does not have an option to have more waste collected other than driving the waste to a local transfer station. The challenge is currently overcome by not enforcing the three bag limit resulting in inconsistency across municipalities.'

'The N6 partners are in support of a two bag limit as they would encourage continued improvement in waste diversion and create consistency across the service area.'

Along with this is a recommended bag tag system at \$2 a pop.

Considering it has not even been a year since Aurora's controversial plan to institute a clear bag program for garbage collection across the municipality fizzled amid extensive public outcry, the possible movement towards a two-bag limit and bag tag program raised eyebrows around the Council table last week.

Mr. Simanovskis, however, said this is not a process that will happen quickly and hopes 2016 will bring forward a discussion on how to achieve harmonization goals.

'It might be a year or two, or it might not change at all,' he said. 'The commitment for the N6 was to at least work towards some harmonization. This is just the beginning of the conversation and there are no changes in the actual contract based on our current approved bylaw other than the fact we will have some discussions in the New Year.'

While he added a report would be coming forward to see how they can figure out if such a move would make sense for Aurora, Councillor Michael Thompson said he was 'reliving' the clear bag debate.

'My concern is that there is going to be significant change without engaging the community,' he said. 'The next thing you know is we're going to have people lined up to come and speak at the podium. I think if there is going to be significant change to our waste collection policies we need to ensure we get out in front of this and engage the community before coming back with a recommendation for Council because I think we have learned our lesson once.'

Councillor Tom Mrakas added he was not in favour of a two bag limit and bag tag program because it would lower existing service

levels for residents, while others said Aurora should explore the possibility of going it alone as far as waste collection is concerned if it could bring better overall value for residents.

?With all due respect to the municipalities of the N6, if there is an opportunity for us and Newmarket to adopt a cheaper and more efficient way to collect garbage, I am prepared to ditch the N6 on the initiative to ensure our residents are taken care of as best as possible just to investigate the costs,? said Councillor Paul Pirri, citing costs savings in other municipalities by implementing garbage collection trucks that automatically pick up wheeled curbside bins to deposit waste in their trucks.