

"Groundbreaking" door-to-door waste collection to start February 6



By Brock Weir

A pilot project to over 3,000 Aurora homes took than 23 tonnes of textiles out of the waste system last year alone. Starting February 6, the Town of Aurora, along with Textile Waste Diversion, is kicking it up a notch, expanding their door-to-door textile collections Town-wide and expanding their collection to include not just cloth but home décor and housewares. Through the new program, all you have to do is bag your items, mark the bags clearly with a 'T' and leave them on your doorstep the first Monday of each month through 2017.

'It's a new program and we just want to give residents more options,' says Amanda Cutler, Waste Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, noting since the pilot project, which served specific pockets of the Aurora community, the CO₂ was reduced by an estimated 171,808 pounds.

'Some residents still want to give to charities, and they can as well, but this is another option to show residents we do care about the environment, we do want to divert more stuff from landfills, and this is another way they can do it if they want to participate. We have the green bins and the blue bins, but we want to continue moving forward and going above and beyond in these programs.' It is certainly above and beyond for the Town of Aurora, but it is also above and beyond for Textile Waste Diversion. (TWD) 'We're excited about our program's expansion [in Aurora] because textiles have such a positive impact on the environment when you're actually able to recycle them, which is something that is very new in Canada,' says Daniele Siggia, Vice President of Development for TWD. 'This is not something Canada has approached up until now, but getting textiles out of the waste stream is something that can be done very quickly and very efficiently and Aurora has proven that.

'We started with a very small pilot project that was easy to manage to make sure that we could get all of the kinks out and as soon as we saw that it worked and it was generating some really positive potential, and great carbon reduction numbers, they decided to expand the program exponentially. What Aurora is proving is that getting to zero waste with textiles is easy, it can be done, and is a big priority for textile waste diversion.'

TWD operates province-wide, but the Aurora approach is slightly different for the company because, Ms. Siggia says, the yields are so small by comparison. Elsewhere in Ontario, much of the collected textiles are sent overseas, particularly to nations in South America and East Africa. As far as Aurora's textiles are concerned, just 11 per cent is exported overseas, with the bulk being reused in North America.

35 per cent goes towards industrial reuse such as upholstery, stuffing, and rags. 10 per cent of that stays in Canada and the rest is sent to the United States, she explains.

'50 per cent of what we collect we're actually able to use in the Canadian second-hand economy at this point, and I would like to see that increase exponentially,' says Ms. Siggia, adding that they do not want to negatively impact charities that work in the same sector. 'We're still streamlining how we want to manage [other household goods that will be collected] and I want to change it. Right now we're distributing to local charities as we go, but I would like to set up an actual formalized process where charities can take their pick. We're kind of in flux about that one, but I would like to see it perfected in the next month or so.'

Perfect or not, what is set to begin a week Monday is something of a game changer, says Ms. Siggia.

?Right now, most municipalities are not involved in textiles whatsoever, and some of them have really restrictive regulations that make it difficult for anybody to operate, even in the private sector or the charity sector. Although TWD is expanding right now, it is slow growth.?

?What Aurora did is different in that they got ahead of the problem and said instead of trying to eliminate the sector, let's try to blossom it into something that will actually reduce waste at the end of the day. They made that a priority and reverse-engineered. They aligned with a company that was interested in sector development, but didn't want to go into competition with charities. Charities have been the backbone of the sector since it started, so there is no reason to eliminate them from the equation. They can be an integral part of it. What we need to do is focus on that 85 per cent, so systems were put in place to capture much of that.

?This is something that everyone in Aurora can get behind; whether they want to give to their favourite charity or support a Town program, we're just urging people not to throw their textiles in the garbage.?

If you're looking to de-clutter, the waste collection starting February 6 includes clothes, curtains, blankets, footwear, housewares, jackets, linens, glasses, purses, hats, belts, soft toys, and even sports equipment. Items not being accepted include furniture, appliances, or, of course, hazardous waste.