

Mounting garbage prompts review of trash contract

By Brock Weir

If your garbage spent days on end at the bottom of your driveway waiting for pickup, it didn't go unnoticed.

Following mounting delays across Aurora in the aftermath of the December ice storm, Aurora is now reviewing its contract with Green For Life (GFL), the company contracted by the municipality for garbage and recycling collection.

Council convened a special meeting Saturday morning to deal with the problem following a motion from Mayor Geoffrey Dawe. In his motion, Mayor Dawe cited escalating impacts stemming from last month's storm resulting in collection days being delayed or missed altogether.

[Green For Life] GFL reported delays and missed collection due to weather conditions, worker injury and vehicle breakdown, read his motion. GFL is still struggling to have the Town of Aurora back on their regular collection schedule [and] over the past several months, prior to the ice storm, residents have reported several missed collections by GFL. This is an unacceptable practice that needs to be addressed.

The motion calls on staff to undertake an immediate review of the GFL contract to determine if they are meeting the terms and, if not, to recommend immediate corrective action and report back to Council.

Speaking to The Auroran ahead of the meeting, Mayor Dawe said residents have not been shy to address their garbage concerns to Town Hall, but their concerns are not entirely new.

Quite obviously there are issues [with] the ice storm and snow and it has been difficult to get to, but complaints, quite frankly, have been going up since the fall and maybe even a bit before, he said. We need to look at whether or not they are performing.

Turtle Island did a pretty good job and we didn't have nearly the complaints with Turtle Island as we do now.

Saturday's discussion tasked staff with going over the contract both from the municipal perspective and the perspective of GFL to determine whether or not they are ticking the right boxes.

We need to get on with the issue of garbage, Mayor Dawe told Council on the weekend. There have been some challenges and we need our staff to look into this.

His motion followed similar ones being issued at the end of the week about GFL by municipalities like Newmarket and Whitchurch-Stouffville.

The motion was passed unanimously by Council at the special meeting.

Normally, I wouldn't have agreed to waive the public notice period with the procedural bylaw because I would have liked people to be in the chamber to discuss this with us, but I believe this is a situation that needs to be taken care of right away, said Councillor Wendy Gaertner.

Some Councillors, however, wanted more than just a review of the services Aurora residents can expect at ends of their driveways, but of the entire communications mechanism between GFL and the municipality as these problems were being met.

I hope the report also looks at how they were communicating with us and vice-versa, keeping us informed of the situation and how we were then able to communicate back out because it does speak to the situation and a little bit about crisis management, said Councillor Michael Thompson, noting he would like to see the report also tackle possible broader changes to communications and the contract.

For Councillor Paul Pirri, problems with GFL are about more than simple delays.

?The biggest concern I have seen is items falling out of the blue box as they are being picked up and nobody is picking them [back] up,? he said. ?To me, that is completely unacceptable. If you drop something, pick it up. It is the appropriate thing to do and not showing a big problem.?

With problems being faced by many groups across the board in the aftermath of the storm, however, Councillor Gaertner suggested one should have a thought for GFL.

?I think we need to keep in mind the service providers, the people who actually do the work, have been really challenged for many reasons,? she said. ?It hasn't been easy. They are really tired and I have spoken to them and I think they have tried to do their best. The contract is the place to look.?

In addition to missed collection days, extreme cold weather also promoted suspension of service on certain days resulting in collections being shifted ahead by 24 hours.

Green For Life did not respond to a request for comment by press time.