

New recycling bins, rules causing fresh headaches for residents, business owners

Mayors of York Region's Northern Six communities continue to advocate for options as new blue bins roll out amid resident pushback ? and they are hoping solutions might be on the table as early as this week.

Area residents began receiving the new Blue Bins bins last week ahead of a switch in the New Year on how recycling is collected.

The new bins, which are significantly larger than the ones now used by residents, are upright, on wheels, and, according to many residents, unwieldy ? both in the space they take up, and how residents wheel them to the ends of their driveways, particularly if they are experiencing mobility challenges.

The January 2026 switchover is the result in a Province-wide move away from a municipal collection service towards a Producer-Responsibility level. While it is argued the new model will result in some cost savings, many are questioning whether it is worth the headache.

In an update on Tuesday afternoon, Mayor Tom Mrakas said talks earlier in the day between the N6 mayors and Circular Materials, which is overseeing the program, were ?not satisfactory,? but indicated work continues to find a resolution.

?Unfortunately, the response from Circular Materials was not satisfactory when it came to questions about providing bin-size options beyond the 95-gallon carts delivered earlier this month,? said Mayor Mrakas. ?We made it clear that bin-size options are not an ask ? they are a requirement. Our residents deserve flexibility, and one size does not fit all.?

Tuesday afternoon's statement followed one issued last week where the Mayor asked residents to reach out to his office whether they were ?in favour, against, or indifferent? towards the new recycling bins as the N6 mayors developed a formal response to the change-over.

?I understand that for many households the new bin feels too large or difficult to manage, and that this change has caused frustration,? said Mayor Mrakas. ?While the Town of Aurora is not responsible for managing or implementing this new program, I want you to know that your feedback has not gone unheard. Under Ontario's Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act, 2016, the Province has shifted responsibility for the Blue Box Program from municipalities to the companies that produce products and packaging. For Aurora, this means the program is now overseen by Circular Materials, a not-for-profit organization representing producers and collection is now being handled by Green For Life (GLF). Other municipalities may have different service providers, which is why bin sizes and options can vary across the Province.

?Even though this program is out of the Town's direct control, Town staff and I have been advocating for more flexibility in bin size and collection options, especially to better meet the needs of seniors and those with limited storage space.?

As concerns ? and complaints ? have mounted, Council members have sought to reassure their respective Ward constituents as well.

In a social media post, Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese says the rules set out by the Province on the switch-over specify that blue box receptacles provided must be ?appropriate for the residence, including with respect to size,? something he suggests doesn't fit the bill with what's been delivered.

?I think this should be vetted by our legal department and every effort to resolve this Blue Bin controversy should be made,? he said.

Added Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland: ?While this may be a ?producer' decision, who approved this one-size-fits-all approach? Were there no local guidelines or consultation before rolling it out? Aurora deserves practical solutions that respect how people actually live ? not policies designed in a vacuum.?

Changes to recycling methods are also causing headaches to local businesses, particularly those that are located in the historic downtown core.

Under the Extended Producer Responsibility model, businesses will become responsible for the disposal of their own recycling, but this has created concerns for businesses in the downtown where space is limited and the only ways to put out their recycling collection is along the busy Yonge and Wellington corridors.

?Since the approval to discontinue the collection of waste and organics in December 2024, staff have met with business owners, delivered letters, posted information and utilized mobile road signage to inform of the upcoming changes, including to recycling, while businesses have been working to secure private collection,? said Amanda Cutler, Aurora's Coordinator of Waste and Recycling, in the report before Council this week.

?Staff has heard from a small number of business owners in the downtown core about the stop of waste collection by the Town effective January 1, 2026. The rationale behind the concerns is lack of storage/space constraints of large waste bins until collection day, higher costs/difficulty securing service and negative impact on downtown businesses. Parking spots in the rear lots are at a premium and utilizing them for waste storage would compound the issue. It's also not possible to utilize the frontage on Yonge Street; this is not an appropriate location as storefronts need to remain inviting for public and space needs to remain unconstrained to allow for adequate pedestrian flow and safety.?

The recommendation, if approved by Council, would rescind Council direction to stop the collection of waste in the downtown core, a decision made last December, that collection continue ?as a temporary measure? during the ongoing design process of the Yonge Street Promenade, and for the Town to provide area businesses a specific location to dispose of recyclables ? again, as a temporary measure ? in January.

Recycling collection, the report notes, is not feasible through the Town's current contractor as part of a downtown collection route.

?While the concerns have been expressed by only a very small number of businesses, staff understand the unique complexities the downtown holds, including mixed residential and business blocks, storage constraints, parking limitations, frontage aesthetics, and a desire to revitalize the area through the streetscape plan currently under progress.?

Options before Council include securing a private contractor to serve these impacted businesses, which would have an estimated annual cost of between \$125,000 and \$175,000, or providing a central location for drop-offs ? specifically the Town's Joint Operations Centre on Industrial Parkway North.

?Staff recognize that this drop-off location is not adjacent to the impacted businesses and that the recyclables will require transport; however, locating the bins in a parking lot in the downtown core would take up valuable parking spots, cause potential concern for residential properties, and potentially promote dumping of other waste by the public and/or cross contamination.

?Due to the unique complexities of the downtown core, staff are recommending the Town continue to collect solid waste and organics for these small businesses, while providing a recycling drop location at the JOC. This service provision will be temporary and provided during the Yonge Street Downtown Promenade Detailed Design project, in which the feasibility of waste storage and collection will be explored and potentially considered.?

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