

Take another look at clear bags, says clear bag proponent

After reading Trash Talk: Aurora discusses possible changes to garbage collection contract (Nov 12, Aurora Banner) and Garbage bag limit to be considered next year (Nov 12, Auroran) I was compelled to write in with the following comments, especially considering our firm ? VisionQuest Environmental ? was involved in the clear bag initiative this past Spring.

Aurora's focus on increased waste reduction and diversion and lower capital and operating costs remain fundamental to the Town's goal of meeting zero waste targets, not unlike most municipalities across Canada and this is very noble. The most successful strategies offer the carrot over the stick approach.

The potential strategy now on the table to consider the implementation of a garbage-bag-limit reduction from three bags to two bags every other week collection combined with a bag tag (perhaps \$2 per bag) cost for additional bags is certainly not a new idea to municipalities as numerous communities have gone down this road already.

Does it work? Sure.

Is it the panacea? No.

For starters, residents often simply compact their garbage bags a little (or a lot) to stay under the bag limit without having to pay for additional bags resulting in reduced volume to the curb but not much of a change to the tonnage. Is it not the tonnage that we are targeting?

Definitely, one factor that led to the demise of the clear bag initiative being considered in Aurora pertained to some Councillors' concerns that they did not feel that they had enough information to support such a transition and that residents needed more information as well. One Councillor commented that this strategy was good, but simply ahead of its time.

The illusion of overwhelming opposition is easily misconstrued by a few letters to the editor of the local paper(s) while the vast majority remain silent. Whether this silence is based on an indifference, acceptance or trust in others to speak for them only you (the reader) truly knows. An on-line survey that receives a response of less than 200 residents from a community of over 30,000 should not be construed as indicative of the overwhelming thoughts of all.

To gauge the effectiveness of a clear bag program for increasing diversion, one only has to look next door to the City of Markham where a similar program that the Aurora program was being modeled after was launched in April 2013. Markham has now accomplished an astonishing 81% diversion of waste, considered one of the best successes across North America. Ironically, Markham actually eliminated the restriction as to the number of garbage bags placed curbside as long as they were clear and contained minimal amounts of divertible material.

An alternative option that some Councillors are now beginning to raise involves a complete program overhaul to large carts for automated collection ? under the false illusion that such programs offer significant savings. One only has to review the solid waste capital and operating budgets from the City of Toronto to want to pull the sheets over your head and shake with fear.

Now consider the huge capital costs for these containers and who has to pay for them: you of course. If you really wanted to use a container, wouldn't you already have one that fits your needs for storage and mobility?

I do hope that my efforts here will also motivate those of you that agree with my position to also write in and illustrate that perhaps the ?clear bag? option isn't ahead of it's time, but rather its time is here.

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