

Committee of the Whole (1) Report

DATE: Monday, October 07, 2019

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: BLUE BOX RECYCLING PROGRAM UPDATE

FROM:

Zoran Postic, Deputy City Manager, Public Works

ACTION: FOR INFORMATION

Purpose

The provincial government has provided a phased timeline for the private sector to become responsible for the blue box recycling program, with some municipalities transitioning their program as soon as January 1, 2023, and all municipalities transitioning by Dec. 31, 2025. Until that time, the City will continue to have legislated responsibility for recycling collection and requires a strategy to address rising contamination rates in the blue box.

Report Highlights

- Blue box recycling will become the responsibility of the private sector, and the first group of municipalities will transfer responsibility of their programs starting January 1, 2023 with full transition completed by Dec. 31, 2025.
- Until that time, the City will continue to collect recycling, and requires a strategy to address rising contamination rates in the blue box.

Recommendation

1. That this report be received for information.

Background

The provincial Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks announced the transition of Ontario's Blue Box Program to full producer responsibility, with the

first group of municipalities transferring the responsibility for their programs to the private sector starting January 1, 2023.

On August 15, 2019, Minister Yurek, in a joint announcement with Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, issued direction to Stewardship Ontario and the Resource Productivity and Recovery Authority (RPRA) to begin the transition of Ontario's Blue Box Program to full producer responsibility. The letter to Stewardship Ontario is included as an attachment.

This transfer of responsibility will provide savings to our residents and should incentivize the private sector to produce more easily recyclable packaging as they assume responsibility for managing their packaging waste. The direction letter to Stewardship Ontario confirmed the following:

- Stewardship Ontario will submit a plan for the wind up of the current funding program to the Authority by June 30, 2020;
- The Plan must be developed with meaningful consultation and transparent communications with impacted stakeholders and the public;
- RPRA shall approve the plan, no later than December 31, 2020;
- The first group of municipalities will transfer responsibility of their programs to the private sector starting January 1, 2023;
- Full transition will be completed by December 31, 2025.

December 31, 2025 aligns with the end date of the City's current waste collection contract. Until December 31, 2025, the City will remain eligible to receive 50 percent funding for designated costs for Blue Box recycling collection, approximately \$1.2 million annually. Once municipalities transfer responsibility for Blue Box services to the private sector representatives, they will no longer be eligible to receive funding from Stewardship Ontario. Producers will assume full responsibility for funding and operations of the Blue Box Program.

For a minimum of three years, the City will continue to be responsible for collecting blue box recycling and will be required to address rising contamination rates.

York Region is responsible for processing all blue box materials collected by their municipal partners, and due to a steady increase in non-recyclable materials in the blue box, they have been impacted by loss of revenue, additional maintenance costs, and more system downtime at the Material Recovery Facility (MRF).

Vaughan has the second highest rate of non-recyclable materials being collected in the blue box program.

There are many factors contributing to the increase in blue box contamination. These include the introduction of new non-recyclable product packaging over time, which is confusing to sort, and the addition of new multi-residential buildings to municipal blue box collection services which typically have poor recycling rates and high rates of non-recyclables placed in the blue box. Between 2014 and 2018, York Region audit results show a seven percent increase in non-recyclable materials being collected in the blue box in Vaughan (see Table 1). As shown in Table 2, Vaughan now has the second highest blue box contamination rates among all York Region municipalities.

Table 1: Vaughan Historical Blue Box Contamination Rate Audit Results

Audit Year	Contamination Rate
2016/2017	18.4%
2014/2015	16.4%
2018	23.4%

Table 2: 2018 Blue Box Contamination Rate by Municipality

Municipality	Contamination Rate
Whitchurch–Stouffville	9%
East Gwillimbury	12%
Newmarket	13%
Georgina	14%
Aurora	16%
King	19%
Richmond Hill	19%
Vaughan	23%
Markham	31%

York Region has requested that the lower tier municipalities work to reduce blue box contamination.

York Region has begun monitoring blue box loads delivered to the Earl Turcott Waste Management Facility and sending those that are majority garbage material for disposal. Staff are looking for obvious contamination that cannot be sorted through the MRF such as recyclables in plastic bags, recyclables mixed with food waste, wood, furniture, toys, etc.

Since May 2018, York Region has been meeting with the local municipalities to develop a strategy to reduce garbage collected as recycling. In June 2019, the three largest municipalities, Richmond Hill, Markham and Vaughan, met with York Region to collaborate on next steps, including a common approach to reducing non-recyclables in the blue box.

Previous Reports/Authority

[Waste Legislation Update on Amended Blue Box Program Plan – March 7, 2018](#)

[Waste Legislation and Waste Division Program Update - October 10, 2017](#)

[Waste Free Ontario Legislation Review - Comments from City of Vaughan – February 16, 2016](#)

Analysis and Options

To address blue box contamination in multi-residential buildings, Environmental Services staff will be monitoring and providing feedback to buildings that are setting out recycling that is more than 30 percent garbage materials.

The City services 85 multi-residential buildings, representing over 12,500 dwelling units. In collaboration with our waste collection contractor, we will monitor and identify problem locations by visually inspecting bins with excess garbage material set out as recycling, using a threshold of 30 percent non-recyclables. The inspection results will be shared with the property manager and condominium corporation via letter and information posted in common areas.

Should these locations not show reasonable improvement after two inspections and two rounds of communication, staff will instruct the contractor to leave the bins behind on the third scheduled collection. The condominium corporation can choose to sort the bins to remove the garbage and set out for next collection, or have the bin picked up privately as garbage at the owner's expense. This program will be rolled out over the course of the next twelve months.

To address blue box contamination in single family homes, Environmental Services staff will continue to work with the waste collection contractor to leave behind blue boxes containing garbage materials.

Currently the waste collection contractor services over 86,000 single family homes, and leaves behind blue boxes that contain obvious waste materials including Styrofoam, toys, hangers, etc. The contractor uses stickers that indicate the reason the bin was left behind. Residents often contact Access Vaughan when receiving this feedback and remove the material for the next scheduled collection. Environmental Services staff will work with the contractor to ensure this program is implemented consistently to address

blue box contamination. As well, outreach and education will continue to focus on recyclable materials, and how residents can participate effectively and responsibly in the blue box program.

Financial Impact

Adoption of this report will have no financial impact. An additional FTE was approved in 2018 to support the multi-residential waste collection service expansion, and these additional activities will be assumed by existing staff. As the City of Vaughan complies with the Waste Free Ontario Act, financial impacts will be brought forward for Council's consideration as part of future budget processes.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

By addressing blue box contamination at the local municipal level, we will contribute to cost avoidance for York Region waste processing. When the blue box program transitions to full producer responsibility, we also anticipate that residents, contractors, and municipalities that choose to remain service providers, will be required to produce lower contamination rates at the curb than are currently being achieved.

Conclusion

Environmental Services staff will continue to participate in any consultation on the Blue Box program transition and update Council on major milestones of the process. Over the next twelve months, Environmental Services will work closely with York Region to monitor and provide feedback to under-performing multi-residential buildings and the waste collection contractor to improve the blue box contamination rate for the City.

For more information, please contact: James Steele, Director, Environmental Services, ext. 6116

Attachment

1. MECP Policy Direction Letter to Stewardship Ontario, August 15, 2019

Prepared by

Kate Dykman, Manager, Solid Waste Management ext. 6309