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City won't scale back trash pickup after green boxes hit streets

Opponents say move will undermine efforts to divert waste

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OTTAWA-Weekly regular garbage collection will continue in Ottawa after an organics composting program is started next year, council decided by a 12-10 vote yesterday.

Opponents of the move say it's going to undermine the effort to divert trash from landfills. The city is running out of landfill space, and after years of pilot organics projects and delays, the recycling of table scraps and other organic materials in green boxes is scheduled to start citywide next fall.

To encourage organic recycling and save landfill space, city staff initially recommended reducing regular garbage pickup to every two weeks when the green-box program is introduced, as has been typical in other cities where organics recycling has been introduced. City garbage experts said with organics taken out, there won't be enough garbage for weekly pickup, and the cutback would save about \$1 million a year.

Alta Vista Councillor Peter Hume, who chairs council's planning and environment committee, was disappointed by the vote.

He said with regular garbage pickup done once every two weeks, the green-box program was projected to get the city residential garbage diversion from landfill rate to 60 per cent from about 30 per cent.

With weekly pickup continuing, the city's diversion rate is expected to be 45 per cent.

"We also lose the moral authority when dealing with landfill expansions," Mr. Hume said. "How can we tell the private sector that they must take significant measures to maximize their diversion when we won't take measures to maximize the diversion for the waste stream we control?"

"It will be a case of do as we say, but not as we do. A sad state, indeed."

The backlash against the move to regular garbage collection every two weeks came from residents, which made it a politically tough issue for elected officials.

The question first went to city council in late August, but, after a series of tie votes resulted in no decision, it was re-visited yesterday. This time, councillors debated a motion brought by Councillor Diane Holmes that would have seen regular garbage pickup move to every second week, but beginning six months after the green-box program started.

At yesterday's meeting, councillors opposed to the change spoke of maggots

infestations, reeking containers, vermin and a lowering of service by the city.

College Councillor Rick Chiarelli, who voted to maintain weekly collection, said the main concern of his residents was that it was a service cut.

"There's no more core service for a municipality than garbage collection," he said.

Mr. Chiarelli said he is confident that once organics recycling starts, people will embrace it and will see in quick order that regular garbage collection every two weeks is acceptable, but that forcing the change immediately when the green-box program starts isn't the way to go.

"We're keeping the core service, and people will discover on their own what their needs are," he said. "They will tell us if this is an acceptable cut in service. If they do, then we do it."

After the vote, Knoxdale-Merivale Councillor Gord Hunter, who voted to go to a two-week collection schedule, said he couldn't believe what council had just done.

He pointed out that green boxes are to be collected weekly in the hot months and every two weeks in the winter, and that the council vote means regular garbage will be picked up more frequently in the winter than compostables will.

"We are encouraging people to not do what we want them to do," he said. "How did we manage to screw it up that much? It's hard to believe that this is what we did."

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