

Date: November 23, 2020
To: Budget Committee
Re: BU19.2 - 2021 Rate Supported Budgets - Solid Waste Management Services and Recommended 2021 Solid Waste Rates and Fees

My name is Emily Alfred and I'm the Waste Campaigner at Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA). TEA has 60,000 supporters across Toronto who want to build a greener city for all.

We believe that solid waste management is an important environmental service of the City. Achieving our waste reduction targets and creating a circular economy in Toronto that sees resources conserved and recycled into new materials will not only cut costs but achieve important community goals. Managing resources and waste wisely is essential to addressing the climate crisis. We need to be a resilient City with sustainable and wise use of resources.

Today I'm here to urge this committee to increase and enhance the waste education budget for Toronto's waste customers, not reduce it.

The proposed 2021 budget includes eliminating printed calendars - while this may seem like a quick solution that saves money and eliminates paper use, we believe it actually will result in higher waste costs and more contamination of all waste streams.

Waste communications and education is a crucial part of moving our city towards zero waste. Ensuring that all waste customers have quick and easy access to information on how to handle and sort waste properly is key to reducing contamination.

Education is important because recycling and packaging is confusing

At TEA, we spend a lot of time talking to members of the public and the media about waste, including residents and staff in multi-residential buildings across the City. We hear that the average person hears a lot of conflicting messages about how to sort waste.

One reason is that **every municipality has different recycling rules**. Within Toronto, the recycling rules are different at every shopping mall, office, or restaurant, or in 1/3rd of apartments and condo buildings that have private waste service. This is very confusing to the average person, and it contributes to contamination and mistakes in sorting.

Printed signs and waste calendars are valuable:

- **Not everyone has access to computers and high-speed internet at home.** For example, some people rely on using the internet at the library or in public spaces, or they may have one shared computer in their household that isn't always available.

- **The calendar has a lot of information on topics that customers may not actively seek out, as they *think* they have the right information.** For example, how to set out yard waste, or that the City collects cooking oil for recycling, or that medications shouldn't be flushed down the toilet.
- **The calendar serves as a helpful reference guide** - the average person may get a notice in the mail, or see an ad online, on the TTC or in the paper, but that doesn't mean they'll remember all the details. A calendar serves as a reference guide that can give the details to back up and complement those other communication methods throughout the year.
- **Official, City of Toronto branded printed resources are important to counteract very confusing information** put out by companies, or just on the internet. For example, well-meaning but inaccurate facebook posts or websites that tell people how to recycle. Or misleading product labels that tell customers products are 'flushable', or 'compostable' when in fact that isn't the case in Toronto.
- **Behavioural science shows that even the smallest barriers or extra steps can impact behaviour.** Instead of checking a calendar or poster, if someone had to go to a computer, navigate to a website, and then type in a product name, that extra few minutes could be enough to discourage them to not bother.
- Research funded by the Continuous Improvement Fund showed that people spend an average of just 5 seconds looking at public waste bin signs to determine how to sort waste. When people are busy, holding something gross in their hands, they don't want to slow down.

Learn from leading multi-residential buildings and expand communications methods.

For the last three years, TEA has been working with and leading a joint research project with researchers at the University of Toronto on high-rise communities in Toronto. In our resident surveys and observations, we've seen that high-performing buildings made extensive use of printed resources such as signs, calendars provided by the City.

We surveyed residents in about a dozen buildings and asked them to indicate all the places they go to get information about proper recycling. We asked for one survey per household, and participation was voluntary.

- **Waste calendars and building signs were the top two sources of information:**
 - 49% of people said they look at signs, and >
 - 41% reported they look at calendars >
- The City website was the third most selected source of information with 33% >
- When you look at age groups, you can see differences in how households find information:
 - For those over 70, the use of website drops to just 15%, and use of printed resources increases
 - Younger demographics - those under 30 - still reported that they looked to calendars and signs, but were more likely to go online for information. However, it's important to note this group was more likely to search on non-City websites.

This is just a small survey of about 1000 households, conducted in English. It isn't representative of the whole City, but it does show that there are important differences between how different age groups and populations seek reliable information.

Multi-residential communities can be a good example of waste and recycling education campaigns. Unlike single-family homes that only get information once a year in a calendar, or in the mail, multi-residential buildings use a range of communication tools including signs, emails, printed notices, and 3Rs Ambassador

training provided by the City to create resident experts in the building. Other research and our surveys confirm that effective communication needs consistent, repeated, and very easy-to-find information.

We recommend that the City of Toronto, instead of cutting the communication budget and eliminating the waste calendars, put more effort and budget into communications and education. This could include more electronic communications, for example a regular email bulletin, more opportunities for residents to learn and ask questions, such as offering the 3Rs Ambassador training to more people online. Most importantly, using a range of tools ensures that messages are available to a broader audience with different learning styles.

Communicating about Toronto's progress to zero waste

In addition to communicating with Torontonians about how to sort waste and recycle properly, it's also important for residents to have a deeper understanding of why reducing waste is so important.

Toronto has a Long Term Waste Strategy with an aspirational goal of zero waste. This is a strong strategy, and in the past few years, there's been a growing understanding of the link between reducing waste, cutting greenhouse gas emissions, and creating a resilient low-carbon circular economy.

To help City Council and the public understand how the City is progressing on waste, I urge Toronto Council to include other metrics to express and measure solid waste success. Aside from waste diversion rate, which is limited in terms of what it tells the public, there are many other metrics that the City can share with customers. As soon as 2023, the City will no longer be managing recyclables, diversion rates may be harder to calculate with confidence. Instead, the City can use annual reporting metrics discussed and approved by Council in the Long Term Waste Strategy in 2016, among others:

- Garbage per capita
- Food waste and organics per capita
- Amounts of recyclable material or organic waste in the garbage
- Greenhouse Gas emissions associated with waste

These numbers give a better picture of how well the City is doing on reducing waste, and on sorting waste, better metrics than simply looking at the weight of what they put at the curb.

In conclusion, we know that Torontonians care about reducing waste and building a low-carbon circular economy. We urge Council to invest more in communications to help residents sort waste properly, and to understand the impacts of their efforts.