
2022 OPERATING BUDGET BRIEFING NOTE

Waste Diversion in City Parks

Issue/Background:

- At its meeting on November 3, 2021, the Budget Committee adopted [Item BU34.1](#), "2022 Rate Supported Budget Launch", which included the following motion:
 1. That the General Manager, Solid Waste Management Services provide a briefing note to the November 19, 2021 Budget Committee meeting on:
 - b. within the context of the City Beautification program, how diversion rates are measured in parks and whether the City is meeting the diversion targets it needs to manage parks waste containers at current service-levels.
- Solid Waste Management Services supports city beautification and cleanliness by collecting litter and waste from approximately 10,600 park bins. In addition, in recent years, new signs have been created for waste bins in City of Toronto (City) parks to remind the public not to place certain items in the Blue Bins.
- This Briefing Note provides a response to the above motion and provides information on the challenges faced in collecting recycling in City parks as well as details on Solid Waste Management Services' pilot projects in City parks to increase waste diversion.

Key Points:

1. Challenges with Recycling Collection in City Parks

Solid Waste Management Services does not set diversion targets or report on diversion rates for City parks. In recent years, the level of contamination in City parks Blue Bins has been high and all bin types are frequently cross-contaminated. This behaviour may be due to park visitors being less willing to take the time to sort materials in a public space, the inability to clean the recycling items (causing food and liquid waste to contaminate the material) and confusion on proper sorting rules from visitors to the City parks coming from outside Toronto. This has resulted in the inability to process most materials collected in the Blue Bins for recycling since March 2018. In speaking with other Greater Golden Horseshoe municipalities, staff have indicated similar issues regarding contamination of recycling bins in public spaces.

Solid Waste Management Services retained a contractor to conduct waste composition audits at City parks, during the summer of 2021. Bins in the sample group City parks were audited to analyze garbage, recycling, beverage and organics materials. A review of the preliminary findings from the audit are currently underway.

2. Solid Waste Management Services' Parks Pilot Projects

Solid Waste Management Services' has recently undertaken pilot projects in an effort to improve the quality of materials collected from City parks bins and increase diversion.

Beverage Bins in Parks 2021 Pilot

In May 2021, Solid Waste Management Services began a Beverage Bin Pilot project in select parks throughout the city. The goal of the pilot was to reduce the level of contamination found in the Blue Bins and determine if a more targeted stream of recyclables could be recovered and at a quality that can be processed for recycling. The existing Blue Bins with domed lids contain high amounts of contaminated materials due to the larger opening and less durable locks that break with manipulation. The pilot utilized a new bin lid design to exclusively capture beverage cans and bottles (with a smaller 4-inch diameter opening on the front lid of the bin). During the project, additional Garbage Bins were added beside the Beverage Bins to compensate for the additional waste materials the Beverage Bins did not accept.

306 Beverage Bins were installed in 30 parks across the city. During a 14 week period the Beverage Bins were audited and monitored at the time of collection. Eight tonnes of beverage cans and bottles were diverted from landfill with a 15% average level of contamination. The materials collected from these Beverage Bins were accepted and processed as recycling at the Materials Recovery Facility. The reduction in contamination rates suggest that expansion of this pilot project could improve the quality and recovery of recyclable material collected in City parks and increase diversion of these materials from landfill.

Green Bins in Parks Pilot Project Expansion

In 2018, Solid Waste Management Services added Green Bins to select dog off-leash areas as a pilot project. Within the six-month Green Bin pilot, 38 tonnes of organic material was diverted from landfill. In 2019, the Green Bin program was expanded to all dog off-leash areas and diverted 179.5 tonnes of organic material from landfill. This organic material represented 4% of the total waste collected in City parks in 2019.

In 2020, the program was further expanded to include Green Bin installation at existing waste stations with the City parks by request or if a need is identified by staff. In 2020, 168 tonnes of organic material was from City parks was diverted from landfill. In 2021, the program expanded to an additional 39 City parks and approximately 165 tonnes of organic material has been collected to date. This program has successfully improved waste diversion in City parks by removing organic material from Garbage Bins and Blue Bins and reducing contamination rates. In addition, the Green Bin material can be processed at the City's anaerobic digestion facility where renewable natural gas can be generated thereby reducing the City's carbon footprint.

3. Next Steps

Solid Waste Management Services continually looks for ways to divert more materials from landfill and improve the quality of materials collected in City parks bins. The findings from the Beverage Bin pilot and the Green Bin expansions are currently being reviewed to determine future parks collection program enhancements that will increase diversion and reduce contamination. The Province of Ontario's new Blue Box Regulations for Extended Producer Responsibility may also impact the way waste is managed in City parks based on the outcomes of the common collection system established and may result in the need to redesign the system. City staff will monitor the outcomes as a result of these regulations in order to assess impacts on the City's park waste management system and to ensure a smooth transition for Toronto.

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