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Deputation to City Executive
Item 20-7, May 14, 2012

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you as you consider how to address, and hopefully mitigate, the decision made by Council last December to impose collection fees on over 1,000 charities and non-profits across Toronto for solid waste disposal.

In late November, Social Planning Toronto became aware of this prospect, and attempted at that time to alert Councillors to the challenges and unforeseen consequences of this action. As the July first implementation date moved closer, and as organizations began receiving notices of this change, SPT became aware that the impact of this change may be even more damaging than initially anticipated.

There was no consultation with the affected organizations prior to the decision, and no assessment as to the impact it would have on these organizations, the constituencies they serve, or, in fact, on the way in which they dispose of their solid waste. It remains difficult to precisely measure the potential impact of this new charge. For some organizations, whose business model depends on donations of items which are ideally reused or refurbished, it will mean substantial reductions in their operations, or outright closure. And not just large organizations like Goodwill -- many smaller community organizations who depend on yard sales for a portion of their funding will have to re-think whether it makes sense to continue these events if they have to add the cost of disposing left-over items to their expenses -- items that would have otherwise likely been discarded by their donors as part of the residential waste stream.

The charge will have a very significant impact on smaller non-profit organizations that provide any kind of food or meal service -- For example, St. John the Compassionate Mission on Broadview Avenue anticipates this charge will cost them seventeen thousand dollars a year when fully implemented. Neighbourhood Centres like Central Neighbourhood House and St. Christopher House are estimating impacts on the order of $10,000 annually. Daily Bread Food Bank, which supplies food to most of the smaller food banks operated by places of worship and other local organizations, is concerned that this new charge will be the tipping point that forces them to close their doors.

If part of the intent of imposing this charge was to promote waste reduction among the affected organizations, an initial conversation with them would have been a good place to start, rather than unilateral imposition of this charge. These are local community institutions - they want the best for their communities, and most would welcome the opportunity to explore ways in which they can reduce the waste they generate.

The City of Toronto supports community organizations in a range of important ways -- through its funding of the Community Partnership Investment Program (CPIP), through the provision of city-owned space at below market rents to a wide range of organizations, to name just a few. When the new fee for waste disposal is fully implemented, city staff anticipate it will bring in just under $3 million a year -- money those organizations currently use to provide programming and services to residents of our city. That is the equivalent of a seven percent reduction in CPIP funding.

I believe that if Councillors had been more aware of the negative impacts of this new charge in November, they would have made a different decision. I understand that it is, at this point, possible to take steps to reverse, or mitigate, the decision to impose this fee. I would encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity to give this matter serious second thought.

John Campey
Executive Director