

Impact of COVID-19 on Waste Collection and Litter in Greenspaces and Parks

Date: August 21, 2020

To: Infrastructure and Environment Committee

From: General Manager, Solid Waste Management Services

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This staff report responds to the request for the General Manager, Solid Waste Management Services, in consultation with the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, to report back at the September 17, 2020 Infrastructure and Environment Committee meeting on the impact that COVID-19 has had on waste collection and litter in greenspaces and parks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager of Solid Waste Management Services recommends that:

1. The Infrastructure and Environment Committee receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The cost of COVID-19 related parks waste and litter activities in the amount of \$273,418 was absorbed within Solid Waste Management Services' 2020 Operating Budget.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on July 9, 2020, Infrastructure and Environment Committee adopted item IE14.14 entitled "Increased Litter in Greenspaces and Parks" which directs the General Manager, Solid Waste Management Services, to report to the Infrastructure and

Environment Committee on the impact that COVID-19 has had on waste collection and litter.

Infrastructure and Environment Committee Decision document can be viewed at:
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.IE14.14>

COMMENTS

Solid Waste Management Services Collections and Litter Operations Overview

With the onset of warmer weather and during a season when many residents would normally be taking vacations outside the City, Torontonians are actively using the greenspaces that are available close-at-hand and taking this opportunity to holiday in their own backyard. At the same time, there has been an increase in littering in greenspaces and parks.

Solid Waste Management Services (SWMS) Collections and Litter Operations is responsible for maintaining the cleanliness of the public right of way and providing waste collection services to all of the City's public space bins along main arterial roads, parks and parkettes. This is done by the SWMS Litter Operations and Parks Collection units.

SWMS Litter Operations performs cleaning of the public right of way using manual efforts (i.e. staff with bag and broom) and mechanical clean up (i.e. sidewalk sweepers, litter vacuums, back pack blowers, specialized pick-up trucks and pressure washers). This unit is responsible for litter collection along major arterial streets, sidewalks and laneways as well as the collection of waste (garbage and recyclables) from public space litter bins located within the public right of way. There are approximately 10,000 public space litter bins across the City that are part of the City's coordinated Street Furniture Program under contract with Astral Media. SWMS Litter Operations is a seven-day a week, 20-hours a day operation.

SWMS Parks Collections performs automated collection of waste bins within parks and parkettes across the City. This includes the collection, maintenance and installation of more than 10,000 garbage and recycling bins, and continued roll-out of organic waste bins in more than 1,500 greenspaces, parks and parkettes.

SWMS actively monitors waste and litter tonnages and associated 311 Service Requests for forecasting and analysis to ensure service levels are maintained.

Impact of COVID-19 on waste and litter greenspaces and parks

COVID-19 had an initial impact on the amount of waste and litter generation in greenspaces and parks, more notably in certain areas of the city such as larger parks in the downtown core (e.g. Trinity Bellwoods) and along the waterfront (e.g. Woodbine Beach). COVID-19 restrictions for public access to these spaces as of March 26, 2020, resulted in lower than normal amounts of waste and litter in April and May. As re-opening of greenspaces and parks occurred in the last week of May, there was a

notable increase in their use and a corresponding increase in waste and litter tonnages. During this time, due to high levels of contamination found in the recycling bins in parks and litter bin recycling compartments such as organics and improperly sorted waste, all waste from public space recycling bins has been collected as garbage. Due to the quality of the recyclables being collected from all public space bins, these materials could not be directed to recycling and were sent to landfill.

Table 1 illustrates the tonnages of waste collected by SWMS Parks Collections in greenspaces and parks on a monthly basis for comparison from 2016 to 2020.

Table 1: Collected tonnages of waste in greenspaces and parks

Year	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	Total
2016	229	198	221	294	449	473	600	2,463
2017	238	185	211	314	405	449	620	1,804
2018	244	194	229	303	469	521	639	1,977
2019	234	175	240	337	439	488	668	1,916
2020	243	173	282	273	321	581	639	1,796

Table 2 illustrates the tonnages of waste collected by SWMS Litter Operations from litter bins on a monthly basis for comparison from 2016 to 2020. Overall, the tonnages of litter found in street bins are consistent with historical levels.

Table 2: Collected tonnages of waste from litter bins

Year	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	Total
2016	343	336	401	419	496	495	532	3,021
2017	368	344	422	463	468	517	508	3,089
2018	392	303	375	381	483	447	413	2,794
2019	286	271	349	386	459	448	466	2,666
2020	367	346	323	267	342	417	469	2,532

Increase in SWMS 311 service requests for litter in greenspaces and parks

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in 311 SWMS Parks Operations Service Requests compared to the same period last year in the months of April, May, June and July with June and July showing a 68 percent increase and an 8 percent increase respectively. The most common complaint from residents is

overflowing waste bins and litter in greenspaces and parks which is captured as a "Bin Overflowing" service request code.

Table 3: 311 Service Requests from SWMS Parks Operations waste related complaints

Year	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	Total
2016	17	10	12	36	47	47	52	221
2017	21	4	14	33	29	43	84	228
2018	24	8	22	12	64	89	95	314
2019	30	25	39	37	44	89	132	396
2020	14	15	22	60	57	149	143	460

Redistribution of SWMS Collections and Litter Operations resources to address litter along the Waterfront

In response to the increased usage of greenspaces and parks throughout the day, SWMS has added 356 additional waste bins in various high priority Parks across the City. As part of normal operations, SWMS deploys small, automated collection vehicles early in the morning to these areas. However, in order to deal with the overflowing waste bins and litter, SWMS has needed to schedule a new dedicated afternoon shift to service the new waterfront bins.

During high pedestrian-traffic times along the waterfront SWMS uses non-mechanical, manual efforts to keep the waterfront parks clean. This mitigates any risk to the public associated with using automated collection vehicles. Staff resources were redistributed to provide the above service enhancement and assigned to a new afternoon shift. Duties include manual litter picking around and between waste bins, collecting overflow bags, and replacing full bins with empty bins.

Increased costs in SWMS Parks Collection and Litter Operations

SWMS estimates that from March to the end of July, there has been approximately \$145,614 in costs as a result of increased service demands to manage litter within City greenspaces and parks during the pandemic. A breakdown of costs is provided below in Table 4.

Table 4: SWMS Litter and Parks Operations Costs

Area	Description	# Staff Hours	Cost to Date
Litter	Additional early morning mechanical cleaning services of Eastern Beaches Parking Lots and section of the Martin Goodman Recreation Trail (as of August 10, performed by City staff, seven (7) days a week, covering approximately eight (8) kilometers per day	186	\$18,257
Litter	Response to Service Requests to clean up littered face masks, gloves and requests from Emergency Command Centre, such as donation box clean-up (as of and up to August 13)	2,791	\$63,485
Litter	Costs associated with Lost Labour due to doctor recommended self-isolation and mandatory two (2) week self-isolation	1,392	\$35,385
Litter	Overtime hours for Labourers and Light Equipment Operators (as of June 21)	149	\$3,337
Parks	Overtime hours for Solid Waste Collection Operators (June 14 to July 17)	260	\$11,532
Parks	Reassignment of four (4) Diversion Program Assistants to manually service parks, five (5) hours/day, seven (7) days/week (June 21 to July 17)	540	\$13,618
TOTAL		5,318	\$145,614

SWMS projects anticipated costs of \$127,804 for the SWMS Parks Collections unit from July 23, 2020 to September 23, 2020 as a result of recalling ten seasonal Diversion Program Assistants on afternoon shifts to perform duties mentioned above in various high priority greenspaces and parks. This equates to an estimated total of \$273,418 in additional costs.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation Operations to Address Park Waste and Litter

Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR) and SWMS worked together to adjust service levels to address the increase of park waste and litter following the re-opening of greenspaces and parks in late May.

During the peak impacts of COVID-19 on parks waste and litter, PFR litter picking was enhanced in some parks and beaches to manage the considerable litter accumulation left behind. PFR continues to conduct litter picking in parks and beaches daily and work closely with SWMS to monitor and service park waste bins to ensure that the bins do not overflow and respond to litter hotspots across the city. Staff have prioritized litter

picking after weekends in areas that experienced high-pedestrian traffic and park visitors.

PFR installed 250 signs at waterfront park entrances and twenty-five "Do Not Litter" signs in parking lots along the Toronto waterfront to educate park visitors to not litter and to take their waste home if the City-provided park waste bins are full. The signs cite a City By-law that could result in a \$500 fine for littering in parks or beaches.

The City has also put out anti-littering messaging on its social media channels and included information about littering in numerous news releases.

In addition, PFR and SWMS worked with Strategic Communications to develop an anti-litter campaign with the goal of encouraging residents and visitors to keep Toronto's parks, beaches and public spaces clean by using the public waste and recycling bins available. The campaign, which ran from mid-August to mid-September, was funded equally by SWMS and PFR and included radio spots, paid social media and multilingual online advertising, among other tactics. The ads encouraged residents to use designated bins for waste and recycling or take their waste home if bins are full. The ads also highlighted the cost of litter clean-up and the fine for littering in parks and beaches and encouraged residents to bring reusable items when in parks and at beaches to help reduce waste.

Next steps and actions taken to continue litter abatement in greenspaces and parks

Continued Benchmarking and Tracking of Key Indicators of Program Success

SWMS will continue to use existing metrics to track programs and services that are in place to manage and support the abatement of litter in public spaces. Any new metrics identified will be added and tracked as new initiatives are implemented.

Waste Reduction

SWMS supports the waste hierarchy (i.e. reduce, reuse, recycle) as a tool to guide program and policy development. Source reduction is the most effective method to prevent litter. Although waste audits have not been undertaken, anecdotal visual inspections show that many items commonly found as litter are single-use items and not accepted in the City's Blue Bin recycling or Green Bin organics programs. Where feasible, SWMS will continue to promote the use of reusable items and encourage residents and businesses to reduce single-use and takeaway items (i.e. waste free picnics, encourage carrying of reusable water bottles, straws and cutlery etc.).

Clean Up Day - Rescheduled Provincial Day of Action on Litter

Over the last sixteen years, the Energy and Environment Division together with SWMS has been coordinating the City's annual spring cleanup weekend called "Clean Toronto Together". The City offers special litter collection to registered participants. This year's annual spring clean-up was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the City, with guidance from Toronto Public Health and in accordance with provincial

restrictions on gatherings, will be exploring ways on how it can support other clean up events such as the rescheduled Provincial Day of Action on Litter currently planned for the week of October 19, 2020.

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SIGNATURE

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