

March 25th, 2024

Re: IE12.1 - Post-Transition of the Blue Box Program to Extended Producer Responsibility and Results of District 2 Service Delivery Options Review

To Councillors and Committee members,

The Toronto Environmental Alliance is an environmental non-profit organization that has been advocating for zero waste policies and programs for over thirty years. We are asking Committee members to take action to prevent worsening environmental outcomes on waste collection, and protect and create good, green City of Toronto jobs.

The report in front of you highlights significant unresolved issues:

1. Gaps in Blue Box Collection caused by a shift away from City control
2. Lack of current capacity to reclaim public control of waste collections services in District 2

Both of these issues could cause worsening environmental outcomes, reduced quality of service for residents, and reduced oversight in meeting the City's waste reduction goals.

We ask that you direct and support Solid Waste staff to take the following actions:

- **Develop a plan for a public space recycling collection program in the event that producers do not establish an adequate system by 2026, which could leave Toronto with reduced public space recycling collection in time for FIFA games and events**
- **Identify and pursue solutions to prevent any other significant gaps in recycling collection for Toronto residents emerging as a result of the Blue Box transition**
- **Take the necessary steps to form a plan and build capacity to bring District 2 collection back into a City delivery model as quickly as feasible, and provide necessary support to staff to do so.**

1. Service Gaps in Blue Box Collection

The report highlights a serious potential gap in service resulting from the province's chaotic rollout of new regulations, noting that "presently, little is known about the producers' approach to establishing a public space recycling collection system and "It is also unknown at this time if the City will have any role in public space recycling as the Issuing Authority has yet to initiate a process for retaining this service."

The City currently provides service to many public spaces and ineligible locations under provincial regulations (like parks, playgrounds, transit stops, small commercial businesses, religious organizations, and City divisions, agencies, and corporations), as it is in the public interest to do so. The City will continue to serve many of these locations post-2026, but it is unclear how locations like civic squares, streetside litter bins, and other public spaces will receive sufficient recycling collection starting in 2026, and whether the City will be compensated by producers for

any of this significant additional Blue Box collection in the event that the City covers any gaps. This is doubly troubling due to the timing of the FIFA World Cup games, which will be bringing vast numbers of visitors to Toronto's public spaces and streets, with many of them needing to dispose of recyclable items like water bottles, takeout containers, etc.

There are currently no staff recommendations for how to move forward in the event that producers do not establish a public space recycling program. TEA strongly recommends adding a direction to Solid Waste staff (and appropriate supports) to:

- **Develop a plan for a public space recycling collection program which covers all currently served locations in the event that producers do not establish an adequate system by 2026, which could leave Toronto with reduced public space recycling collection in time for FIFA games and events**
- **Identify and pursue solutions to prevent any other significant gaps in recycling collection for Toronto residents emerging as a result of the Blue Box transition**

This highlights one of the major issues with private vs public delivery of collection services. As TEA has pointed out in previous submissions, the new provincial Blue Box regulation has major flaws and hands over significant control to private companies, but with big loopholes that could send Toronto's recycling rate backwards. Many private companies are continuing to push the Province to further weaken the regulations, which means many open questions about whether residents will see a decline in service quality heading into the future.

Public oversight and control has ensured for many years that gaps in private delivery have been filled, and ineligible locations have continued to receive a critical service necessary for meeting Toronto's waste diversion targets. However, private services following provincial regulations - out of the City's control - will have no such motivation to serve the public good and fill gaps left by a regulation with many loopholes and weak environmental targets. The City is now also in a position where they may have to cover collection costs for many public spaces, parks, playgrounds, small businesses, transit stops, etc. This is a confusing, costly and inefficient situation handed to the City by the province and private producers, who are supposed to now be responsible for collection costs. It is an important reminder of why more City control and oversight in District 2 would better serve the public interest.

The City of Toronto has also historically provided a strong resident education component as part of the Blue Box program in over 18 languages and in many forms. Due to weaknesses in the provincial regulations, private producers will only be required to do one education push per year in French and English, which raises questions about how reduced education will impact diversion and contamination rates.

We support continued City advocacy to the Province to fix the significant flaws in the regulation to close the loopholes, to raise the recycling targets and to provide details on how the regulation will be enforced. Without fixing these fundamental flaws, Toronto's recycling rate will not improve, and could go backwards, undermining our environmental progress and ability to achieve our climate targets.

2. Lack of current capacity to reclaim public control of waste collections services in District 2

The City has assessed performance and cost of waste collection in private and publicly delivered districts multiple times, most recently in a 2021 report. **There is consistent evidence to show that public delivery of waste collection is better for environmental oversight, and is delivered at similar cost while supporting higher-paying jobs.**

The report before you explores the feasibility of bringing District 2 service delivery back into City hands. The conclusions are that it would take significant time to build back the City's previous delivery capacity in this district. We believe that the environmental benefits of greater City oversight, plus the undeniable employment benefits of providing more good green jobs within the public sector, strongly justify taking the time to build back capacity, beginning with the actions staff have identified in the report to restore Ingram Yard to its previous role.

To do this, we recommend the Committee take the following action:

- **Direct and provide necessary support to Solid Waste Staff to form a plan and build capacity to bring District 2 collection back into City delivery as quickly as feasible.**

Advantages of bringing City waste collection back in house:

1. Public delivery gives the city more control, agency and oversight over a critical environmental service

The City is aiming to divert 70% of Toronto's waste away from landfill by 2026. This is not only important for reducing waste, but is a key part of Toronto's climate and environmental goals. Public sector delivery is better-positioned to provide appropriate oversight, quality control, and monitoring to reach this goal.

Close monitoring and strict enforcement are essential to ensure contractors are following the contract terms, and the City is getting good value while working towards effective waste diversion outcomes. However, private waste contracts in Toronto have not always been monitored in a consistent way and lack enforcement. Even when contractors have been found to break the rules over the years, they often do not face penalties. For example, In the first year of the contract to collect west of Yonge, [GFL was late with collection times 16.7% of the time](#) (excluding their first month and the late pick ups after the July 2013 storm). Yet, there were no penalties imposed on the contractor. In 2017, [a CityNews camera](#) caught a private waste hauler dumping a load of non-residential garbage at a City transfer station that was full of recyclables. The by-law prohibits and refuses 'mixed' waste loads like this one, yet the truck drove away without issue. There are also many concerning stories of private companies taking actions that undermine the City's waste diversion goals, including [combining recycling from private buildings with garbage](#), and posting improper signage.

[Recent analysis](#) has also shown lower numbers of service complaints in districts with public collection, and slightly higher waste diversion rate in these districts which contributes to better environmental outcomes. Although it will take time to build back In the long term public capacity to deliver waste collection in District 2, the environmental benefits of City delivery will make this worthwhile in the long-term. Now is the right time to invest in bringing these core services back into City hands while it's still possible. This will be the right move to maintain greater control and oversight over the City's waste reduction goals.

Sincerely,



Sarah Buchanan, Campaigns Director, Toronto Environmental Alliance