

Transition of the Blue Box Program to Extended Producer Responsibility: Preparation for January 2026 Collection

Date: November 25, 2025

To: Infrastructure and Environment Committee

From: General Manager, Solid Waste Management Services

Wards: All

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide the Infrastructure and Environment Committee with an update on correspondence between Solid Waste Management Services staff and Circular Materials pertaining to supplemental recycling collection in January 2026 for residents impacted by the system optimization schedule change in Districts 2 and 3.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager of Solid Waste Management Services recommends that the Infrastructure and Environment Committee receive the report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial impacts arising from the adoption of this report.

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

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on November 12 and 13, 2025, City Council adopted item IE25.2 entitled "Transition of the Blue Box Program to Extended Producer Responsibility: Post-Transition Plan". Amongst other decisions, City Council direct the General Manager,

Solid Waste Management Services, to request Circular Materials to add additional trucks on City Collection days in January 2026 to ensure no disruption of service to residents and should Circular Materials not agree to this request to work with the Executive Director, Customer Experience and the Chief Communications Officer to include information on the request and refusal by Circular Materials in the City's communications about the Extended Producer Responsibility Transition, and report to the December 4, 2025, meeting of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee on the results.

The City Council Decision document can be viewed at:

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.IE25.2>

At its meeting on July 23 and 24, 2025, City Council adopted item IE23.2 entitled "Joint Collection Schedule Discussions with Circular Materials". Amongst other decisions, City Council requested the General Manager, Solid Waste Management Services, to report to the September 26, 2025, meeting of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee on the following:

- a. key messages for the shift of the Blue Box program away from the City collection including clear public messaging for City Councillors on the shift of the Blue Box program away from City collection;
- b. planned advertising venues and earned media related to the shift of the Blue Box program away from City collection;
- c. a clear plan for what would happen when bins are left uncollected in January 2026, and snow storm contingency for collection;
- d. a possible pilot looking for Blue Box contamination earlier than January 1, 2026; and
- e. a clear communication plan for first 3 months of January 2026 that explains the changes in the Blue Box program and why this has happened.

The City Council Decision document can be viewed at:

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.IE23.2>

At its meeting on April 23 and 24, 2025, City Council adopted item IE20.5 entitled "Transition of the Blue Box Program to Extended Producer Responsibility: Post-Transition Update". Amongst other decisions, City Council directed the General Manager, Solid Waste Management Services, to explore the feasibility of a collaborative cost-shared joint calendar with Circular Materials for 2026.

The City Council Decision document can be viewed at:

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.IE20.5>

At its meeting on April 17 and 18, 2024, City Council adopted item IE12.1 entitled "Post-Transition of the Blue Box Program to Extended Producer Responsibility and Results of District 2 Service Delivery Options Review". Amongst other decisions, City Council

directed the General Manager, Solid Waste Management Services to implement curbside collection routing changes as a result of no longer collecting eligible Blue Box materials to re-optimize collection services and to investigate potential efficiencies and synergies within collections and litter operations and return to Council for direction as required.

The City Council Decision document can be viewed at:

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.IE12.1>

COMMENTS

As a direct result of the transition of the Blue Box Program to Extended Producer Responsibility and Circular Materials' decision to not contract the City to provide curbside recycling collection services in 2026, City staff and fleet resources will become unbalanced in 2026, resulting in an inefficient system. At their April 17 and 18, 2024 meeting, City Council directed staff to "implement curbside collection routing changes as a result of no longer collecting eligible Blue Box materials to re-optimize collection services and to investigate potential efficiencies and synergies within collections and litter operations".¹

City of Toronto and Circular Materials Correspondence Pertaining to Supplemental Recycling Collection in January 2026

In response to this impact and City Council's direction, City staff examined alternative collection approaches that would improve efficiency while minimizing impacts to residents. A route optimization operational analysis was conducted and a switch in collection week for garbage and recycling for approximately 125,000 households in Districts 2 and 3 was deemed an operationally and financially worthwhile endeavour. This change, brought forth to City Council for consideration at their April 23 and 24, 2025 meeting, will realize an approximate savings of \$7 million dollars for District 3 and an estimated \$5 million dollars for District 2 over a 5-year period.² Please see Attachment 1 for a map of District 2 and District 3 affected areas.

Prior to bringing this forward to City Council in April 2025, staff engaged Circular Materials on matching the City's operational changes and switching recycling collection to alternate weeks. This change would minimize congestion at the curb and maintain the alternating weeks of garbage and blue box collection to which residents are very accustomed. On April 9, 2025, Circular Materials provided written confirmation that their contractor could accommodate the change in collection week for recycling for approximately 125,000 households in Districts 2 and 3.

1. April 17 and 18, 2024, City Council Decision Document, Item – 2024.IE12.1:
<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.IE12.1>

2 April 23 and 24, 2025, City Council Decision Document, Item - 2025.IE20.5:
<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.IE20.5>

To ensure no household goes three (3) weeks without garbage collection during the scheduling change, the City will provide additional garbage collection, only as needed for impacted households, to assist with the change from January 2 until January 7, 2026. In addition, on-street outreach efforts will occur throughout January 2026 to ensure residents understand why the change is happening and comply with material set out instructions.

On October 31, 2025, Solid Waste Management Services sent a letter to Circular Materials, imploring them to provide supplemental residential recycling collection to impacted residences in Districts 2 and 3 in January 2026 to ensure customer service needs are met. Please see Attachment 2 for a copy of the letter.

Circular Materials responded on November 7, 2025, indicating their plan to provide supplemental recycling collection to impacted residents on Friday January 2, Saturday January 3, and Monday January 5, 2026. Please see Attachment 3 for a copy of the letter. City staff commended Circular Materials' commitment to providing supplemental recycling collection to impacted residences on January 2 – 3, 2026, to ensure impacted households do not wait more than 2 weeks between recycling collections. However, City staff noted in Circular Materials' plan to provide supplemental recycling collection on Monday January 5, 2026, for 31,496 residences in Districts 2 and 3.

The City has not provided curbside collection on a Monday in many years and there was concern that this action may add confusion for residents at a critical juncture in the post-transition phase when Circular Materials' contractor takes over collection of Blue Box Materials from all eligible sources in the city.

Unfortunately, the Blue Box Regulation³ does not require producers to match the collection days provided by the municipality prior to transition, so the City sent a subsequent letter to Circular Materials on November 13, 2025, expressing these concerns and recommended providing overtime collections between January 6 and January 9, 2026 instead of on Monday January 5, 2026, as residents are not accustomed to placing their materials at the curb on this day of the week. Please see Attachment 4 for a copy of this letter.

Simultaneously, City Council provided direction to staff at their November 12 and 13, 2025 meeting for:

"the General Manager, Solid Waste Management Services, to request Circular Materials to add additional trucks on City Collection days in January 2026 to ensure no disruption of service to residents and should Circular Materials not agree to this request to work with the Executive Director, Customer Experience and the Chief Communications Officer to include information on the request and refusal by Circular Materials in the City's communications about the Extended Producer Responsibility Transition, and report to the December 4, 2025, meeting of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee on the results."

³ <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/210391#BK1>

After further discussions, Circular Materials provided a response to City staff on November 25, 2025, confirming their ability to provide supplemental recycling collection to impacted households through the first collection cycle on January 2, 3, 6, and 7, 2026, as per the City's request. This will ensure the transition to the new collection schedule proceeds as smoothly as possible. Please see Attachment 5 for a copy of this letter.

Next Steps

Solid Waste Management Services will work closely with the Communications and Customer Experience Divisions to inform impacted residents in Districts 2 and 3 of changes to their collection schedule and support them through this change by providing supplementary collection of garbage. If a resident places their recycling bin at the curb and a missed collection results, they are to contact Circular Materials' customer call centre (the phone number on their recycling bin). If the resident inadvertently calls 311 for a missed recycling collection, they will be advised that the City no longer manages the Blue Box Program, due to a change in Provincial regulation, before transferring them to Circular Materials' customer call centre for response.

Staff are committed to supporting residents through the change with the following actions:

- Residents will be informed of the change in advance, so they are aware of the unique circumstances;
- Members of Council and 311 will be provided with key messages to assist with responding to such enquiries that arise in early 2026; and
- A dedicated Customer Care Team call centre has been established, and staff will be in the field on collection days to assist residents navigate this change and comply with their new collection schedule.

CONTACT

Charlotte Ueta, Director (Acting), Policy, Planning & Outreach, Solid Waste Management Services, Telephone: 416-392-8506, Fax 416-392-4754, Email: Charlotte.Ueta@toronto.ca

Michael Skaljin, Project Director (Acting), Business Transformation, Extended Producer Responsibility, Policy, Planning & Outreach, Solid Waste Management Services, Telephone: 416-392-8517, Fax: 416-392-4754, Email: Michael.Skaljin@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Matt Keliher
General Manager
Solid Waste Management Services

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: D2 and D3 Affected Areas Map

Attachment 2: October 31, 2025 Letter to Circular Materials Regarding Supplemental Recycling Collection

Attachment 3: November 7, 2025, Letter from Circular Materials Regarding Supplemental Recycling Collection

Attachment 4: November 13, 2025, Letter to Circular Materials Regarding Supplemental Recycling Collection

Attachment 5: November 21, 2025, Subsequent Letter from Circular Materials to the City Regarding Supplemental Recycling Collection