

NOTICE OF MOTION

Addressing Recycling in Public Spaces

Moved by: Councillor Lily Cheng

Seconded by: Councillor Paula Fletcher

SUMMARY:

Approximately 15,000 recycling receptacles (Blue Bins) are located in public spaces across the City of Toronto. Under the terms of the provincial takeover of Ontario's Blue Bin (paper and packaging recycling system), the materials deposited in these bins are no longer collected or processed as part of the Blue Bin recycling program. Instead, the contents are collected as solid waste and combined with garbage for disposal in landfill sites. Toronto also has high contamination rates in these receptacles, which means recycling rates in public bins have long been reduced in our city.

This disconnect between public perception and operational reality undermines trust and transparency. Many residents reasonably believe that putting their recyclables into Blue Bins and receptacles labelled as recycling in public spaces contributes to waste diversion and environmental protection. If those materials are instead disposed of as garbage, the continued presence of recycling infrastructure in these spaces may mislead the public and may undermine support for recycling and the circular economy more generally. In addition, substantial quantities of valuable and genuinely recyclable materials (such as aluminum cans and PET bottles) will go to landfill instead of being reused.

Accordingly, this Motion requests that Council direct the General Manager of Solid Waste Management Services to explore cost-effective options for restoring targeted recycling in public places, or whether to remove all recycling infrastructure from public spaces in the interest of transparent and truthful waste collection practices. It further requests that the City advocate to the Province of Ontario for practical ways to better manage Blue Box materials when people are away from home, to boost recycling and reduce litter.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. City Council requests the City Manager, in coordination with the Deputy City Manager, Infrastructure Services and General Manager, Solid Waste Management Services in their analysis for bin procurement to replace Astral bins, consider procurement of litter-only bins with no recycling infrastructure, instead transitioning to a 'carry-in, carry-out' model

that encourages users to take their recyclables home with a report back to the appropriate committee when the plan for bin procurement is reported back.

2. City Council requests the General Manager, Solid Waste Management Services, to report back to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee in 2027 with an updated strategy for public space recycling and food packaging litter reduction in Toronto, including the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of one or more of:
 - a. Targeted receptacles in high-traffic locations that accept only valuable and genuinely recyclable materials (e.g. aluminum cans and PET bottles), such as reverse vending machines or smart-bin technology;
 - b. Incentive Programs successfully utilized in other jurisdictions; and
 - c. Other options that will reduce litter and landfilling of food packaging, including those identified [in the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks 2019 Discussion Paper on Reducing Litter and Waste in our Communities](#).

3. Council Council request the Provincial Government to:
 - a. re-introducing public space recycling obligations within O. Reg 391/21: Blue Box; and
 - b. requiring retail establishments to:
 - i. allow consumers to de-package products onsite upon purchase, and
 - ii. deliver the any Blue Bin materials from that packaging into the provincially-mandated Blue Bin recycling system.

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