



## **A WASTE MANAGEMENT AGENDA FOR THE NEW OTTAWA COUNCIL**

**AUGUST 27, 2018**

*Waste Watch Ottawa is a locally based environmental advocacy group that is committed to the promotion of waste management, recycling and composting best practices and the overall improvement of the City's environmental performance. More information on WWO may be found on our website at: [Waste Watch Ottawa](http://www.wastewatchottawa.ca)*

### Key priorities and actions for early adoption by the new Council

The new Council needs to address Ottawa's lacklustre recycling and green bin programs to ensure that more of our municipal waste is diverted from landfill disposal. Our municipality trails most other cities in Ontario and action is needed to make our City an environmental leader and to extend the life expectancy of the City's Trail Road landfill.

Ottawa's current programs are lagging behind and do not follow proven best practices adopted elsewhere. Waste management and improved diversion from disposal should be identified as high priorities for the 2019 – 2022 term of Council with the following being undertaken as soon as possible:

- Set a target to divert 65% of waste to recycling and composting by the end of the Council term in October 2022;
- Rescind the previous Council's decision to allow non-compostable plastic bags in the green bin;
- Triple spending on promotion and education for the recycling and green bin programs to a level commensurate with that of other large Ontario municipalities;
- In multi-residential buildings, require green bin composting and make a concerted effort to improve recycling program performance;
- Plan to implement a partial or full user pay system for garbage, to require clear garbage bags and to reduce the number of bags/bins of garbage that can be set out bi-weekly for collection; and
- Act now to engage residents in constructive consultations and action.

### Ottawa's poor waste recycling and composting performance

Ottawa diverts a smaller percentage of waste from disposal than the other major Ontario municipalities. Ottawa's blue and black box recycling program and its green bin organics program all perform poorly. According to 2016 provincial data through these programs the City only diverted 44% of the total residential waste collected, whereas leading municipalities regularly divert over 50% and the best are achieving rates in excess of 60%.

While the City's Trail Road landfill site has capacity to take waste until around 2045 there is no reason to relax and fill the site with more waste than is absolutely necessary. Finding an acceptable site and

getting approvals to construct any new landfill or waste disposal facility could easily take at least a decade and cost in excess of \$250 million. This assumes that a new site within City boundaries or close by can be found at all, which is highly questionable. Starting now, each 1% point improvement in Ottawa's poor waste diversion performance would from 2045 onwards add 1 additional year of life expectancy to the Trail Road landfill. A move from the current 45% to 65% diversion would allow the site to operate until 2065. This is significant given that Trail Road is an essential and likely irreplaceable piece of municipal infrastructure.

Nothing was done to improve the performance of recycling and green bin programs over the last term of Council. The last significant improvement in the overall waste management program took place in 2012 with the adoption of bi-weekly garbage pickup. Since then programs have languished with very low spending on promotion and education; indeed, the lowest spending among comparable municipalities. There has been sparse attention to multi-residential buildings, including a failure to require participation in the green bin program. In addition there have been almost no new programs and operational innovations modelled after changes that have been tested and proven to work in many other municipalities, where recycling and composting performance are considerably better than in Ottawa.

#### A Path Ahead for Increased Waste Diversion

Diverting 65% of all residential waste would bring Ottawa into line with the current performance of York Region, the leading municipality in the province, and into line with waste plan targets of many other municipalities. Significantly improving diversion rates over the 4 years of the next term of council will require dedication and effort but by adopting proven program approaches and limiting easy access to garbage collection and disposal such a target could be met.

Allowing non-compostable plastic bags in the green bin program starting in 2019 will compromise compost quality, endorse and facilitate distribution of plastics in the environment at a time when there is widespread concern about the environmental impacts of plastics, and will have little if any impact on program participation and tonnages collected.

The former Council adopted a do-nothing stance on waste diversion programs based on the argument that the province was redesigning both the funding and operation of the blue and black box programs. Provincial changes stalled last winter and there is no clear indication what direction the new government will be taking or more importantly how long whatever new direction is settled upon will take to play out.

The City should aggressively work to improve program performance now, even in the face of uncertainties at the provincial level. Other municipalities in Ontario are not waiting for signals or action from the new Provincial government. Over the past years municipalities have worked to enhance and further develop their waste diversion programs because they understand that it serves their best interests. Ottawa should do the same, to better serve the interests of all residents and to contribute to the City's overall environmental performance.

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