

WASTE WATCH OTTAWA

NEWS RELEASE

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Ottawa is Moving Backwards with Its Proposed Changes to the Green Bin Program

Allowing Plastic Bags and Dog Waste will Create Problems and Reduce Compost Quality

Ottawa, March 24, 2018

Waste Watch Ottawa (WVO), a resident-led group, opposes the proposed changes to the City's organics composting contract with Orgaworld, and will appear before the City's Environment and Climate Protection Committee on Monday March 26.

WVO disagrees with the draft proposals to permit plastic bags and dog waste in the green bin. The recommendations will create unnecessary problems for the green bin program and will downgrade the quality of the compost that is produced. Plastic bag liners might help to improve participation but at an unacceptably high environmental price. Indeed, there are much better ways to divert organic materials from the residual garbage stream.

"The City should promote the use of certified compostable plant-based paper or plastic bags, and under no circumstances should regular plastic garbage bags or grocery sacks be put in the green bin", said Duncan Bury, spokesperson for WVO. Dog waste should not be allowed in green bins either Bury said. "Dog waste will exacerbate the plastic bag problem and will create an odour problem at the composting plant that will require significant capital investment and management to address".

"Allowing non-biodegradable plastic bag liners will create operational challenges at the existing composting plant. You can never remove 100% of the bags and the resulting shredded plastic persists forever. Microplastics is a well recognized global pollution problem that harms many creatures - earthworms and sea life alike" according to Bury and his colleagues at WVO.

WVO notes that the resulting lower quality compost will require labelling according to the [Ontario Compost Quality Standards](#), and the staff report readily admits that the compost quality will be reduced from the highest quality level of AA:

"the addition of plastic bags and dog waste, will, if approved, change the finished material from AA (unrestricted use) compost to beneficial use products, such as compost and non-agricultural source material "(Source Separation Program Update report, page 14).

Certified compostable plant based paper or plastic bags facilitate meeting the highest compost quality standard, are widely marketed by a number of brand owners and manufacturers and are clearly labelled. Even if the bags do not completely break down during the processing time at the compost plant they will do so in short order and are not an environmental problem. Compostable bags are

currently widely accepted and promoted in other green bin programs including the Regions of Peel, Halton, Waterloo, Niagara and Durham, and Hamilton, Kingston and Guelph.

WWO argues that the city needs to invest significantly more money and effort to encourage participation in the green bin program. WWO wants this to be done sooner rather than later. The green bin program should be actively promoted now, rather than waiting until 2019, as City staff recommend. In particular the City needs to spend more time and effort to get green bins into multi-residential units. Some progress has been made on this but not enough.

[WWO's report of September 2017](#) identified two much more effective ways to increase organics waste diversion – **full and partial user-pay systems** and **clear bag programs**. Both of these approaches have been used successfully by many other municipalities and have been proven to push more materials into the organics and recycling programs and out of the garbage stream. Waste Watch Ottawa is also concerned that the changes are being put forward for quick approval without any real public input. The package has also been described as being non-negotiable, to settle a lingering arbitration dispute with Orgaworld. However appealing it might be to finally turn the page on the contractual mess, this proposed deal does not make the best long term environmental sense. Bill Toms of WWO stated that “the public should also be concerned that information sent to Councillors by Legal Counsel and apparently seen by the Ottawa Citizen has not been made available to the public. Residents/taxpayers should not be distracted by the apparently small 15 cent per month extra cost.”

Waste Watch Ottawa calls on Councillors to completely re-think the Green Bin proposals being considered. Duncan Bury stated that “the City made the right choice at the outset of the green bin program to prohibit plastic bags and not to allow dog waste, and those policies should be maintained”.

Waste Watch Ottawa will be expressing its concerns with the proposed changes to the City's source separated organics program at the Monday March 26th meeting of the Environment and Climate Protection Committee at 9:30 in the Champlain Room at City Hall.

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