

WASTE WATCH OTTAWA PRESENTATION

SOURCE SEPARATED ORGANICS / GREEN BIN PROGRAM

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION WATER AND WASTE MANAGEMENT (EPWWM) COMMITTEE MEETING

MONDAY MAY 17, 2021

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK TO THIS ITEM. I AM HERE TODAY REPRESENTING WASTE WATCH OTTAWA.

IN REVIEWING THE STATUS OF THE ORGANICS PROGRAM I WOULD URGE YOU TO FOCUS YOUR ATTENTION MORE ON THE ACTUAL COLLECTION AND PARTICIPATION DATA CITED IN THE STAFF REPORT AND LESS ON THE SURVEY DATA REPORTED ON BY HILL AND KNOWLTON WHICH CONCENTRATES MORE ON PERCEPTIONS, ASPIRATIONS AND OPINIONS AND LESS ON THE FACTS ON THE GROUND.

THE STAFF REPORT SHOWS WHAT COULD BE DESCRIBED, AT BEST, AS A MODEST IMPROVEMENT IN BOTH THE TONNAGES OF ORGANICS COLLECTED AND IN THE PARTICIPATION RATE IN THE PROGRAM. HOWEVER, THE STAFF REPORT STATES THAT THE PANDEMIC HAD AN INFLUENCE ON INCREASED WASTE GENERATION BOTH HERE IN OTTAWA AND IN MOST OTHER MUNICIPALITIES IN ONTARIO AND ELSEWHERE ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

I WOULD THEREFORE URGE CAUTION IN READING TOO MUCH INTO THE NUMBERS PRESENTED.

THE REPORT SHOWS AN INCREASE IN TONNAGE DELIVERED TO CONVERTUS OF 4.0% IN 2019 OVER 2018 AND 6.1% IN 2020 OVER 2019. IT ALSO SHOWS THAT THE PROPORTION OF HOUSEHOLDS PUTTING OUT A GREEN BIN FOR CURBSIDE COLLECTION ROSE TO 58% IN 2020 FROM 50% IN 2018. THIS SHOWS SOME PROGRESS BUT MORE THAN 40% OF OTTAWA RESIDENTS ARE STILL NOT WILLING OR ABLE TO ACCESS THE GREEN BIN PROGRAM AND THIS IS CLEARLY A PROBLEM. IN ADDITION THE CITY'S WASTE DIVERSION RATE HAS ONLY CREPT UP TO 46% IN 2020 FROM 43% IN 2018. WE NEED TO GET TO OVER 60% TO MATCH THE PERFORMANCE OF LEADING MUNICIPALITIES.

THE HILL AND KNOWLTON STUDY IS USEFUL IN IDENTIFYING THE CHALLENGES. IT SHOWS FOR EXAMPLE THAT THERE WAS A STUBBORN 18 - 19% OF RESPONDENTS WHO HATE USING THE GREEN BIN AND DON'T THINK RECYCLING AND THE GREEN BIN DO MUCH FOR THE ENVIRONMENT. IT ALSO SHOWS THAT THE SUPPOSED "YUCK" FACTOR THAT WAS A MAJOR CONSIDERATION BEHIND THE DECISION TO ALLOW PLASTIC BAG LINERS IS NOT REALLY A BIG ISSUE AT ALL. ONLY 8% OF RESPONDENTS SAID IT WAS A PROBLEM. NOT HAVING A GREEN BIN, INCONVENIENCE, TOO MUCH TROUBLE, BUGS AND VERMIN AND UNCERTAINTY ABOUT WHAT GOES INTO THE BIN WERE TOGETHER MORE IMPORTANT CONSTRAINTS CITED BY 61% OF RESPONDENTS.

THE CITY'S EFFORTS TO IMPROVE GREEN BIN ACCESS FOR MULTI-RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS APPEARS TO BE SHOWING SOME SUCCESS ALTHOUGH AGAIN THERE IS A LONG WAY TO GO. DESPITE SOME PROGRESS 2/3 RDS OF MULTI-RESIDENTIAL UNITS STILL DID NOT HAVE ACCESS TO THE PROGRAM.

WASTE WATCH OTTAWA CONTINUES TO HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT THE QUALITY OF THE COMPOST BEING PRODUCED BY THE PROGRAM. WHILE THE ADDITION OF PLASTIC BIN LINERS MAY HAVE HAD SOME SMALL IMPACT ON PARTICIPATION IT HAS AT THE SAME TIME CREATED A PROCESSING CHALLENGE AND NEW COSTS. THE BAGS HAVE TO BE REMOVED AND RECOVERING ALL OF THE PLASTICS IS NEXT TO IMPOSSIBLE. THE REPORT STATES THAT IN JANUARY 2021 THAT PLASTICS OF MORE THAN 2.8 MM IN SIZE – THE QUALITY STANDARD - REPRESENTED ONLY 0.11 % OF THE COMPOST PRODUCED AT THE PLANT. THIS SOUNDS LIKE A SMALL NUMBER BUT OVER THE TOTAL 85,000 TONNES OF ORGANICS DELIVERED IT COULD TRANSLATE TO APPROXIMATELY 90 TONNES OF PLASTIC BITS IN THE COMPLETED COMPOST. LOOKED AT ANOTHER WAY, AND USING US EPA WEIGHT TO VOLUME ESTIMATES, THIS 90 TONNES IS EQUIVALENT TO AROUND 5,500 CU YDS OF LOOSE PLASTIC LDPE FILM, GROCERY AND GARBAGE BAGS. SURELY WE CAN DO BETTER.

THE REPORT CITES THE TONNAGE OF ORGANICS DELIVERED TO CONVERTUS BUT IT DOES NOT REPORT ON THE TONNAGE OF PLASTIC WASTE AND OTHER DETRITUS WHICH IS SCREENED OUT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE COMPOSTING PROCESS AND ULTIMATELY DISPOSED OF. THESE NUMBERS ARE ESSENTIAL TO ASSESS THE TRUE IMPACT OF THE DECISION TO ALLOW PLASTIC BAGS. SAYING THAT THE COMPOST MEETS NON AGRICULTURAL SOURCED MATERIAL (NASM) STANDARDS IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH.

IN CONCLUSION, PROMOTION AND EDUCATION CAN ONLY GET YOU SO FAR IN ENCOURAGING MORE USE OF THE GREEN BIN. ULTIMATELY COMMITTEE AND COUNCIL ARE GOING TO HAVE TO RESTRUCTURE THE WASTE MANAGEMENT

SYSTEM TO MAKE HOUSEHOLDS MORE DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WASTE THEY GENERATE AND FOR THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE ORGANICS AND RECYCLING PROGRAMS.

USER PAY SYSTEMS HAVE BEEN PROVEN TO PROVIDE THAT NECESSARY INCENTIVE AND WE ARE HOPEFUL THAT THE NEXT ROUND OF THE SOLID WASTE MASTER PLAN WILL CITE USER PAY AS AN EFFECTIVE WASTE DIVERSION STRATEGY AND THAT ULTIMATELY COUNCIL WILL ADOPT SUCH A SYSTEM. WASTE WATCH OTTAWA STRONGLY BELIEVES THAT USER PAY WILL DRIVE A MUCH LARGER IMPROVEMENT IN THE ORGANICS PROGRAM THAN SHOWN TO DATE. A USER PAY SYSTEM WILL ALSO SERVE TO EXTEND THE LIFE OF THE TRAIL ROAD LANDFILL WHICH IS LIKELY AN IRREPLACEABLE ASSET THAT MUST BE JEALOUSLY GUARDED.