

Green bins in condos: A city how-to

Ambitious plan will make Toronto a leader in waste diversion, says De Baeremaeker

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An ambitious plan that will bring the city's successful green bin system to apartment and condo dwellers has been drafted to help Toronto divert 70 per cent of garbage from landfill by 2010.

"It's the environmentalist's holy grail," works committee chair Glenn De Baeremaeker said yesterday of the report, to be presented to council's executive committee May 28 and to city council June 20 for final approval.

"How do you actually get apartments to use the green bin? How do you get them to divert more than 13 per cent of their waste? It's all in that document: costs, numbers, programs, everything ... it's complete," he added.

De Baeremaeker said the plan, a major policy document by city staff in the solid-waste management and finance sections, will put Toronto on the map as "the North American leader in terms of waste diversion. And we'll have nothing left to burn."

Last year, 42 per cent of garbage from single-family homes and multi-unit buildings was diverted from landfill.

Key elements aimed at increasing that figure to 70 per cent – 250,000 tonnes of new diversion – include:

- Green bin collection for multi-residential buildings on a city-wide basis, phased in over 18 months, beginning in mid-2008.
- Introducing variously sized wheeled "Blue Carts" for houses, starting next March. The largest holds as much as six current blue boxes.
- Adding new materials such as plastic bags and polystyrene to the blue cart recycling program.
- Creating a so-called "garbage tax," or user pay system, beginning July 1, 2008. Homeowners would be charged based on the volume of non-organic waste left at the curb.
- Developing centres to recycle and disassemble old electronics, and a new program for curbside pickup of bulky items like mattresses.
- Providing enough blue carts to make recycling in residential highrises easier. Instead of one recycling area – typically in the basement – blue carts could be placed in more areas, perhaps one per floor, city staff say.

"When you look at the green bin program, when it rolled out we had 95 per cent of the homes participating in the very first week. We had a massive uptake by the public," De Baeremaeker said.

"The biggest complaint I get today is people from apartment buildings, who say how come I don't have a green bin? I don't want to throw my banana peels into the garbage," he added.

With regard to the "garbage tax," a typical single-family house with a curbside container that holds three bags would pay, after a special grant kicks in, \$101 per year for garbage collection – \$50 less

per year than for a four-bag container, but \$60 more than a house using a container holding 1 1/2 bags.

There would also be a single-bag bin.

Because of the complexities of the property tax system, the city is precluded from removing the entire \$183 million waste disposal budget from property taxes, as was proposed earlier. A short-term solution suggested in the report is to set up a grant program, whereby the city would give credits or rebates to homeowners to offset the \$183 million in taxes collected for waste disposal.

Whatever system is adopted, the plan is to have garbage collection fees added to water bills, said Rob Orpin, director of collection services in the solid-waste management department.

It will cost \$54 million to start up the new garbage system, including the cost of containers and retrofitting trucks, an amount to be phased in over the coming years.

De Baeremaeker called the 70 per cent diversion target "insanely ambitious," but added that he thinks the public is, so far, ahead of politicians on the issue. "I think the public is so willing that we can do it. Maybe we'll only end up at 68 or 69 per cent, but I think (it can be done)."

"We know Torontonians want to do this stuff," said Stuart Green, spokesperson for Mayor David Miller, who was out of town yesterday. "If everybody does their thing, recycles and green bins, we can keep the cost neutral for the smallest user," he said, referring to the user-pay collection system.

"As you go up in bin size, obviously the amount goes up. The impact for the average family works out to about \$50 for the year, \$1 a week."