

York trash plan causes a stink

Vaughan and 6 other York Region municipalities reduce garbage collection to every two weeks

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When former Toronto resident Benny Gentile moved into his new Vaughan home two years ago, he was willing to pay higher property taxes, so long as he got more in the way of services.

One was the luxury of weekly garbage collection, a privilege long gone from Toronto and Durham Region municipalities such as Ajax, Pickering, Whitby and Oshawa thanks to green bins and aggressive waste diversion.

Now, with Vaughan and six other York Region municipalities reducing garbage collection to every two weeks – Vaughan starts tomorrow – Gentile isn't happy.

The three-bag limit for non-recyclables every two weeks isn't enough for his growing family, Gentile says, as he points to a collection of garbage-filled bags in his garage.

"Didn't like it then (in Toronto) and don't like it here," said Gentile, 33, a program manager at a software company and father of two young children.

Gentile was lucky, however, that Vaughan chose to transition residents into the new system. Vaughan residents got a year after receiving their green bins.

Councillor Alan Shefman says that ends tomorrow, and with other York municipalities following suit, going greener is simply the new reality in the edge cities.

Shefman said it's a sign of how much things have changed in the self-styled "city above Toronto."

"This is mainstream; this is not extraordinary; this is like everybody else," said Shefman, who has made it his mission since he was elected in Thornhill three years ago to turn around Vaughan's unenviable record on garbage.

"We were the worst municipality for diverting waste," said Shefman. "We were only diverting 19 per cent of our waste (from landfill) ... I wasn't going to stand for it."

That was only three years ago. Since the fall of 2006, when Vaughan rolled out the green bins, the diversion rate has leapt to about 51 per cent. The city's target is to divert 60 to 65 per cent, comparable with most municipalities.

In the rest of York Region, Aurora, Whitchurch-Stouffville and King go to a two-week garbage pickup schedule starting today, while Newmarket, East Gwillimbury and Georgina begin next Monday.

With major York municipalities such as Vaughan and Markham on board, only Peel and Halton Region still have weekly garbage pickup. Halton plans to consider changing its schedule this fall.

Toronto has been a leader in the green bin concept, with a trial in Etobicoke in 2002. The rest of the city, with the exception of highrise buildings, was on board by 2005. **Durham Region's works commissioner, Cliff Curtis**, said many of the municipalities held off because of the difficulty of finding a place to send compostable materials. While Michigan's impending refusal of Ontario's garbage has prodded municipalities to extend the life of landfill sites, other forces are at play.

"I think people's attitudes have changed," he said. "It's got to the point where people think that recycling (and waste diversion) is accepted as a social responsibility."