Resource Conservation Manitoba

A Non-Profit Centre for Applied Sustainability

Smart and Green – Managing Waste for a Sustainable Winnipeg

A Brief to Executive Policy Committee and City Council

February 16, 2010

Ten months ago, planning for a *Sustainable Winnipeg* was launched. We anticipate the plan will make recommendations leading to more cost-effective and sustainable ways to manage our waste, but the city is continuing to lock in long term contracts that could be barriers to these changes. We need a vision of where we're going before another contract is signed.

Resource Conservation Manitoba (RCM) recommends that Council's Executive Policy Committee defer the waste-related items on its agenda to provide the Public Service an opportunity to formulate a critical path towards an integrated, cost-effective system for the separated collection and management of organic, recyclable and residual waste from Winnipeg residences.

- ***Full implementation should be no later than the expiration of the last of the old garbage collection contracts in 2013. Earlier phase-in is possible.***
- ***All further waste, recycling and organics diversion contracts should be shown to be congruent with the full implementation plan before approval.***[1]

RCM also makes the following observations and recommendations.

1. The plan should include the separate collection of compostable organics, recyclables and residual waste. It should be evaluated by a variety of criteria including waste reduction and diversion, resource conservation, the reduction and minimization of GHGs, and cost-effectiveness - including external costs.

2. We don't need to reinvent the wheel. Viable models exist. For example, Toronto uses two-compartment trucks to make a single pass each week, collecting organic waste weekly and recyclables and garbage every other week. In contrast, Winnipeg collects only recyclables and garbage and requires two weekly collection passes to do it. Halifax, on the other hand, alternates the collection of garbage and organics, relying on the lid to keep the smell in. Recyclables are collected weekly in the city and bi-weekly in the suburbs.

   More research needs to be done on these and other models, assessing their cost effectiveness, environmental impact and convenience.

[1] Note that the recycling contract bids are good until May 6.

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3. In the Public Service reports on recycling and organic pickup (and in the public surveys conducted), garbage collection was not costed but taken as given, with recycling and organics pickup driving additional costs depending on the frequencies of collection.[2]

   Once organics and recyclables have been removed, the smallest fraction of the waste stream remains for garbage collection. Shouldn't we ask how much we can afford to spend on this remnant? Let's ask what savings are possible from reduced garbage collection volumes and frequencies enabled by a robust program of organics diversion. In addition, a tonne of leaves and kitchen waste diverted from garbage to composting saves Winnipeg ten dollars in WRARS levy plus an additional WRARS credit for diversion.

4. The Public Works Committee supports the Public Service recommendation to award a 7½ year weekly recycling collection contract for $4.7 million/year, which is almost $2 million/year more than the comparable lowest bi-weekly bid of $2.7 million/year. The recommendation was based, in part, on a KPMG study that found "programs that collect recyclables at least as frequently as garbage, exhibit 10% higher recovery rates."

   RCM supports the intent to create higher recovery rates for recyclables and the willingness to spend $2 million a year to do so, but a broader range of options must be examined, including garbage and recyclables collection in alternate weeks and a more robust organics collection as in Toronto. For example, the $2 million recycling cost difference plus WRARS levy savings would more than cover 7 months of organics diversion and probably 12 months if organics collection was bi-weekly. In this case, recyclables would be collected as frequently as garbage, which meets the condition for a 10% higher recovery rate that KPMG observed.

5. Pilot projects of variations on the Toronto and Halifax models could be tried in several areas of the city. Any pilots and eventual global change will need public awareness and education programs and waste management ambassadors able to problem-solve issues as they arise. Contracts should be written or reopened to allow both the implementation of such pilots and the eventual adoption of the preferred option by 2013.

RCM celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. We've been at this for a long time, offering policy recommendations and practical solutions for green action. We've joined the city before in delivering projects on applied sustainability and we would be happy to continue working with you on the task at hand – developing a comprehensive sustainable waste management plan for the City that's smart and green.

Thanks for your attention.

Peter Miller, Policy Committee Chair for Resource Conservation Manitoba

[2] The organics report anticipates savings from lower garbage volumes if organics diversion is introduced, but not from reduced pickup schedules. Unquantified credits from the WRARS fund are mentioned, but not the $10/tonne savings if organics are diverted from the residual stream.