

Toronto Environmental Alliance

Deputation - June 13, 2016

Government Management Committee

GMC 13.35 - Waste Diversion Services in City Facilities

Good morning

My name is Emily Alfred, I'm a Senior Campaigner for the Toronto Environmental Alliance, or TEA. We are a grassroots group with more than 50,000 supporters across Toronto.

My focus at TEA is on waste reduction, and on advocating for policies and programs that help Torontonians get to zero waste. Toronto residents, businesses and visitors want to do their part to reduce, reuse, recycle and compost their waste.

Unfortunately, we've seen that many City facilities, including libraries, community recreation centres and parks, do not have good waste diversion services or signage.

I hope that is something this Committee can help to rectify, as it is an ongoing problem.

Last summer, TEA partnered with an organization called the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians for a leadership program. Working with a group of 8 volunteer leaders, we discussed waste and recycling issues they faced, and identified ways to improve them.

Something that came up over and over was the difficulty in knowing what to recycle and how to sort waste - the rules are different in every building it seems.

As a group, we developed a plan to look at City facilities in Scarborough, where most volunteers lived. The volunteers, with the help of two summer students, visited 12 City buildings, including libraries, community centres, outdoor pools and rec centres. They took photos and spoke to staff to be sure they hadn't missed anything.

What they found was very mixed:

- Need for more signs, and clear signs on every bin
- Need for more recycling bins
- Need for organics bins

Signage:

- I grew up in Toronto, and have grown up with Toronto's recycling system, so I understand it very well, and I know that I may take this knowledge for granted.
- One experience I had really opened my eyes to the importance of good signs, everywhere. We were in a library, I went with a volunteer who was relatively new to Toronto, and who lives in apartment building without City waste services. We saw a blue bin with the recycling symbol - she pointed and asked 'what goes in that bin?'. In her apartment, paper and bottles go in different bins, so she didn't know what the rules were in this library, though I assumed that all paper, cans and bottles could go in the same bin. That experience opened my eyes to the assumptions we make about our recycling programs. A sign on every bin is needed.

Blue Bins:

- Some City facilities don't have blue bins in them - our volunteers took a look at many buildings and found that there were almost always more garbage bins than recycling bins. In many cases, there were no recycling bins at all.
- I love to swim and use indoor pools all year and outdoor pools in the summer. Sadly though, almost all of these facilities have only one large garbage bin in the change rooms. I peek in and see diapers, paper towel and drink bottles in the garbage bin. I've asked staff, and they point to recycling bins outside the building in the park, but, that is clearly not working.

Green Bins:

- Most City buildings don't have green bins - despite the fact that all buildings will generate some small amount of organics. Even buildings that don't have food have paper towel, diapers from visitors.
- Volunteers visited a number of buildings that have kitchens for community and program use, but even some of those did not have green bins.
- A few have outdoor composters, which is great, but this is rare

While our volunteers looked at only a dozen buildings, what they found matches the experience I've had at City buildings.

The good news is that we can do better - there are a number of City buildings that are doing great. This building we're in is one example - City Hall boasts that it is nearing zero waste on banners by the elevator. Though there isn't regular reporting on diversion rates for city buildings, the most recent numbers say that some buildings diverted more than 85% of their waste, but some don't.

I hope that you will take this seriously today, as it is an issue of credibility, and hypocrisy.

It is also something that has come up repeatedly, but still not been fixed.

In 2010, an internal Waste Diversion task force reported on efforts to get more recycling into City ABCDs (Agencies, Boards, Commissions and Divisions). The news was good - some divisions had 70% or higher diversion rates. But the conclusion was that much more work needed to be done.

In late 2012, Council directed Solid Waste and Facilities staff to develop a plan to get green bins and good recycling in all City buildings. I have not seen any report back on this and in early 2013, in outlining the beginning of the Long Term Waste Strategy, solid waste staff reported that while they could support other divisions, it was up to each division to achieve waste diversion targets. Unfortunately, three years later, it's not clear if anything has improved.

Overall, the City is inconsistent and not following it's own best advice for maximum diversion. As we embark on a long term waste strategy that is all about educating Torontonians, and as we consider using more enforcement of city rules, it is bad form, to say the least, for the City not to be following its own rules.

This is a very big opportunity, with some clear direction, some assessment of each building and a plan to get signs in every building, I think the City will also be seizing an opportunity to educate the public.

Other info:

City Council's directive in November 2012 (2013 Rate Supported budget votes)

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2012/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-52157.htm>

“General Manager of Solid Waste Management Services, in consultation with the Director of Facilities Management, to develop a plan to implement green bin and recycling programs for City-owned facilities beginning in 2013 and report to the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee in the First Quarter of 2013”.

Response from Solid Waste Management Services - March 2013

- Long Term Waste Management Strategy report, page 19

- <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2013/pw/bgrd/backgroundfile-56629.pdf>

“Solid Waste Management Services will circulate updated solid waste program information to Agencies, Boards, Commissions and Divisions through already established channels of communication. Providing updated information to Agencies, Boards, Commissions and Divisions, such as the addition of mixed rigid plastics to the Blue Bin Program, ensures consistent messaging to staff and members of the public. Staff will continue to provide guidance on waste diversion measures; however, each individual organization is responsible for making the appropriate changes to their respective diversion initiatives and for communicating updated information to staff and program users.”