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## **Yard Waste Program – Grass Clippings Update Information Report**

Report Number: 2017-36

Department(s): Public Works Services

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In accordance with the Procedure By-law, any member of Council may make a request to the Town Clerk that this Report be placed on an upcoming Committee of the Whole agenda for discussion.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to provide an update regarding the challenges of accepting grass clippings in the Town's yard waste program.

### **Background**

All nine local municipalities in York Region offer seasonal, curbside collection of yard waste. For over a decade, grass clippings have been banned from eight of the nine local municipal curbside yard waste collection programs in York Region; only the City of Vaughan accepts grass clippings.

### **Discussion**

Prior to 2005, York Region's yard waste material was primarily processed at Halton Recycling in the Town of Newmarket, while a small amount of yard waste went to the Bloomington Yard Waste Depot in Richmond Hill. In 2005, Halton Recycling experienced operational challenges and was shut down by Order of the Ministry of the Environment due to persistent odour complaints.

In 2006, the contract with Miller Waste Systems was extended for the provision of yard waste composting services at the Bloomington Yard

Waste Depot (Miller Waste Compost Site) which secured long term yard waste composting capacity for the entire Region. Miller Waste Systems is under contract with York Region for leaf and yard waste composting services at Bloomington Yard Waste Depot until 2025.

For processing, continued local municipal bans on the collection of grass clippings in curbside yard waste programs provides better quality feedstock of overall yard waste that best support the compost process, which is undertaken outdoors via windrow technology. Given the odour complaints related to processing challenges, increased grass clippings in the yard waste stream would likely result in additional odour complaints putting this key part of our diversion program at risk for Ministry Orders.

### BEST PRACTICE AND BENEFITS OF GRASSCYCLING

The practice of grasscycling (leaving clippings on the lawn) reduces the need for fertilizer by 30 per cent by returning nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium back to the soil to build deep, healthy roots. This also helps protect local waterways from runoff pollution generated from fertilizing lawns and gardens.

Grasscycling also helps reduce the need to water lawns, as grass clippings, which are mostly water, decompose quickly, returning moisture to the soil. Furthermore, grass clippings can help reduce water evaporation from the lawn by keeping the soil temperature cooler.

Placing grass clippings in a backyard composter is another way to recycle the material. Grass clippings may also be used as mulch around the base of trees, shrubs and plants to return moisture to the soil. York Region recommends the Town of Newmarket continue to promote grasscycling as the preferred method of managing grass clippings.

The City of Vaughan also promotes the practice of grasscycling as the preferred method of managing grass clippings and discourages residents from including grass clippings with their yard waste. Annual campaigns are utilized to educate residents about the benefits of grasscycling as well as promote its continued practice.

Through discussions with City of Vaughan staff and analyzing tonnages, the data indicates that there are a significant number of Newmarket residents who are already placing grass clippings into their yard waste. This is being done in contravention to the By-law, however this practice is often unnoticed as the contractor does not inspect the contents of yard waste bags unless there is an easily observable issue such as an overweight bag or noticeable smell of decomposing material.

If grass clippings were permitted, it is assumed there would be more grass clipping material introduced into the yard waste stream by approximately 33%. This additional material would cause some bags to break upon collection due to the moisture content

and slow down the collection process. It would also increase the tonnage of this stream and cost approximately \$133,000.

## DISPOSAL OPTIONS FOR RESIDENTS

York Region residents may drop off Yard Waste, including grass clippings, at the following depots:

### **Bloomington Yard Waste Depot**

1351 Bloomington Road  
Richmond Hill, Ontario

Fees: No charge for residents to drop off yard waste and grass clippings (Note: limits apply)

#### Hours of Operation

April 1st to November 30th  
Monday to Friday: 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Saturday: 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Sunday: Closed

December 1st to March 31st  
Monday to Friday: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
Saturday & Sundays: Closed  
Closed: Civic and Statutory Holidays

### **Georgina Waste Transfer Station**

23068 Warden Avenue  
Georgina, Ontario

Fees: \$100 per metric tonne for yard waste and grass clippings

#### Hours of Operation

Monday to Saturday: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Sunday: Closed  
Closed: Civic and Statutory Holidays

### **Miller Waste Transfer Station**

112 Bales Road  
East Gwillimbury, Ontario

Owned and operated by Miller Waste Systems. York Region does not have any yard waste contracts with this facility.

## **Conclusion**

Keeping grass clippings out of curbside yard waste collection programs reduces collection and processing costs and promotes grass as a resource, which supports the York Region Leaf and Yard Waste and Composting Strategy in the SM4RT Living Plan. Grasscycling is a best practice in many large Ontario municipalities such as the City of Toronto, Durham Region and Niagara Region. They too promote grasscycling and have also banned grass clippings from their curbside yard waste collection programs.

## **Business Plan and Strategic Plan Linkages**

### *Well Equipped and Managed*

Deliver affordable, efficient and effective solid waste collection services that meet or exceed provincially mandated requirements, Council and the public's expectations, while promoting and encouraging solid waste diversion through recycling, composting, rethinking, reusing, reducing and implementing programs to achieve a realistic diversion rate and environmental protection.

## **Consultation**

This Report has been prepared in consultation with staff from the Region of York and The City of Vaughan.

## **Human Resource Considerations**

Not applicable to this report.

## **Budget Impact**

Openly accepting grass clippings as part of the yard waste program would result in increased disposal costs as there would be an increase in overall yard waste tonnage. The Town's reported yard waste tonnage in 2016 was 3,174.4 metric tonnes. Allowing grass clippings as part of the yard waste program could increase yard waste tonnage by up to 1,050 metric tonnes, increasing disposal costs by approximately \$113,000. This would increase annual yard waste disposal costs by approximately 33%.

## **Attachments**

None.

## **Contact**

For more information on this Report, contact: Christopher Kalimootoo, Director of Public Works Services at 905-953-5300, ext. 2551 or via email at [ckalimootoo@newmarket.ca](mailto:ckalimootoo@newmarket.ca).