

Implementation of a \$50 Flat Fee for Elm Disposal at the Landfill and Enhanced Education

ISSUE

In July 2021, Saskatoon recorded its third case of Dutch elm disease (DED) in Leif Erickson Park. To mitigate the spread of DED, provincial legislation requires all elm wood to be immediately disposed of at the closest designated disposal site. The Saskatoon Regional Waste Management Centre (Landfill) is the designated disposal site for Saskatoon and accepts elm wood for disposal based on the fees outlined in Schedule B of Bylaw No. 8310, *The Waste Bylaw*.

Beginning in May 2021, new criteria for applying the special handling fee were introduced at the Landfill. Loads containing stumps and logs greater than 10 inches in diameter and three feet in length started to be charged special handling fees to address the greater operational cost to handle these materials safely. The community raised concerns that this introduced a financial burden for the proper disposal of elm wood and resulted in the report "[Near-Term Options to Reduce the Burden of Proper Elm Disposal](#)" presented to the Standing Policy Committee – Environment, Utilities and Corporate Service in October 2021.

This report outlines the Administration's recommended approach to reduce the financial the burden of elm wood disposal and how it will be coordinated with additional education efforts to mitigate DED.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities and Corporate Services recommend to City Council that the Administration proceed with the approach outlined in this report including: research and implementation of \$50 flat fee for landfill loads that are primarily elm wood; enhanced education to mitigate the spread of DED; and piloting a comprehensive behaviour change program targeting proper elm wood disposal.

BACKGROUND

At its meeting held on October 4, 2021, the Standing Policy Committee – Environment, Utilities and Corporate Services received the report, "Near-Term Options to Reduce the Burden of Proper Elm Disposal", and provided the direction:

"That Administration report further on option 3D, including what types of Elm loads this would apply to and how it would be coordinated with further education efforts."

Option 3D will eliminate the special handling fee and apply a \$50 flat fee.

Any changes to the landfill fee structure for elm disposal should be considered as an interim solution until Recovery Park is operational. The operation plan for Recovery Park and the funding model will be brought forward in 2023.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

The Administration's proposed approach to implement a \$50 flat fee for elm disposal at the landfill and enhance education includes the following actions:

1. Discontinue special handling fees for loads that are primarily elm wood immediately;
2. Complete research to verify effectiveness of the \$50 flat fee for loads that are primarily elm wood;
3. Develop a coordinated cross-departmental communications and education strategy; and
4. Complete a pilot of a comprehensive behaviour change program targeting proper elm wood disposal.

The following discussion provides additional detail and rationale for the Administration's proposed approach for each action.

1. Discontinue special handling fees for loads that are primarily elm wood immediately

The Administration will immediately discontinue the application of the special handling fee for loads comprised primarily of elm wood. This is an Administrative decision that does not require Committee or City Council approval to implement; however, it is included in this report since it is a component of the Administration's overall proposed approach to implement a \$50 flat fee for elm disposal at the landfill.

In May 2021, based on the discretion granted in Bylaw No. 8310, *The Waste Bylaw*, the Administration developed criteria on the types of loads where the special handling fee would be applied to ensure consistency and clarity for landfill users. The criteria were based on operational considerations. Stumps and logs received at the landfill greater than 10 inches in diameter and three feet in length interferes with the equipment and process to compact and bury waste, which results in a greater operational cost to handle the larger materials.

The following steps are required to implement this type of fee change at the Landfill:

- Development of a procedure to assess if loads fall within the Contamination Threshold;
- Landfill staff training on elm wood identification; and
- Communication on changes to the special handling fee criteria.

It is unclear, due to a lack of sufficient data, whether the application of the special handling fee is a disincentive for the proper disposal of elm wood waste. Until the impact of the special handling fee on proper elm disposal is more clearly understood, the Administration intends to discontinue the special handling fee for loads that are primarily elm wood.

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The estimated financial impact of suspending the special handling fee for loads containing primarily elm wood is \$30,000 per year. The 2022 budget was developed based on historical revenues earned before the special handling fees were consistently enforced. As such, no budget adjustments to landfill revenue will be required. Any reductions in revenue will be reported as part of variance analysis.

2. Complete research to verify effectiveness of the \$50 flat fee for loads that are primarily elm wood

At the October 4, 2021 meeting of the Standing Policy Committee – Environment, Utilities and Corporate Service, additional reporting was requested on *Option 3D - Eliminate Special Handling Fee, add \$50 Flat Fee*, including what types of Elm loads this would apply to and additional financial implications.

Application of Fees to Elm Wood Loads

The table below further details how the maximum \$50 flat fee would be applied compared to the Status Quo. Both the \$15 entrance fee and no charges for loads under 150kg would remain in place. Under Option 3D, the application of regular tipping fees would be applied for loads over 150kg up to \$35 (or 333kg), so that a maximum fee of \$50 would apply when the tipping fee is combined with the entrance fee.

Component	Status Quo	Option 3D
Entrance Fee	\$15	\$15
Tipping Fee – loads under 150kg	\$0	\$0
Tipping Fee – loads between 150kg – 333kg	\$105/1000kg (no maximum)	\$105/1000kg (up to a maximum of \$34.99)
Flat Rate – loads 333kg+		\$35 flat fee
Special Handling	\$130/1000kg with a \$275 minimum charge per load	\$0

Consistent with other thresholds within Bylaw No. 8310, *The Waste Bylaw*, a contamination threshold of 10% would be used to determine when a load would be eligible for the maximum \$50 flat fee.

Additional Financial Implications

The implementation of a maximum \$50 Flat Fee for elm wood loads, as described above, is expected to result in an annual revenue loss for the Landfill of \$127,000 based on currently available information. When combined with the \$30,000 lost revenue from the special handling fee, the net revenue loss would be \$157,000. This is updated from previously reported projections based on additional data and modeling as well as the flat fee only applying when loads meet or exceed the \$35 in regular disposal tipping fees.

Additional information on the application of fees, the steps required for implementation, and financial implications are provided in Appendix 1 – Additional Information on Option 3D: Eliminate Special Handling Fee, add \$50 Flat Fee of this report.

Implementation Approach

The Administration's proposed approach is to complete additional research and reporting to verify the effectiveness of the fee change on incentivizing the proper disposal of elm wood. The research will focus on the barriers that exist for proper elm wood disposal and the most effective fee structure to motivate proper disposal behaviour. The research will be completed by Q2 2022 and reporting back on the anticipated effectiveness of the \$50 flat fee structure on proper elm disposal by Q2-3 2022. Funding for the research is integrated into work defined in the capital project for the Solid Waste Reduction and Diversion (SWRD) Plan that was considered in the 2022-2023 budget deliberations.

The Administration's proposed approach was guided by the following Triple Bottom Line Considerations:

- Environmental Health and Integrity – with current data there is no way to determine if and to what extent changing the fee structure at the Landfill will result in increased proper elm disposal and mitigation of DED spread in our community. The proposed additional research will create greater certainty about the effectiveness of a \$50 flat fee.
- Social Equity and Cultural Wellbeing – with current data there is no way to determine if there are equity barriers that will remain unaddressed with the changed fee structure. The proposed additional research and use of the Equity Toolkit will provide more certainty about the equity consideration for the fee change.
- Economic Prosperity and Fiscal Responsibility - the suspension of the special handling fee has addressed the immediate concerns brought forward by landscaping and tree care businesses on negative impacts to their operations. Additional research and reporting will ensure that a new fee structure maximizes protection of our natural assets while continuing to provide value at a reasonable cost.
- Good Governance – the Administration's approach supports data informed decision-making, stakeholder engagement, customer centered policies, and effective service delivery on the measures being taken to mitigate DED spread.

If the research confirms that a revised fee structure will enhance compliance with elm disposal regulations, further reporting will be provided in Q2 2022. Additional reporting will also bring forward the necessary recommendations for the following steps that are required to implement this type of fee change at the Landfill:

- Amendment to Bylaw No. 8310, *The Waste Bylaw*;
- Approval of Landfill rates through budget deliberations or budget adjustment;
- Update staff training and the procedure to assess if loads fall within the Contamination Threshold if needed; and
- Communication on fee changes.

3. A coordinated cross-departmental communications and education strategy

At the October 4, 2021 meeting of the Standing Policy Committee – Environment, Utilities and Corporate Service, additional reporting on coordination of fee changes with further education efforts was requested. The Administration prepared an inventory of City-led education and programs that address elm tree care, Dutch elm disease, and the storage or disposal of elm wood that is available in Appendix 2 - Further Education and Communications.

Development of an overarching communications and education strategy, and regular coordination meetings for Dutch elm disease and elm wood disposal is planned. The inventory revealed that with so many departments and programs involved, education and communications can be enhanced with consistent key messaging, reduced duplication of effort, and maximizing the effectiveness of the resources that are already available. There is no expected financial impact to this action.

4. Pilot of a comprehensive behaviour change program targeting proper elm wood disposal

In addition to coordinating current education and programs, development of a new comprehensive behaviour change program and pilot targeting proper elm wood disposal is proposed. In contrast to conventional information-intensive approaches, comprehensive behaviour change applies a methodology called *community-based social marketing* which has been shown to be very effective at bringing about behaviour change. This involves:

- Carefully selecting the behaviour(s) to be promoted;
- Identifying the barriers and benefits associated with the selected behaviour through marketing research;
- Designing a strategy that utilizes behaviour-change tools to address these barriers and benefits;
- Piloting the strategy with a small segment of the community and evaluating results; and
- Implementing the program broadly and monitor results.

Community-based social marketing has been applied by the City with success for the neighbourhood recycling cart contamination blitzes. While the program was paused due to COVID-19, in 2019, a total of 4,908 cart inspections were conducted. Each cart was tagged with either a green happy-face emoji tag for proper recycling behaviour or an orange sad-face emoji tag if contamination or other issues were found; tags also included tips for proper recycling. The number of green tags issued, indicating good recycling behaviour, increased 8.6 percent over three visits. The number of orange tags, indicating incorrect recycling behaviour, decreased 14.5 percent over three visits.

The comprehensive behaviour change program and pilot is proposed due to the scale of improperly stored or disposed of elm wood by residents that was revealed when data from various sources was compiled in the [Appendix 2 – Elm Wood Disposal of the Near-Term Options to Reduce the Burden of Proper Elm Disposal](#) report. Not

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addressing this behaviour presents a significant risk to Saskatoon’s urban forest. While the previously reported indicators suggest improper storage and disposal of elm wood, there is no data to understand what is causing that behaviour and what might be the most effective way to encourage and assist our residents in immediately disposing of their elm wood at the Landfill. The comprehensive behaviour change program and pilot will generate that data through marketing research (such as surveys and focus groups), and design a program grounded in behaviour change science for maximum effectiveness.

The pilot requires \$110,000 to develop the program to the stage of completing the comprehensive behaviour change pilot and a report with a recommendation on full program implementation. Funding for the pilot was integrated into work defined in the capital project for the Solid Waste Reduction and Diversion Plan that was considered in the 2022-2023 budget deliberations. Additional funding will be required to implement the program on an ongoing basis and the amount will depend on the final program’s design.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications of the approach are summarized in the table below:

Action	Financial Implication	Description
1. Discontinue the special handling fees for loads that are primarily elm wood immediately.	\$30,000 annual Landfill revenue reduction	The 2022 budget was based on historical revenues earned before the special handling fees were consistently enforced; no budget adjustments to landfill revenue required.
2. Complete research to verify effectiveness of the \$50 flat fee for loads that are primarily elm wood	\$127,000 annual Landfill revenue reduction	Resources to conduct research included in Solid Waste Reduction and Diversion Plan. Additional reporting is planned for Q2-3 2022 on the effectiveness of the fee change. The financial implications require additional reporting and the following approvals prior to taking affect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amendment to Bylaw No. 8310, <i>The Waste Bylaw</i>; • Approval of Landfill rates through budget deliberations or budget adjustment.
3. Develop a coordinated cross-departmental communications and education strategy.	No anticipated financial implications	This will maximize the effectiveness of current education and communication resources at no additional cost.
4. Complete a pilot of a behaviour change education program targeting proper elm wood disposal.	\$110,000 capital funding to complete pilot and reporting	Pilot funding integrated into capital project for the Solid Waste Reduction and Diversion Plan that was considered in the 2022-2023 budget deliberations. Additional funding required for ongoing operation of program.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Other considerations have been summarized in Appendices 1 and 2.

NEXT STEPS

Upon approval of funding, research and program development can begin. The following table shows the proposed timelines for deliverables on both changes to elm wood disposal fees and further education based on funding being available in 2022.

	Elm Disposal Fee Change	Further Education
December 2021	Suspend special handling fee for loads on elm (10% or less contamination).	Launch cross-departmental elm education and communications strategy development
Q1 2022	Research on current elm wood storage and disposal behaviour in Saskatoon.	
Q2 2022	Reporting back on the effectiveness of Option 3D Eliminate Special Handling Fee, add \$50 Flat Fee.	Launch of the Elm Behaviour Change pilot program.
Q3-4 2022	Implementation of fee changes and monitoring if directed.	Report on results of pilot program and recommendations for full program implementation.
2023	Operating plan and funding model for Recovery Park and funding model.	Monitor elm wood storage and disposal behaviour and continuously improve the behaviour change program.

APPENDICES

1. Additional Information on Option 3D: Eliminate Special Handling Fee, add \$50 Flat Fee
2. Further Education and Communications

Report Approval

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