

Recycling Depots – Immediate Improvement Options and Comprehensive Review Plan

ISSUE

In April 2021, City Council approved the closure of the Meadowgreen Recycling Depot. Administration has continued to work on developing options to address other immediate safety and contamination issues at the remaining three City-run recycling depots and respond to the City Council inquiry on potential cameras at recycling depots.

The Solid Waste Reduction and Diversion Plan has the short-term action to complete a Comprehensive Recycling Depot Review after new programs have been implemented, including Recovery Park and the Industrial, Commercial, and Institutional sector recycling regulation. The Comprehensive Recycling Depot Review will factor in the approach taken by the Province of Saskatchewan in their review of the Household Packaging and Paper Regulations and associated programs.

This report outlines the recommended immediate improvements for recycling depots and outlines the Administration's plans for completing a comprehensive review.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities and Corporate Services recommend to City Council:

1. That restricted depot access and hours at the Lakewood Recycling Depot be piloted as outlined in this report and results reported in Q3 2023;
2. That the service level for Recycling Depots be increased to five bin collections per week and seven site clean-ups per week; and
3. That the comprehensive review of the Recycling Depot program proceeds as outlined in this report.

BACKGROUND

At its regular business meeting on April 26, 2021, City Council received the [Meadowgreen Recycling Depot Closure Report](#) and resolved:

1. That immediately, the Meadowgreen Recycling Depot be permanently closed; and
2. That Administration proceed with closing and remediating the Meadowgreen Recycling Depot as outlined in the April 12, 2021 report of the General Manager, Community Services.

At the Governance and Priorities Committee meeting on September 21, 2020, in response to the [Multi-Unit Residential Recycling Agreement - Corporate Recycling Service Pricing](#) report, the Committee in part resolved:

“That the Administration update the previously presented report on security cameras used as a tool, to mitigate illegal dumping, and contamination of recyclables, at the City of Saskatoon operated recycling depots. This report should be presented at the same time as the report on Recovery Park is presented prior to 2022 budget deliberations. The report should also include reference to how the cameras would help reduce criminal activity at the depots. The report should also be updated with costs based on the current technology of the day and how the installation of cameras would be scaled to the decision, by City Council, on how many depots are to remain operational, moving forward.”

The Standing Policy Committee – Environment, Utilities and Corporate Services received the [Solid Waste Reduction and Diversion Plan](#) (the Plan) at its January 11, 2021 meeting. The Plan identified the in-progress action to make immediate improvements to recycling depots starting in 2021, and the short-term action to complete a recycling depot program review starting in 2023.

Additional background is available in Appendix 1 - History of City of Saskatoon Recycling Depots.

CURRENT STATUS

The City of Saskatoon (City) currently operates Lakewood, Lawson Heights, and University Heights recycling depots. The recycling depots are not staffed and are open to the public 24/7 to drop off recyclable material. The Waste Collections group removes recyclable material and delivers it to Cosmopolitan Industries for material processing. Collections are currently conducted four times per week and the depots are cleaned by City staff to remove litter and illegally dumped material. Given the current operational structure of the recycling depots, the responsibility of correct use of this program is with the public; see Appendix 2.

Acceptable materials at the depots include household paper and cardboard packaging, household tin and aluminium, plastics #1 to #7, and household glass. The City has signage at the depots that indicates the accepted recyclables, common non-accepted materials, information on recycling disposal rules, and refers to The Waste Bylaw, 2004. The City educates residents on the proper use of the recycling depots through recycling specific programs and several campaigns throughout the year.

The recycling depots and Multi Unit Residential Recycling contamination rates are measured together and were 22% in 2019 and 19% in 2020. The Lakewood recycling depot has a high rate of contamination with garbage and household furniture. This depot frequently requires extensive cleaning due to materials not being placed in bins. Environmental Protection Officers (EPO) visit the Lakewood depot more frequently to help deter illegal dumping.

The 2021 residential [Waste and Recycling Survey](#) found that most residents do not use any of the City's recycling depots. Those who do, use them once or twice a year and most often go to Lakewood or Lawson Heights depots. Residents were divided regarding level of support for closing the City's recycling depots after the opening of Recovery Park, with 38% opposing closures and 41% supporting; see Appendix 1.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Over the past couple of years, multiple changes and improvements have been made to the recycling depot program, including:

1. In April 2021, the City permanently closed the Meadowgreen Recycling Depot due to ongoing safety issues, as outlined in [Meadowgreen Recycling Depot Closure Report](#).
2. In September 2021, the donation bins at the Lakewood Recycling Depot were relocated to the Lakewood Civic Center parking lot to help mitigate illegal dumping. Small household items are frequently left around the donation bins in addition to large household items. Early indications are that this action has had a notable positive effect to mitigate illegal dumping at the depot. The University Heights Depot and Lawson Heights Depot are generally in good condition, only on occasion having illegal dumping or excessive recycling or garbage outside of bins.
3. The City has increased education efforts to target and decrease illegal dumping and recycling contamination at the recycling depots. Vandalized or damaged bins were replaced, and updated decals were installed clearly outlining approved and non-approved recyclables and outlining expectations around scavenging and illegal dumping referenced in The Waste Bylaw, 2004. Signage advertising the Saskatoon Waste Wizard was installed at all depots in an effort to reduce illegally dumped or non-approved materials from the sites.
4. Increased depot servicing over the Christmas holidays on December 27, 28 and 29, 2021, helped keep the depots in an orderly state during a peak time of use by residents.

Options to Reduce Criminal Activity, Illegal Dumping and Recycling Contamination

Administration has considered alternative strategies to address criminal activity, illegal dumping, and recycling contamination at the public recycling depots. The options were developed using best practices research, assessing the feasibility to implement in the current recycling depot model, and the total costs to implement and operate. The feasible options are summarized below, and additional information is provided in Appendix 3.

Restricted Depot Access and Hours

Most criminal behaviors at the recycling depots were reported by EPOs to occur in the late-evening to early-morning. Other jurisdictions found that restricting depot access hours, accompanied with clear signage, greatly reduced illegal dumping behaviors.

Increased Bin Collections and Site Clean-ups

Frequency of bin collections at the recycling depots will increase the overall cleanliness of the sites and may reduce incorrectly discarded recyclables outside of the bins. The City uses a behavior change strategy for its waste management enforcement programs called Community-Based Social Marketing (CBSM). Studies using the CBSM “bystander-technique”, illustrated that well-maintained sites that consistently contain little to no litter altered the perception of the site to the participants over time and reduced the likelihood of improper disposal and bystanders littering.

On-Site Supervision

Sites with the presence of a figure of authority and/or supervision, have the greatest ability to deter inappropriate behaviours. Of the 28 communities surveyed, 25 sites have staffed restricted-hour transfer stations or eco-centres and seven sites have staffed restricted-hour public recycling depots. Staffing appears to be a solution to limit the inappropriate use and criminal behaviours at the recycling depots but may not eliminate illegally dumped materials outside of the hours of operation. Additional information is provided in Appendix 4.

Proposed Pilot and Survey Level Changes

High rates of illegal activity and contamination are the reason why many other Canadian municipalities have switched from public 24/7 waste management sites to operations that have supervision or restricted hours and site access.

As the Lakewood Recycling Depot is currently experiencing higher levels of criminal activity and illegal dumping, a pilot is recommended that would restrict public access and reduce operational hours. This option requires a staff member to manage opening and closing the depots (7:00am to 7:00pm) for seven days a week. Installation of a lockable gate and new signage is required. This option is recommended to pilot at only one depot to test effectiveness before rolling out to the other two remaining depots or considering additional measures such as on-site supervision or camera use, which are more expensive and complex to implement. Monitoring for illegal dumping at the entrance to the depot will be tracked, and if problematic, may be an appropriate application for camera installations.

To reduce illegal dumping and contaminated recyclables, it is recommended that bin collections increase to five days per week and clean-ups to seven days per week for all three recycling depots. This service level change is expected to increase safety and customer satisfaction while decreasing illegal dumping and contamination.

Camera Use to Help Reduce Criminal Activity, Illegal Dumping and Recycling Contamination at the Recycling Depots

City Council has requested that the use of cameras be investigated to reduce criminal activity, prevent illegal dumping, and reduce contamination of recyclables. This information has been summarized in Appendix 3. Camera use is not recommended as part of this set of immediate improvements; however, is planned to be reassessed as part of the evaluation of the pilot and increased service level in Q3 2023.

Comprehensive Recycling Depot Review

The proposed pilots and increased service levels are intended to be an interim step prior to a comprehensive recycling depot review. This review is recommended to be completed once Recovery Park has become operational and the Industrial, Commercial and Institutional Sector recycling regulations have been fully implemented, so that the impact of these new programs on depot use can be evaluated. As well, this will allow the effectiveness of the pilot and increased service levels to be understood and whether additional steps are required to further mitigate illegal dumping and contamination. The

actions from the Solid Waste Reduction and Diversion Plan, and the proposed timing, are outlined in Appendix 4.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The estimated costs for the restricted access and hours for the Lakewood recycling depot is \$18,500 for one year. The cost for the additional collections and clean-ups is \$21,000 per depot, or \$63,000 for all three depots per year. The total cost for the immediate improvements recommended in this report is \$81,500. Funding for these initiatives will be partially offset by a reduction in emergency inspections and cleanups that are currently occurring and will be made available through the 2022 Waste Minimization Operating Budget. As these initiatives are an increase in scope from the service levels previously approved through budget deliberations, Administration may need to adjust priorities within this program to account for the additional cost. Reporting on actual budget implications will be included in future reporting.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no other implications by approving this report.

NEXT STEPS

Following the approval of this report, the changes to the recycling depot program will be implemented. A report on results is planned for Q3 2023 and may include additional recommendations for on-site supervision or camera use if the pilots and service level changes are inadequate to address contamination and illegal dumping.

The Solid Waste Reduction and Diversion Plan has a short-term action plan to complete a comprehensive recycling depot review. Data collection will begin in 2023 and the majority of the review and analysis will take place in 2024. The review will provide a long-term strategy for the City's recycling depot program including the number of depots and service levels.

APPENDICES

1. History of City of Saskatoon Recycling Depots
2. Alternative Options to Reduce Illegal Activity at Recycling Depots
3. Surveillance Camera Effectiveness at Reducing Illegal Activity at Recycling Depots
4. Solid Waste Reduction and Diversion Plan and Recycling Depot Initiatives

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