



# ENGAGE



## **SASKATOON TALKS TRASH: CURBSIDE**

Accessible Waste Collection Workshop Summary

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## Overview

The Special Needs Garbage Collection Service has been the topic of several City Council reports and motions. In fall 2017, City Council requested that Administration consult with stakeholders to discuss accessibility considerations and the future of the Service as part of the larger Saskatoon Talks Trash: Curbside community engagement activities.

## Background

Some Saskatoon residents, including seniors and people with mobility challenges or disabilities, have challenges physically maneuvering waste carts or accessing other waste services.

While a Special Needs Garbage Collection Service exists to provide assistance with collection carts, the program has not accepted new registrations since its inception and was originally intended to be a short-term measure. However, Administration continues to receive requests for new applicants.

Costs to provide this service are estimated at \$490 per household in the program, funded through property taxes. In the interim, the Cart Crusaders campaign was launched as a way of encouraging neighbours to help neighbours in need by rolling out their carts on collection day - similar to the Snow Angels campaign for snow shoveling.

## Workshop Approach

The “Accessible Waste Collection” workshop was held on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018 from 9:30am-11:30am at the Saskatoon Field House.

The workshop was open to stakeholders and organizations that serve or represent older adults and/or other residents who are physically challenged by the task of managing a waste cart. Direct invitations were sent to a list of over 30 organizations, and the workshop was also publicized on the project’s Engage website.

## Engagement Objectives

The goals of this workshop were to:

- Better understand the challenges and opportunities with curbside collection from an accessibility lens.
- Discuss preferred options for design and delivery of a special collections service.
- Assess the three scenarios used in the broader engagement exercise from an accessibility lens.
- Build relationships with key stakeholders.

## Participants

8 participants attended the workshop, representing a variety of organizations:

1. Spinal Cord Injury Saskatchewan
2. Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission
3. Sarcan Recycling
4. Saskatoon Services for Seniors
5. Saskatoon Council on Aging
6. Crocus Cooperative
7. Saskatoon Accessibility Advisory Committee
8. Kenderdine Court Condo Association

## What We Heard

### Barriers and Challenges

Participants shared a range of challenges with the current waste collection program, including: the size, height, and weight of bins; difficulty maneuvering in snowy and icy conditions; and difficulty disposing of bulky items and hazardous waste.

They emphasized that difficulties are experienced by both people with physical limitations and people with mental health challenges (for example, with hoarding behaviours). One service provider noted that they have assisted with many yard clean-ups due to the storing or piling of waste as a result of the above difficulties.

Participants were disappointed with the current limitations on Special Needs Garbage Collection, and noted the need for an updated name to reflect current language (not special needs). They emphasized that neighbourliness approaches like the Snow Angels or Cart Crusaders campaigns are insufficient and unreliable solutions for waste management. These approaches were also critiqued from a human rights perspective, as residents are not receiving an equitable level of service from the City.

The participants also shared feedback on the fines from Environmental Protection Officers, stating that the Officers and the tone of the letters have been intimidating or scary to older residents and people with mental health challenges. They urged a more educational tone, greater sensitivity, and friendliness related to fining, and to customer service in general.

### Opportunities

We heard that it would be important to take a values-based approach in the design and delivery of a future program. Key values include:

- Transparency and openness – of program offered.
- Fairness – of eligibility, access.
- Equity – in level of service and cost (comparative to regular household program).
- Affordability – conscious of constrained incomes (old age pensions, disability).
- Coordination – between service providers.

The group also identified that a future program should have a threshold for eligibility with clear criteria, and streams for temporary versus permanent physical impairments. There was strong support for inviting community proposals for the delivery of the service, while the City would retain overall strategy, oversight, and communications. One service provider noted that it is much easier for them to collect bags than to move carts. Participants also stressed that residents in the program not be double-charged for the service.

It was noted that having smaller garbage cart options in a waste utility would be helpful for many who struggle with the size and weight of current standard carts.

## Appendix: Full Results

### Question 1: What are residents and/or clients telling us about the barriers and challenges they encounter with our curbside collection program?

- Bins are too large and heavy as individual carts, cannot maneuver or struggle to move them.
  - Have heard that carts are too high to deposit larger/heavier bags or materials into them.
  - Back alley collection seems to be more accessible-friendly due to lack of curb.
- Weather challenges; pulling the carts through snow, or snow accumulating on flat tops of carts.
  - Getting bins to the streets when snow pile is high.
- There is a broad spectrum of need, including:
  - Mental health challenges and waste hoarding, leading to residents feeling threatened or worrying about eviction.
  - Physical disability or mobility limitations, leading to being physically unable to get waste out of the house or to the cart.
  - Some have homecare providers or support agencies who do the disposal.
  - Some hire service providers, if they have money to afford this.
- Dealing with bulky items is an added challenge.
- Attitude to City or feeling of civic pride may not be as positive for some of these groups – ex. seeing messy yards; not everyone is conscientious or concerned about it.
  - Crocus Co-op and Saskatoon Services for Seniors both provide yard clean-up services for clients and are often thanked by neighbours for their services.
- Symptom of these barriers may lead to waste accumulating outside the door or in yard (because unable to get it to the carts) to the point where it becomes overflowing or too heavy to deal with.
  - Providers like Services for Seniors have been stuck with waste they cannot dispose of for their clients, and no solutions offered by City in these cases.
- Services in the community exist but are not coordinated, and there is a lack of awareness among residents of who to contact for what.
- Residents experiencing difficulties do not know who to call and have felt dissatisfied by City response.
  - Frustrated that they may have heard of this “magic program” (Special Needs Collection Service) but cannot get into it.
- “Neighbourliness” approaches are not reliable.
  - We are too large with insufficient community spirit to achieve this; connections between neighbours are not necessarily strong or may not exist.
    - What happens when people move away or their life circumstances change?
    - Could there be an incentive in exchange for helping a neighbour?
- Some people work together and use each other’s bins for excess waste.
  - Idea raised of a civic incentive for sharing waste bins (i.e. a 2% reduction on your bill).
- Fine system is a point of concern.
  - Notice letters (i.e. educational warnings to move bin back onto property) have been disturbing to some residents, especially if economically challenged and with a disability.
  - “Military-like” approach of Environmental Protection Officers (EPOs) can provoke emotional responses from residents who need special consideration re: accessibility.

- Police-like uniforms were mentioned as distressing to some.
- Public perception of being policed by EPOs and the cost of EPO staff leads some to wonder about investing more in a more conversational and educational approach using phone calls, mailers, news media, etc.
- Overloaded carts – people don't know that the lids are not supposed to be open at all; also lack of knowledge of the right of way bylaw, as discussed prior.
- Customer Service considerations – increase sensitivity and responsiveness, awareness of differing needs and abilities.

## Question 2:

### a) What are the advantages and disadvantages of these scenarios from an accessibility lens? Why?

- **Scenario 1**
  - Concern about lifting bags of yard waste – would need smaller bags.
  - Small food cart might still be large for a senior – may not fill it at all, and just contaminate black cart instead. Scenario 3 could help with that situation.
  - Like the small garbage options across all scenarios.
  - Some people may still need largest size carts AND be unable to move them.
- **Scenario 2**
  - 1 cart for organics seems easiest, compared to Scenario 1.
  - Some desire for more frequent collection than every 2 weeks.
- **Scenario 3**
  - Need a simple solution – green and black bags seem complicated for education and use.
    - Challenges getting the bags are even more challenging for people with disabilities – would need distribution not just pick-up.
  - Need clarity around materials going into/out of garbage and organics especially for Opti-Bag.
  - Could be good for people with limited garbage/organic waste – in one cart vs. hauling out another cart.
  - Would like smaller blue cart options as well.
- **General comments**
  - Concerns about (organics) compliance in any scenario.
  - Need variable sizes for ALL carts – makes sense given variability of need, household size and type.
  - Bagging options can help service providers to the pick-up (can't manage large, full carts at this point).
  - 1 size doesn't fit all.
  - The word "mandatory" rubs people the wrong way.
  - Describe the benefits in terms of costs not just environmental angle, especially when thinking about fixed income and low income residents.
  - Note – house design – how to integrate organics collection in kitchen?
  - Perhaps carrying bags out to stationary carts is easier.

- Could consider special program where folks can do this instead of using carts; get special bags for pickup.
- What about residents who generate medical waste – penalizing this by variable rate pricing?

### **b) Looking beyond the scenarios, how might we adapt our collection program to be more accessible for more people?**

- Recycling – if I don't generate much, why have the largest bin.
- Education – take less punitive approach, less judgemental, more informative.
- Seniors – reaching folks via 6:00 and 12:00 News is best, not via social radio.
- Be clearer in communication, not just about what's permitted/not permitted but the next step (ex. If plastic film not allowed, what to do with it?).
- More accessible options for Household Hazardous Waste pick-up.
- We need to expect that our demand will increase with an aging population.

### **Question 3: Preferred models for special collection – what do you see as the advantages/disadvantages of a City-delivered or 3<sup>rd</sup> party-contracted approach? What are the critical success factors for this kind of service?**

- Must be open to the public, with criteria for eligibility.
  - Could involve Health Region, Occupational Therapy to do home visit assessment.
- Fairness as a key principle.
- Would like to see smaller cart options in the general service stream, for those who do have the ability to manage smaller carts.
- Find a supplier who can do it.
- Don't make people feel bad or like they have to beg to access the service.
- Invite community proposals to procure the service – include a clear scope of demand and expectations.
  - Might be cheaper than City-run program.
    - Affordability is important, especially if on disability pay or low-income.
    - Sense of already being financially penalized for a condition that is beyond a person's control.
  - May need to have some consideration of different agency constraints and abilities – ex. Crocus Cooperative workers have a limit on their hours per week for disability payments.
  - Could be a component of a broader suite of service offerings, like snow removal help.
  - Could Cosmo or another group drive around day prior to collection and within 24 hours after to pull out/in the carts for special service recipients?
- People may want the City to be involved, at the very least in a promotion and advocacy role, and to answer questions/deal with concerns from residents – “more likely to call the City than a contractor”.
- Suggestion that at the end of the day, City is likely to play a significant role even with 3<sup>rd</sup> party delivery – managing the contracts, providing education, etc.

- One person suggested the option of allowing folks to opt-out of city collection and manage their own special procurement rather than perception of paying twice.
- No double-charging or being punished for age or ability.
- Equitable service is required; not necessarily the same service.
- Must remove barriers and stop limiting the program in current fashion – this is a problem from a Human Rights perspective.
- Must have a threshold for accessing the service – consider a one to two page form like other cities.
- Aging in place is a priority in our community and that relates to waste collection.
- Change language away from “Special Needs” service – outdated and not fully accurate.
- Timelines – must move on this sooner than later.
  - A Human Rights complaint would become an issue for the City of Saskatoon.
- Recommend an incremental change approach, similar to Human Rights Commission’s work with transportation.
- Human Rights Commission doesn’t necessarily care how the service is delivered, but emphasized that neighbour-based program likely would not work.
- Need temporary and permanent service options for different types of challenges (ex. Recovery from hip surgery vs. a permanent condition).
- Likely cheaper for a 3<sup>rd</sup> party to deliver the actual service.
- Would this be part of a user pay model or reflected in the mill rate – need to prioritize equity.
- From rights perspective, any program would have to be the same costs for those on special services and those on regular service (could be a challenge to work into a Waste Utility).
- At the end of the day, collection is a public good.
  - This is about being a better, more inclusive community.
  - Waste collection is a public good like parks and libraries.