

City Council presentation
2019 March 25
Compost

Thank you Your Worship and Councillors. My name is Sara Harrison, and I am the Chair of the Saskatoon Environmental Advisory Committee.

I and my colleagues have stood up here many times before, and as you are well aware, SEAC is a strong supporter of the implementation of waste diversion via the proposed city-wide organics program.

Our mandate is to provide advice on matters relating to environmental implications of City policies and programs... and one of our key goals for 2019 is to continue to advise on waste diversion programs. We are extremely committed to this goal as this program is a significant step towards a sustainable Saskatoon –in waste footprint, GHG emission reduction, and financial sustainability.

While we haven't had a chance to review the presented report as a committee, there are some fundamentals we have discussed previously that we would like to comment on. In addition, we have responded to your request to comment on the February report and a letter is forthcoming to EUCS. If you so choose, we look forward to the opportunity to fully discuss and comment on the details of this report as a committee at our next meeting.

SEAC applauds the vision and foresight of Council in having decided to continue to move forward with citywide curbside organics collection. However, we wish to reinforce the need to progress with implementation as quickly as possible.

Saskatoon's goal of 70% waste diversion by 2023 is only 4 short years away and Saskatoon's current waste diversion rate is only approximately 23%. As nearly half of Saskatoon's residential waste is made up of organics, quick implementation of city-wide organics collection is needed in order to achieve this goal.

In addition, approximately 8% of Saskatoon's GHG emissions come from the landfill.

There are a couple points in this report I would like to draw your attention to:

Firstly, on our environmental targets:

- The report clearly states that meeting our 2023 Waste Diversion target is in jeopardy. This should not be taken lightly. These targets represent a guiding commitment and priority to Saskatoon residents. What are we left with if we disregard these targets when the going gets tough? We encourage and are here to support Council in showing leadership in this area... to make tough yet sustainable decisions for Saskatoon residents.
- Saskatoon has one of the worst waste diversion rates in Canada. As other cities move forward with their composting plans, Saskatoon's delays have us racing for the bottom.
- This is only the first step on our way towards achieving our waste diversion targets – a delay in this program will flow on towards other programs – the multi-unit and ICI programs, further jeopardising our ability to meet this target.
- Lastly, waste is a critical component of our Low Emissions Community plan. 12,000 to 17,000 tonnes CO₂e per year is projected to be reduced with this program, supporting our target towards 40% reduction in GHG emissions by 2023 and 80% reduction by 2050.

Next, some points in regards to financial sustainability...

- It is tempting to just look at the mill rate increase with each option. However, from my understanding from unpacking this report, these figures do not factor in the property tax required increase to sustainably fund the landfill given the current shortfall to the replacement reserve. The longer this program takes to implement, the sooner Council will be faced with a significant funding crunch in order to construct a new landfill. Simply looking at this mill rate increase for the Compost program is narrow-focused and short-term. Council needs to consider the full picture of sustainable waste management when considering the financial cost.
- In addition, Council has requested Administration to consider a “triple bottom line” policy to move decision-making away from purely financial. These options as presented do not consider the environmental and social levelers of sustainable waste management.

- Option 1 rolls out the program at the quickest rate, and therefore will most quickly solve the problem facing the city. Yes, it has the highest mill rate in the near-term but it will most effectively lead to a solution of the root cause problem – our current low diversion rate.
- Attachment 4 lays this out clearly, to quote:
 - For every year that a citywide curbside organics program is delayed a loss of landfill airspace is equivalent to \$1.1 to \$1.6M per year.
 - Put simply, landfill airspace is expensive to Saskatoon residents and you need to consider the landfill airspace costs over the long term.
- In Attachment 1, it wasn't clear to me what is embedded in each option and whether they are equivalent in managing the current funding gap. To get a full picture of the decision before you, you need to understand the breakdown of what portion of the increase is due to the organics program vs. other components of the waste system.
- Without fully considering the value of air space, and the historic underfunding of the waste system, you are effectively saddling the decision to proceed with the organics program with the costs of black-bin waste collection and disposal.
- Essentially, the slower the program is rolled out, the longer you continue to subsidize the thing you don't want (waste) vs. the thing you do (waste diversion).

Residents' voices

- Over 80% of residents surveyed supported the implementation of a program during 2018 engagement. With 10% growth of residents making a choice to pay to compost, there is clearly a strong desire for more sustainable waste solutions in Saskatoon. 8,500 residents have said loud and clear (with their pocket books) that they value sustainable waste by opting in to the current green cart program.

Given all of this, I (and I speak as the Chair, not the committee) am not clear why Administration has recommended Option 2, other than in following your request for "AN option". You did not direct it to be "THE option". In light of seeing the picture before you, I am not clear why you would choose this option.

On a personal note – I have 2 young children, 4 and 2 years old. They are the reason I take the time to stand before you today, as they, and all residents of Saskatoon, deserve to live in a healthy, sustainable city. The decision you make today will impact not only Saskatoon’s tax payers, but the long-term residents of this city. You can choose to invest today in a long-term, financially and environmentally sustainable solution that has a positive impact in the future. Or you can choose short-term gain over long-term pain and saddle residents with an unsustainable landfill for longer.

SEAC encourages you to choose wisely, consider the full and long-term picture of your decision, and implement this program as soon as you can.

Thank you.