



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

# Briefing Note

---

**To:** Council

**File No.:** 5360 - 20

**From:** Director of Public Works Services

**Date:** January 10, 2024

**Subject:** Solid Waste Automated Curbside Collection – Update

---

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this briefing note is to provide Council with an update on the roll out of the City's new Solid Waste Automated Curbside Collection system and to highlight milestones and associated impacts to residents serviced by curbside collection.

**DISCUSSION:** January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024 marked the transition to automated curbside collection in the City of Courtenay. In the lead up to the start of the new service nearly 30,000 carts were delivered to the estimated 9,960 residences in the City that are part of the curbside collection service. Three carts were delivered to each home: garbage, organics and recycling. Overall, the cart delivery went well, with some homes requiring additional carts for home health care waste or regular garbage for large multi-generational homes, while some residents requested the assisted set out service. In addition, there was a delay in delivering wildlife resistant organics carts until mid-December. Finally, some properties that did not receive carts for various reasons have been prioritized for cart deliveries in January.

This briefing note will serve to summarize the automated curbside collection service and provide updates to Council on relevant issues that have come to light during the transition to the new service.

## Changes to the System

A robust communication strategy was undertaken to inform the public of the changes to the system which inspired much conversation in the community and engagement with the City. The greatest impact to residents has been the change from weekly to bi-weekly garbage collection, the cart-size limit on organics (kitchen and yard waste) away from unlimited yard waste prior to 2023, and the transition to automated carts. Each item is discussed below, followed by an FAQ document as Attachment 3.

### *Bi-Weekly Garbage Collection*

The goal of the change to bi-weekly garbage collection was to align with the regional goal of waste reduction through diversion to recycling and organics. Responses from the public do indicate that the inclusion of kitchen waste into the organics stream in January 2023 has helped considerably to reduce garbage output from most households. That being said, residents with home health care waste or children in diapers have been emphatic in requesting extra garbage carts to accommodate the change to bi-weekly collection and additional carts will be provided for those homes on a reviewed request basis. A discussion on additional carts and associated costs follows below. On a similar note, a small number of residents have voiced concern over manoeuvring the cart to the curb on collection day. Based on a review with the resident, an assisted set-out service will be provided on a subsidised basis<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Additional garbage carts for home health care waste are \$56.00 annually (tipping fees only), additional garbage carts for regular waste are \$138.20 (full cost recovery). The assisted set-out service is offered at \$100.00 annually.

### *Organics Limits*

Single residential homes will be provided a 360 L organics cart for weekly collection, and residents in some areas of the City have voiced concern that seasonal leaf collection and yard waste will overwhelm the new carts that will be provided. Residents will be given the opportunity to acquire additional organics carts on a cost-recovery basis, however those carts will likely only be used during periods of seasonal clean-ups and remain unused for the remainder of the year.

Recognizing the desire from some neighbourhoods of the City to develop a solution for excess yard waste disposal options in 2024 due to the cart size limit for organics, the City is continuing to monitor the needs of the community and working with our regional partners to find potential short- and long-term solutions. The 2024 Solid Waste budget includes a cost for reviewing, developing, and, if necessary, deploying a small seasonal pilot program administering and hauling seasonal waste to the CSWM drop-off at the landfill at a cost of \$2 per household across the service. The program would ask residents to bring excess bagged leaves to designated locations for consolidation and hauling by the City. Staff are working with the CVRD on an in-kind agreement to accept loads of leaf litter from the City for drop-off at the Comox Valley Waste Management Centre on a trial (pilot) basis under the condition the material is free of garbage, sticks, stumps, and rocks. Another option would be for those residents in need of excess yard waste disposal to simply purchase a second organics cart through the service. Alternatively, the Emterra agreement included a proposal for a seasonal yard waste collection event to accommodate the seasonal fluctuations in yard waste collections with a 4-week period in the spring and another 4-week period in the fall. This cost of this program would need to be spread across the entire service, raising rates significantly higher than a City-run drop-off program. In the absence of statistical information relative to the need of a seasonal collection program, the City declined to agree to this section of the proposal in the first year of the contract, understanding that it may create some inequity within the service as all residents would be paying for a program that may only benefit a small portion of the City.

### *Automated Cart Set Assignments, Cart Exchanges, Additional Carts*

Based on supply-chain limitations in the production of the automated carts, the City was not able to provide a cart selection survey for residents ahead of the required cart order in the fall of 2022. In the absence of the survey, Courtenay used historical data and future program goals to select the best options for carts for different housing types in the City. The messaging to residents has been to use the supplied carts for all four seasons with an online cart exchange portal opening in the fall of 2024 for exchange requests to be made.

Due to the lack of a cart selection survey in 2022, the first cart exchange for each owner will be free in 2024/25, with subsequent cart exchanges being proposed to be charged at \$65 to recover the cost of the cart pickup, drop-off, and administration by the contractor and City. In order to avoid multiple cart exchanges throughout the year, each household will be limited to one cart exchange annually. To streamline the process, requests for cart exchanges will be directed to an online cart exchange portal. Future cart exchanges will require a fee to be paid in person at City Hall prior to the exchange taking place as the City's tax and utility fee system is limited in its capacity. Upon receiving a new cart set, residents will see the updated fee on the next annual tax notice. Staff estimate there will be up to 14 unique charges required for both transparency and equitability in the system. Obviously cart RFID (radio frequency identifiers) and cart serial numbers will play a critical role in tracking cart assignments for exchanges, as well as contamination management.

### *Home Health Care Needs*

In the cases of homes requiring additional capacity for home health care waste in the garbage, additional garbage carts will be provided before the commencement of the automated collection system on a request basis. Staff have pro-actively identified care homes in the community and have received calls from residents requiring additional carts for home health care waste. An interview with the resident will be done to understand the need for the service. The fee for the additional garbage cart for residents with home health care waste will be based on tipping fees alone and represent a subsidized fee for the cart cost and administration. Proposed fees and charges are included as an attachment and are considered draft, in anticipation of the 2024 solid waste budget presentation and until the 2024 Solid Waste Fees & Charges bylaw is adopted by Council.

Some residents have expressed a desire for additional garbage carts based on a perceived need for additional volumes or based on the change to bi-weekly garbage collection; in those cases, an application and interview will be required, and should the threshold for the subsidized service not be met (no home health care waste), the full cost for an additional garbage cart will be charged (tipping fee + fixed collection service fee + administration fee).

### *Assisted Set-out Service*

An estimated 53 homes will require an assisted set-out service<sup>2</sup>. To date, 35 residential properties are participating in the assisted set-out service. This service includes pulling the carts from an agreed upon location at a resident's home to the curb, emptying the carts, and returning the carts to the same location on the property. The assisted set-out service is intended for those residents that are eligible, being physically unable to fulfil the resident responsibilities of setting out the automated carts on collection day. Inclusion in the assisted set-out service will require an application to the City and a site-visit to the home to ensure the resident is unable to pull the carts to the curb and that the service is reasonably possible at the home. The contracted cost for the service is \$450.96 annually, however it will be billed to eligible residents at \$100, with the subsidy<sup>3</sup> spread across the service. The cost for the estimated 53 homes participating in the assisted set-out service will be \$1.87 annually for each of the 9,960 households in the curbside collection service.

### *Wildlife Resistant Carts*

Nearly 1,500 wildlife resistant carts were delivered to residences across the City. A map of potential bear-active neighbourhoods is attached and was chosen based on proximity to greenbelts and watercourses. Those residences that are interested in exchanging a regular organics cart for a wildlife resistant organics cart should contact Public Works Services for additional information. There is no extra charge for wildlife resistant carts and organics carts can be exchanged for free based on availability.

### *Solid Waste Contamination Management Staff*

As has been seen in numerous communities, the implementation of automated carts typically increases recycling contamination with the closed lids on the carts concealing the contents from view. The absence of

---

<sup>2</sup> Currently the City, through Contracted Services (EMTERRA), offers assisted set-out services for four (4) customers at no cost.

<sup>3</sup> Eligible residents will receive a 78% subsidy rate for the assisted cart set-out service. Non-eligible residents will be billed at the full cost recovery rate.

manual loaders puts the reliance on the automated truck driver to monitor for contamination while the cart is being tipped into the truck. An enhanced contamination management program (approved by Recycle BC) will be implemented with the automated collection system, with the most visible component being contamination management staff ('bin flippers') who will be out in the community on a regular basis monitoring recycling bins for contamination. An education campaign similar to the summer student ambassador program will be the first step in the program, followed by further actions including the option to escalate to bin tipping with recycling audits. The initial program roll-out will run for four months from January to April 2024 with two City staff, which will transition to the annual summer student ambassador program in the summer months.

### Solid Waste Utility Fees

As part of the 2024 – 2028 Financial Plan new solid waste utility fees<sup>4</sup> have been developed for the automated curbside collection service beginning in January 2024. The new fees will incorporate the fixed rates for the contracted collection service, cart purchasing and administration, as well as variable rates for CSWM tipping fees. The fees will be based on the two distinct cart sets that have been assigned to households in the curbside service. Two cart sets, below, are based on housing type, and have been delivered to homes.

| Housing Type                                | Recycling | Organics | Garbage |
|---|-----------|----------|---------|
| Single Residential Dwelling, Duplex         | 360 L     | 360 L    | 120 L   |
| Secondary Suites, Carriage House            | 240 L     | 120 L    |         |
| Townhouse   Mobile Home in a MHP   Fourplex |           |          |         |

All households in the curbside collection service will receive a 120L garbage cart with the emphasis on waste diversion to the recycling and organics streams.

The proposed Fees and Charges, which are subject to budget approval, are attached and consist of fixed & variable rates for collection, tipping fees, and administration.

These new fees represent the cost of the service for both the City-Emterra agreement as well as the tipping fees at the CSWM Landfill. The increases represent a 36% or 50% increase for townhouse / mobile home parks or single residential dwelling / duplex respectively from the single household fee of \$237.50 in 2023. The City had prepared for this planned increase by raising fees in 2023 by 24% to ensure the 2023 costs to deliver the service were fully recovered and to gradually transition to the planned increases.

### Solid Waste Management Bylaw and Contamination Management Policy

Solid Waste Management Bylaw No. 3113 and the Solid Waste Contamination Management Policy were adopted by Council this fall ahead of the commencement of the automated curbside collection service. The reason for the new bylaw is the change to automated curbside collection using carts, as well as to incorporate some of the incremental amendments that have occurred of the past several years while modernizing the bylaw from its original adoption on 2002.

---

<sup>4</sup> Solid Waste Utility Fee as represented are considered **draft**, in anticipation of the 2024 solid waste budget presentation and until the 2024 Solid Waste Fees & Charges bylaw is adopted by Council.

Much of the City's bylaw was influenced from bylaws of other local governments that have already adopted and are operating a successful automated curbside collection service, with some aspects tailored to Courtenay's specific requirements.

Key points that will be brought forward in the new bylaw for consideration include:

- Required participation in the service as well as definitions of serviceable properties
- Default carts, cart placement requirements on collection day
- Cart exchange options, costs and limits
- Assisted set-out service
- Requirements for waste audits
- Contamination management
- Penalties and offences
- Fees and Charges Schedule for all cart combinations as well as additional carts

As discussed, experience from other local governments that have adopted automated carts has shown there is often an increase in contamination in the waste streams as automated collection puts the reliance on the automated truck driver to monitor for contamination while the cart is being tipped into the truck. Courtenay collects and delivers recycling material to its industry partner, Recycle BC, who reimburses the City for the material. An important part of the agreement with Recycle BC is to continue to maintain low levels of recycling contamination in order to avoid financial penalties. Efforts have always been and will continue to be focused on resident education through curbside audits and the ambassador program. The Solid Waste Contamination Policy was adopted to provide tools to staff for enforcement at problematic properties where education efforts have not worked.

### **Old Container Exchange and Collection Program**

Now that automated carts have been delivered and are in use, some residents have voiced a desire to have old recycling, yard waste and garbage containers removed from their property. Communication and education efforts to date have encouraged residents to consider ways to re-purpose the carts such as storage for tools, use as rain barrels, planters, or depot items (flexible plastics, foam, refundable containers). That said, some residents have no space to house their old containers. In response, and in consideration of our collective waste diversion goals, there will be a few options for residents to divert old containers away from the landfill:

- The City will have two crews in rented cube trucks collect old containers from households on collection days for three weeks between January 15<sup>th</sup> and February 2<sup>nd</sup>. Residents are asked to put the old containers behind the automated carts on collection day and continue to put them out until they are collected as staff will likely require three weeks to collect all the old containers.
- Alternatively, City residents can drop off clean, used containers at 1094 McKenzie Ave, outside the City Public Works Yards from January 15<sup>th</sup> to February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Residents who want to pick up the used containers are welcome to visit the same location and pick up on a first come, first served basis.
- The CSWM will also be diverting old containers that residents bring to the landfill to a location near the recycling depot from January 15<sup>th</sup> to February 10<sup>th</sup>.

After the exchange period, remaining containers will be sent to specialized durable plastic recycling facilities on the mainland, the only cost being the shipping. The Town of Comox is running a similar and concurrent drop-off / exchange program so the City will not see an influx of containers from Comox residents.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Similar to the 2023 budget for the implementation of the automated curbside collection system, the 2024 budget will have a number of one-time items related to the new automated system including the old container exchange program, advertising and education, and legal fees. The budget for collection costs will be based on a full cost recovery model, but based on the new contract solid waste annual fees will increase 36% and 50% for town home / mobile home parks and single residential dwellings / duplexes respectively.

**ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:**

The largest administrative burdens on City staff will be additional cart requests or missed cart deliveries followed by the old container collection exchange at the beginning of 2024. Once the system is running with all carts delivered, contamination management staff will begin curbside recycling reviews. Contamination management tracking through stepped enforcement will be a new administrative function. Working with the new technology available for contamination monitoring on the contractor’s fleet in combination with the updated and mapped addresses, the City is well-positioned to use the tools and software available to track and manage contamination systematically.

As supply-chain constraints prevented a cart selection survey, the first cart exchange per owner will be free of charge. In an effort to mitigate this burden and offset the inherited costs associated with the administration and coordination of cart exchanges, fees will be administered for all future cart exchanges – and limited to one exchange annually.

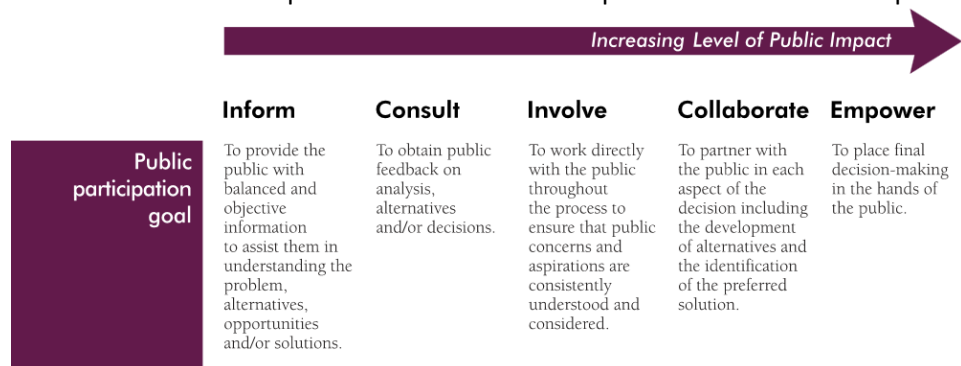
**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:**

This initiative addresses the following strategic priorities:

- Municipal Infrastructure - Continued regional collaboration: Regional Growth Strategy, Liquid Waste Management Plan, South Sewer Conveyance, organics/solid waste, air quality, and regional parks.

**PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:**

Staff would inform the public based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation:



**RECOMMENDATION:** THAT Council receive the “Solid Waste Automated Curbside Collection – Update” briefing note.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Attachment 1 - Wildlife Resistant Cart Areas
2. Attachment 2 - Proposed Schedule of Fees and Charges
3. Attachment 3 - Frequently Asked Questions

Prepared by: Chris Thompson, Manager of Solid Waste Services

Reviewed by: Kyle Shaw, ASCT, CPWI, CWP, CWWP, Director of Public Works Services

Concurrence: Geoff Garbutt, M.Pl., MCIP, RPP, City Manager (CAO)