

Regional Municipality of Waterloo

TRANSPORTATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES WASTE MANAGEMENT

To: Chair Fred Kent and Members of the Planning and Works Committee

Report No: E-02-070

File Code: C06-20/ER02

Date: July 2, 2002

Subject: GRASS CLIPPING DIVERSION PROGRAM

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Regional Municipality of Waterloo:

- a) Actively promote the diversion of grass clippings from landfilling effective immediately; and
- b) Ban grass clippings from curbside garbage collection as of March 31, 2003.

SUMMARY:

Regional residents generate an estimated 8,000 tonnes of grass clippings annually, some of which are still landfilled. With the introduction of yard waste collection throughout the tri-city area in 2002, residents now have a variety of options to divert grass clippings from landfill. Options include: backyard composting, grasscycling, naturescaping, bi-weekly yard waste collection and drop off at the Region's small vehicle transfer stations. Banning grass from Regional garbage collection service represents a final step in diverting grass clippings from landfill.

REPORT:

Background

Organic waste such as grass clippings and yard waste represents over 35 per cent of the residential waste stream in season. Grass clippings from lawn maintenance represent almost 15 per cent of all organics or five per cent of the residential waste stream. Diversion of organic waste continues to be a priority and a key component of a balanced approach to waste reduction. Grass by its very nature degrades easily and at relatively accelerated rates. The high moisture, low fiber composition of grass causes it to generate more than twice as much methane and other landfill gases when landfilled compared to other yard wastes.

Regional Diversion Program Options

Grass clippings are easily managed at the home through "at source" practices such as backyard composting and grasscycling. To date, the Region has given out over 65,000 backyard composters. A recent survey of local residents revealed that over 50 per cent of Regional residents with backyards, of sufficient size, currently practise backyard

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composting. Moreover, 85 per cent of these residents are utilizing their composters to manage yard wastes including grass.

The Region also actively promotes "best management practices" such as grasscycling, xeriscaping and property naturalization to, among other things, reduce the amount of grass waste produced by residents. The practice of grasscycling involves leaving the grass clippings on a freshly cut lawn rather than removing them. Typically, a mulching lawn mower blade is employed to finely cut the grass clippings so they are not noticeable and to incorporate the clippings back into the soil as a nutrient source.

Xeriscaping and naturalization involve replacing a portion or all of the resident's lawn with drought resistant and/or native species of groundcover. This concept reduces water consumption, fertilizer and pesticide usage and promotes diversification of plant species.

As of this Spring, the Region now offers bi-weekly yard waste collection throughout the tri-city area. Residents who choose not to manage their yard waste at source can take advantage of this expanded service or opt to drop off their grass clippings at any of the Region's small vehicle transfer stations. The Region currently estimates that over half the grass clippings are diverted through these various options.

A ban on grass clippings from curbside garbage collection is the next logical step to complete the diversion of this organic waste.

Curbside Garbage Ban

Implementation of the ban is proposed to begin immediately on a voluntary basis.

Enforcement of the ban would take effect as of March 31, 2003. The ban would prohibit disposal of grass clippings in curbside garbage. Grass will be accepted from April to November each year in the paper yard waste bags and tagged yard waste containers. Current Regional promotional materials already indicate that grass clippings should not be included in the garbage. Throughout the Fall of 2002 and Spring of 2003 residents will be reminded in Regional promotional materials of the pending ban.

Garbage bags and containers found to contain grass clippings after the ban has become effective, would not be picked up and would be "stickered" with a reminder notice. The sticker would remind residents that a ban on grass clippings is in effect and would provide a phone number for residents to call for assistance.

Program Support

Current efforts to promote grasscycling will also be expanded to ensure residents receive sufficient support. Information on how to grasscycle successfully will be placed on the Region's Internet web site and will be made available in print. The feasibility of offering rebates to residents purchasing mulching lawnmower blades will also be explored.

A waste composition study of the residential waste stream is also being undertaken at this time. The initial phase of the study is measuring, among other things, how much grass is currently being landfilled prior to implementation of the ban. The second part of the study will focus on determining the "post implementation" effectiveness of the ban.

CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN:

This proposed initiative meets the Corporate Strategic Plan goal of ensuring that we spend wisely the dollars that we are entrusted with and maximize their use for those we serve.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The promotional costs associated with this initiative will be accommodated within the existing operational budget for the Division, as the promotional focus will shift from new blue box materials to organic diversion.

OTHER DEPARTMENT CONSIDERATIONS:

Staff from the Finance Department have reviewed this report.

PREPARED BY: Michael Birett, Project Manager

APPROVED BY: Michael Murray, Commissioner of Transportation and Environmental Services