

Region of Waterloo
Engineering and Environmental Services
Waste Management

To: Sustainability, Infrastructure, and Development Committee
Meeting Date: October 7, 2025
Report Title: Downtown Waste Collection and Public Space Garbage Litter Container (Sani-Cans) Update

1. Recommendation

For information.

2. Purpose / Issue:

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Downtown waste collection changes for 2026, and the designated downtown public space garbage litter container (sani-cans) collection service.

3. Strategic Plan:

This report supports the 2023-2027 Corporate Strategic Plan priorities to steward our natural environment and shared resources as we grow: We will work to protect the region's natural environment, biodiversity, trees, and water under Strategic Priority 2, Climate-aligned growth. With the introduction of Downtown organics collection, we can work towards our goal to extend the life of our landfill and reduce carbon emissions.

4. Report Highlights:

- A working group was formed to gather input on the upcoming Downtown waste collection changes. Topics include collection days, number of carts per business, set out locations, challenges and other considerations. Walkthroughs and drop-in session meetings have occurred to get on-site and direct feedback
- An observational audit of the Downtown areas assessed current business waste generation and collection practices to inform discussions on the upcoming Downtown waste collection changes
- The Region will continue to work with area municipalities to develop a long-term strategy to manage the sani-cans within their respective downtown areas and collaborate with them in reviewing new waste management technologies.

5. Background:

On August 13, 2024 (EES-WMS-24-003) Council approved the Region to continue to administer and fund the collection, processing and disposal services for industrial, commercial, and institutional (IC&I) properties located in the designated Downtown areas. Approved service levels approved were a minimum of four times per week collection in the tri-city designated downtowns, weekly collection for the designated township downtowns, and twice weekly collection for Belmont Village. Garbage, organics and recycling would be collected in carts, and cardboard manually.

A working group has been established, consisting of BIA representatives, area municipality staff, and Region staff to gather input on the development and implementation of the downtown program. Key points discussed by members included the following:

- Cart deliveries before collection begins
- Collection days
- Number of carts per business
- Cart storage and set out by parking spots, laneways, and during the winter
- Education for property and business owners

The working group has:

- Confirmed which properties are eligible for service based on the current BIA boundary and MPAC property codes
- Provided feedback on key concepts and messaging that should be included in the educational materials for property and business owners
- Conducted walkthrough sessions in the Downtown areas to assess how the upcoming waste collection changes would apply to each area
- Participated in drop-in sessions to get a hands-on look at the carts. These sessions allowed participants to see the carts up close, explore their features and dimensions, and provide input

An observational audit of all Downtown Areas that the Region services was conducted in June and July 2025 to assess current business waste generation and collection practices. Findings include:

- Average co-piles consisted of five garbage bags and four blue boxes per set out
- 10% percent of all audited addresses had preparation issues
- The most frequently observed preparation issues were the use of non-program recycling containers and incorrect sorting (both at 24%), followed by ripped garbage bags (22%), improperly prepared cardboard (17%), and set outs exceeding the 10-bag limit (7%)

The upcoming cart-based program in the Downtown areas is expected to reduce or eliminate several of the preparation issues by removing the need for multiple recycling containers and material sorting, containing garbage securely in carts preventing ripped bags, and using higher-capacity carts to reduce bag limit exceedances.

Public Space Garbage Litter Container (Sani-can) Collection

The Region of Waterloo is not legislatively required to provide public space garbage litter container (sani-can) collection. Under the Municipal Act, 2001, S.O. 2001, Chapter 25, the Region has the authority to provide waste collection services as it deems appropriate, subject to the direction and approval of Regional Council. Sani-cans would remain manual collection, using existing containers that are not owned by the Region.

BIA representatives, area municipality staff, and Region staff met to review current sani-can collection practices within the affected areas and assess potential implications of a service change.

Currently, the Region collects 57 sani-can containers. Containers in the Downtown Kitchener and Uptown Waterloo are collected six days a week, while containers in Belmont Village and New Hamburg are collected weekly, and Wellesley bi-weekly.

Area municipalities collect 113 sani-cans within their designated downtown areas. Note, other public space litter containers are collected by area municipalities outside of the downtowns such as in parks and on trails.

The Region can maintain existing sani-cans in the interim, however there are different levels of service as seen in Appendix A. This information was provided by area municipalities. Region staff emphasized in meetings that sani-can collection practices in 2026 should not only be sustainable, but equitable across all municipalities. Area municipalities expressed concerns about the financial impact of transferring the administration and costs to them. The Region will continue to work with area municipalities to develop a long-term strategy to manage the sani-cans within their respective downtown areas, collaborating with them on review of different types of waste management technology.

6. Communication and Engagement with Area Municipalities and the Public

Area Municipalities: The Downtown working group has been involved in the planning and implementation of Downtown waste collection. Meetings were also held for sani-can collection. On-going meetings, surveys and brainstorming sessions have occurred to gather feedback.

Public: Extensive communication efforts will be required to inform and educate impacted property and business owners about the upcoming changes to the Downtown

waste collection program. Carts and information kits with education will be delivered to each eligible address.

7. Financial Implications:

The expected cost to collect and process waste from sani-cans is between \$100,000 - \$150,000 a year. Council to discuss as part of 2026 Budget.

8. Conclusion / Next Steps:

Staff will continue working group meetings with BIA representatives and staff from the area municipalities to advance the Downtown waste collection program. In Q1 2027, staff will provide an update on the Downtown waste collection program once the cart-based collection has been implemented.

9. Attachments:

Appendix A: Region vs area municipalities sani-cans collections

Prepared By: Melissa Chaves, Coordinator, Contracts & Service

Ann-Marie Weber, Supervisor, Contracts & Service (Waste Management)

Reviewed By: Olivia Kwok, Director, Waste Management

Approved By: Jennifer Rose, Commissioner, Engineering and Environmental Services