

Next regional council must finally deal with an old issue: the fate of York's garbage

BY PATRICK CASEY
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The debate has drifted dramatically from dumping to diversion, yet the question remains the same:

Where is York Region's garbage headed after Keele Valley closes?

The Maple dump is scheduled to close by the end of 2002 after two decades worth of trash created Canada's largest landfill site.

Three months ago, the region was prepared to send its trash to Kirkland Lake, dumping it down Adams Mine, an abandoned iron ore mine half-filled with spring water. The final proposal never reached the region's doorstep when the plan died over contract wrangling between Toronto and Rail Cycle North Ltd.

Today, York Region is considering joining Toronto and truck its waste to Michigan, inking an independent contract with U.S.-based landfill operators or re-tender the entire project.

At the same time, a new waste transfer station was proposed for East Gwillimbury, a massive facility where all the region's garbage would be trucked and sorted into three piles — disposal, recycling and compost materials. Local residents, however, are opposed, requesting an environmental assessment and pledging a battle before the Ontario Municipal Board.

As a possible alternative, the region is examining a private site in northern Richmond Hill. As a precaution, council also ratified contract extensions with three local recycling firms until the end of 2003.

By and large, the overall results are not impressive.

York Region's nine mayors and 10 regional councillors spent the last six years dissecting possible solutions to handle 175,000 tonnes of annual waste but failed to sign new contracts before the Nov. 13 election.

The final answers are now in the hands of a new council. Beginning with a re-education process in January, the region's political leaders must also decide on a two-stream (waste and dry recyclables in one bag and household organics in another) or three-stream (the waste and recyclables are separated into separate bags) collection system and whether new trucks should be purchased capable of accepting both curbside waste and recyclable material at the same time.



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Mario Ferri is concerned about Vaughan's diversion rate and is advocating a Two Stream System for the city after the Keele Valley Landfill closes in 2002.

"It's frustrating because this has been a question for 20 years," explained Mario Ferri, a Vaughan councillor seeking re-election in Maple.

"There's been a sense of comfort

with Keele Valley because the region and Toronto have made money with it being opened.

"I can't believe the length of time it has taken. A decision should have happened 10 years ago. We are

pushing the envelope and testing the provincial government to see if they will back down and keep Keele Valley open longer. That would amount to political suicide because it's going to close.

"Maybe we have been good neighbours when we shouldn't have been," he added. "We accepted our burden but now it's somebody else's turn."

Opponents of the Adams Mine promised civil disobedience if trainloads of trash arrived in Northern Ontario.

And campaign organizer Pierre Belanger said public outbursts from northerners helped open dialogue surrounding recycling diversion, with the need for improved rates across Greater Toronto.

In York Region, only 26 per cent of the trash is diverted away from landfill, while Toronto is stuck at 24 per cent. Appalling figures considering all Ontario municipalities had set a 50 per cent target by the beginning of 2000.

"The GTA has been like a teenager who hasn't done his homework. It's now past midnight, the excuses are eaten up and there's no place to go," Belanger said. "It's now the moment of truth."

The era of a big hole in the ground is over. It is time to do what everybody else is doing in the modern world and adopt aggressive recycling measures. The Adams Mine would have made the GTA the laughing stock of the world for its medieval solution.

However, garbage and recycling collection is a costly endeavour.

This year, York Region will spend \$25.2 million to collect and dispose of all its waste, including \$3.4 million on recycling efforts.

By 2003, the figure could skyrocket to as high as \$57 million, with \$18 million needed for recyclable processing, another \$3.1 million to compost food waste and \$9.6 million in capital costs to finance the waste transfer station.

"Nobody appreciates the crisis we are in. The public thinks you just put out the garbage and it disappears," explained Markham Regional Councillor Gord Landon. "People only appreciate a crisis if we don't pick it up."

Landon, chairperson of the region's solid waste committee, said the demise of Rail Cycle North means the region now has until next August to secure a disposal site.

But he admits recycling answers must come soon. A decision by March means a new facility is operational by the end of 2003.

"We are painted into a real box," Landon said. "It is going to take a couple of years to build a facility

The cost to collect trash:

The following is a breakdown of financial implications of adopting a new collection system in York Region, comparing current operating costs with costs of either a two-stream or three-stream collection system by 2003.

Activity	2000	2003	
		2-Stream	3-Stream
Collection	\$15.3 million	\$17.4 million	\$20.3 million
Recyclable Processing	\$2.2 million	\$18 million	\$7.6 million
Food Waste Processing	Not applicable	\$3.1 million	\$2.8 million
Yard Waste Composting	\$1.2 million	\$1.1 million	\$1.1 million
Capital Costs	Not applicable	\$9.6 million	\$8.6 million
Disposal	\$6.5 million	\$7.8 million	\$8.3 million
Gross Costs	\$25.2 million	\$57 million	\$48.6 million
Revenues	\$4.1 million	\$11.6 million	\$8.6 million
Net Costs	\$21.1 million	\$45.4 million	\$40 million
Diversion Rates	24 per cent	56.6 per cent	50 per cent

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