

# Steep cost to diverting trash from landfills

BY JEFF MITCHELL  
Staff Writer

Diverting trash from landfill will mean significant cost increases for York Region municipalities over the next few years.

That concerns municipal leaders, who wrestle annually with tax hikes. But local environmentalists and ratepayers see it as the cost of being environmentally responsible.

"It's time we invest and spend more money on teaching people about composting and recycling," said Nadia Magarelli, president of the Weston Downs Ratepayers Association in Woodbridge. "For us it's important now, instead of

spending money to send (waste) to landfills, to look at better technologies."

The pursuit of better technology — and a goal of diverting as much as half of the region's trash away from landfill through recycling and composting — are behind the expected cost increases.

The conversion to so-called three-stream waste collection is intended to address the closure at the end of this year of the Keele Valley landfill site in Vaughan and the region's 50 per cent diversion goal.

The region plans to spend \$35 million on a waste transfer plant near Newmarket that will sort recyclables and

compostable material from waste collected in the northern municipalities. A similar facility will be built in the southern municipalities.

Those new plants and their operating costs will result in a higher price tag for waste management.

It is expected more than \$13.7 million will be required to run the waste management system by 2004, nearly \$4 million more than was budgeted in 2002.

The financial burden is expected to climb to more than \$9.7 million in 2004, a whopping increase over the \$5.4 million the region will collect from the lower-tier governments in 2003. The municipalities will pay \$1.6

million to the region this year and millions more to Toronto for costs associated with dumping waste at Keele Valley.

Newmarket Mayor Tom Taylor is shocked by that cost.

"This year isn't too bad, but next year and the year after that, it's going to bury us," Mr. Taylor said.

"When I look at an increase of \$1 million to almost \$10 million over two years and it's coming from the municipalities, that doesn't let me sleep too well."

The figures are speculative right now, but Mr. Taylor worries his town's waste management budget — expected to cost about \$2.7

million this year — will skyrocket. Municipalities pay private contractors for garbage pick-up in addition to regional charges for waste disposal.

"How do you offset it?"

That's a good question," said Mr. Taylor. He insists the province, which has set guidelines for increased diversion rates, should increase funding for municipal waste management.

Another potential solution is user pay, said Brent



**BILL BELL:** User-pay system is the best way to go, says mayor of Richmond Hill.

Kopperson, a Sutton resident and executive director of the Green Communities Association affiliate in York Region.

"Is the cost justified? I think absolutely the cost is justified," Mr. Kopperson said. "How it's borne is another matter."

He points to Georgina's buck-a-bag system, which requires residents to affix a \$1 sticker to each bag of garbage they place by the curb.

The benefits are two-fold, he asserts: The system raises significant revenues which offset municipal waste management costs — more than

\$600,000 a year, according to the town — and raise recycling awareness among residents.

Georgina has the highest diversion rate among municipalities in the region, directing 37.5 per cent of its waste from landfill.

If it works in Georgina, it can work elsewhere in the region, Mr. Kopperson said.

"I think it's another way of getting people to take a look at how waste is managed," he said. "I would certainly recommend users

take on some responsibility for the waste they put into the system."

Richmond Hill Mayor Bill Bell agrees that user-pay systems demand better waste management in households, where the process should begin.

"I think more of the idea now than I did two years ago," he said.

But any move to a user-pay schedule would have to be co-ordinated region-wide, to prevent residents from disposing of their trash in a neighbouring municipality.

See TRASH, page 15.

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