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Region fumbled waste project: Heath

BY KATHLEEN GRIFFIN
Staff Writer

Markham's leadership role in waste management has been jeopardized after the Region of York "dropped the ball" in securing a new site to process kitchen organics, a local councillor is charging.

Plans to begin implementing a three-stream collections program this fall — garbage, recyclables and kitchen waste — have been shelved because there's nowhere to process the organics.

Ward 5 Councillor Jack Heath is livid. "This is an abomination," he said. "The region is in charge of providing processing and it dropped the ball. It let Markham down. This is a gross failure for the environment."

He said representatives from Toronto and Mississauga visited Markham to observe two successful pilot projects over the last two years that

tested methods of collecting organics. Now, those municipalities are leading the way.

"We used to be the leader in this area, now we can't do anything," Mr. Heath said.

"If we had a system in place we could increase our diversion rate from about 35 per cent to 60 per cent, putting us among the top in the province."

"We've spent six months working on this. Personally it's frustrating, but more than that, the environment deserves much better."

Kees Schipper, York's Commissioner of Transportation and Works, said the region supports Markham's initiatives. Unfortunate circumstances simply combined to delay the program, he said.

"We think it's a great idea," he said. "It's something the region is pursuing as well — our No. 1 objective is increasing the diversion percentage."

He blamed the delay on the region's only organic processing facility, Canada Composting Newmarket Inc., going into receivership and being put up for sale.

"That made it impossible to conclude a financial deal with CCI," said Mr. Schipper. "Hopefully, if there's a purchaser we can negotiate very quickly."

Another alternative was to truck the organic waste to a processing site in Guelph.

Councillor Heath said because the region dragged its feet in securing space there, Scarborough's Green Bin program took Markham's spot.

"My point is, this opportunity existed in January, in February, in March, in April. Nothing was done and now they won't consider us until they can gauge how much waste Scarborough generates," he said.

But Mr. Schipper said the Guelph site was always problematic because in order to deliver the waste there, it has to be transferred from garbage trucks to a large tractor trailer.

"Unfortunately there isn't a transfer station within York Region for organics," he said.

A new transfer station is being planned for the south end of the region that would accept waste from all three garbage streams and those negotiations are ongoing, he added. Construction would be at least a year away.

"If CCI is sold, we can get this going even earlier," Mr. Schipper said. "We, too, are anxious to proceed quickly."

It won't be soon enough for Councillor Heath. "My residents are going to be furious."

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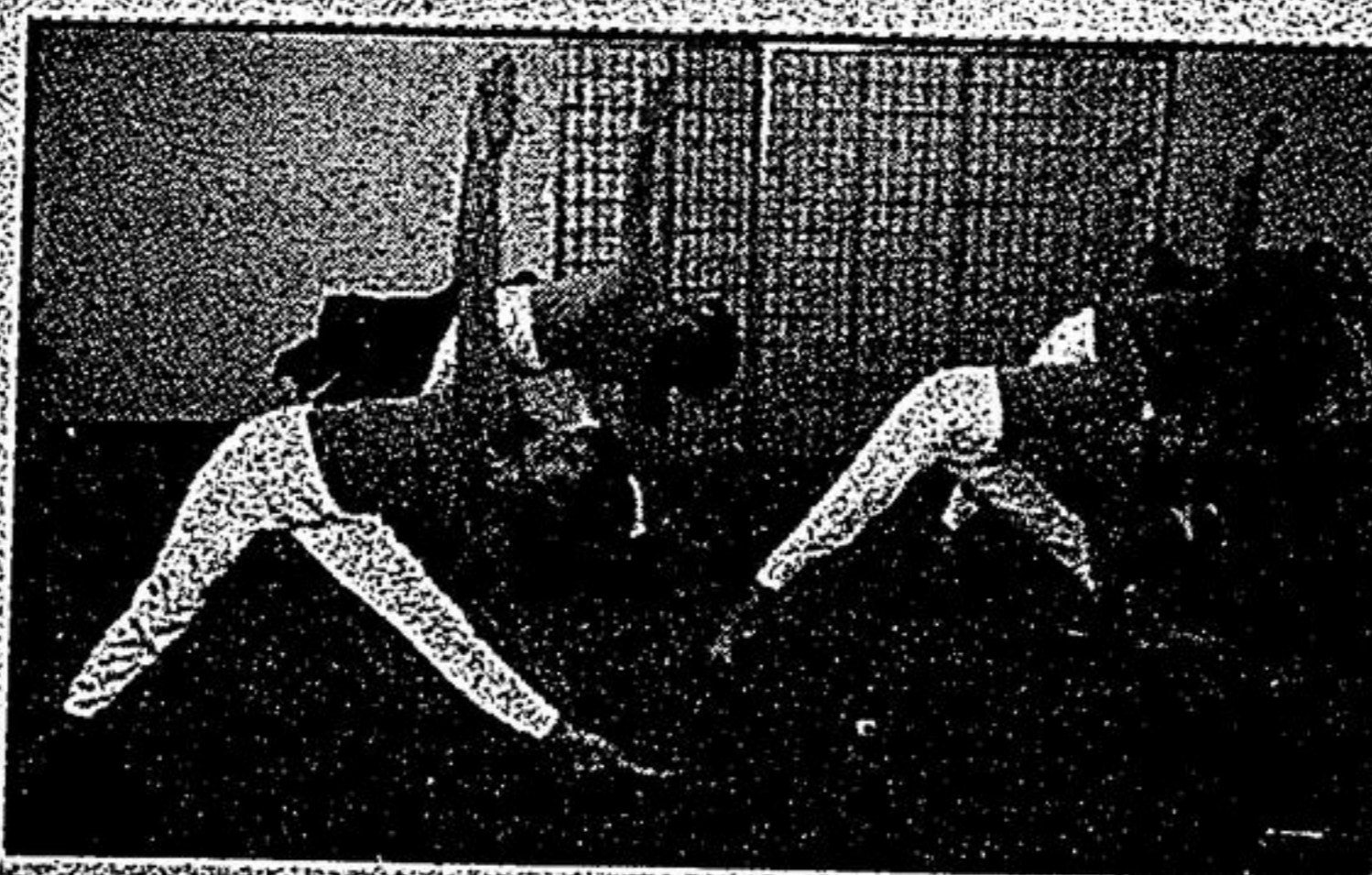
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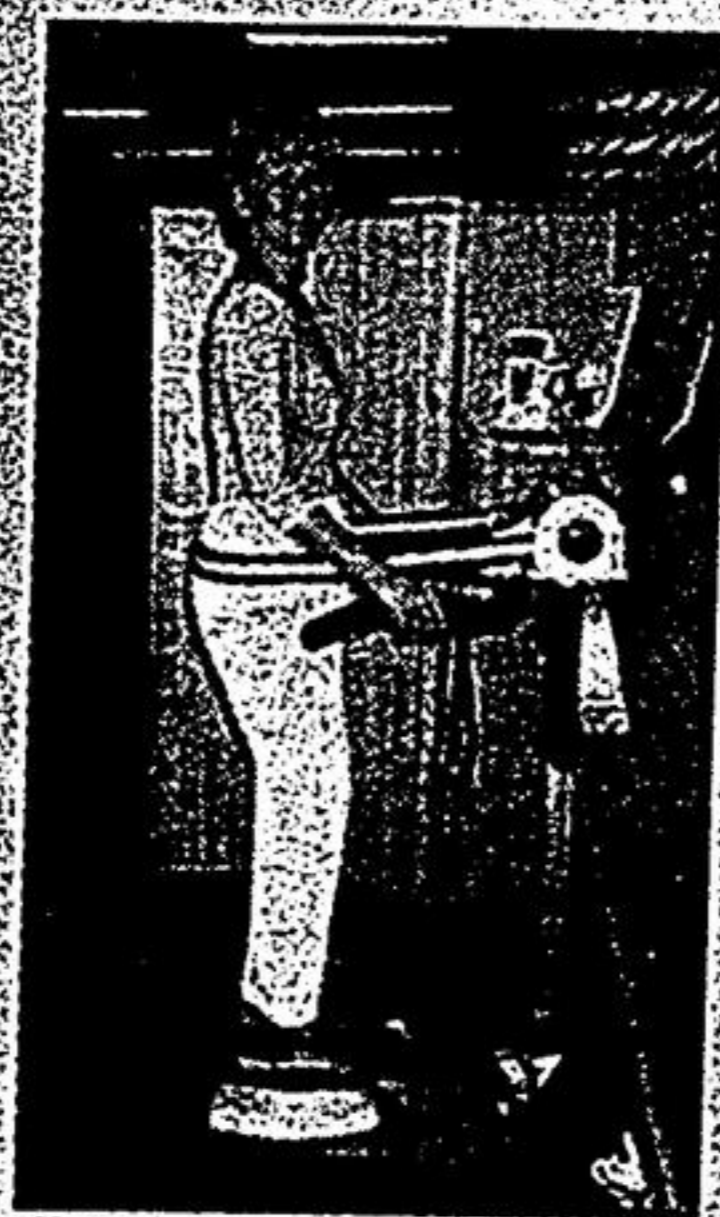
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