

'Michigan doesn't want your garbage.'

— Mike Garfield

Don't Trash Michigan campaign

York wrestles with trash options

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the eve of 2003, neighbours celebrated with champagne.

But no one else in Ontario wants a new landfill, so York put its trash on the road, dropping one-third in a landfill near St. Thomas, ON, and moving the rest over the Ambassador Bridge to Michigan.

But regional council didn't count on the anger of Michigan citizens. They don't like their trash can reputation any more than Maple enjoyed being Greater Toronto's dumping ground.

"Michigan doesn't want your garbage," said Mike Garfield, a spokesperson for the Don't Trash Michigan campaign, aiming to make the state less attractive for out-of-state waste.

Michigan decided last year trash from Toronto and York met its standards, meanwhile, Ontario citizens were throwing about a billion aluminum cans a year in the trash, according to a provincial watchdog, Environmental Commissioner Gord Miller.

This is a decision year for waste in York.

We have to drop our landfill contracts in Michigan or renew them. We must decide if we should turn some of our trash into pellets that can be burned as fuel. We have to find a new place to send some or all our kitchen scraps for composting. And if we want an incinerator or some fancy new energy-from-waste facility within a decade or so, we have to decide now.

York, with its above average incomes and single-family households that typically do better at recycling than multi-

unit residences, began the millennium with one of the worst records for diverting waste from landfill among Ontario's large communities — 24 per cent in 2002. Apparently, only Hamilton residents cared less about what happened to their trash.

Throughout his two-decade run as a Markham and regional councillor, Gord Landon discovered residents never paid attention to where their garbage went.

"It just disappeared from the end of the driveway," he said.

We do know bag limits drive diversion (from landfill).

How can you have good diversion if you have unlimited garbage?

Andy Campbell

York's solid waste management director

Last year, however, Environment Minister Leona Dombrowsky came to Markham and announced the province would try to reach a 60-per-cent diversion rate by 2008.

Should we have laughed? Many years ago, the province committed itself to reach 50 per cent — and the region pledged to do that by 2004. When last year arrived, we were at 26 per cent, barely halfway.

Yet as Markham started curbside organic waste collection last fall in its east end, it was bold enough to predict a 70-per-cent diversion rate for homes with the program, twice what the town achieves with the blue box alone.

It worked.

But regional councillors, who had decided organic waste should be collected throughout the region by June 2006, failed when it came time to back that up in their own communities.

They failed because sending wet waste to Halton Recycling Ltd.'s Newmarket facility cost \$130 a tonne while to truck it to Michigan cost \$65 a tonne.

And the process got more complicated when Halton's facility became so odorous, a legal battle erupted with Newmarket council.

Now we'll be lucky to see organics collected across the region by the end of 2007.

If it's important for residents, collecting organics, reaching 60-per-cent diversion and stopping our shipments to Michigan will be important for York's municipal councillors, Mr. Campbell said.

At the end of the day, we need money and leadership.

Last year Peel Region passed a three-bag limit for every household, but Peel makes decisions on waste only at a regional level.

York's municipalities do what they want. Thus, Vaughan's tough waste strategy brought its residential garbage pickup down from an unlimited number of bags to 10 (it will reach three bags a week in 2006) and Richmond Hill dropped from a 10-bag limit to five.

"We do know bag limits drive diversion (from landfill). How can you have good diversion if you have unlimited garbage?" Mr. Campbell asked.



DOUG BLACK: Aurora man one of few surveyed who knew York's trash sent to Michigan.

Where does our trash go?

BY MARTIN DERBYSHIRE
Staff Writer

Where does your garbage go? The final answer is Michigan, or possibly southwestern Ontario.

But first, it all goes to Georgina after it's picked up by your local municipality, or whatever company they contract out to do the dirty work.

It's the responsibility of each municipality in York Region to pick up garbage from its residents' curbsides.

Then it's trucked up to the regional waste transfer facility off Warden Avenue in Georgina.

Once it arrives there, it's compacted into the back of 40-foot transport trucks and shipped to a landfill.

The region uses the Green Lane landfill in Southwold Township in southwestern Ontario, along with the Onyx Arbor Hills and Carlton Farms landfills south of the border in Michigan.

It costs about \$70 a tonne to do this and the region did it for about 230,000 tonnes of household waste last year, according to Mike Birett of the region's solid waste management branch.

That's about 400 trucks full of York Region garbage headed down Hwy. 401 each year and growing.

The Warden facility is at capacity and with continuing growth, the region has been forced to build a new waste transfer facility on Bales Drive in East Gwillimbury to handle the extra garbage.

The \$28-million facility should get the region ahead of the game in

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