

# Funding recycling big part of puzzle

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Staff Writer

Unless corporations start paying the full cost of having their containers recycled, the blue box program, as it is today, should be scrapped, York Region's top waste bureaucrat says.

It's a position director of solid waste Andy Campbell plans to pass on to Queen's Park when the province's Blue Box program is reviewed later this year.

"If (businesses) are making these things, why are they only paying 50 per cent instead of 100 per cent? What's the rationale? They're only paying for half of the problems they produce," Mr. Campbell said.

But even at 50 per cent, the industry's share of blue box costs is more than it had been.

Other than a one-time investment in the blue box program, the makers of plastic and glass containers didn't used to contribute to recycling costs.

It wasn't until municipalities, including York, began making serious pleas for a return to a deposit-return system, which has proven successful with beer bottles and cans, that big business agreed to help fund curbside pickup.

Through Stewardship Ontario, an organization created in 2002 to draw money from companies whose packaging is collected through municipal waste management programs, 1,228 companies across the province share 50 per cent of blue box costs.

In 2003, these companies contributed about \$59 million of the nearly \$118 million it cost to run the programs. York Region's share is about \$1.8 million

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a year, including a \$549,910 payment it received in March.

Until it Stewardship Ontario was created, York and most other Ontario municipalities bore the full cost of their recycling programs after provincial funding dried up in the early 1990s.

It placed a burden on local taxpayers and municipal politicians setting budgets, Mr. Campbell said.

More troubling, however, York has been forced to take some plastic containers to landfills, since it lacks factories to sort problem containers, such as those used for many margarine and shampoo products, Mr. Campbell added.

However, a new sorting facility is set to open in East Gwillimbury, just north of Newmarket, this summer.

All of the region's recyclables will be sorted at the state-of-the-art facility, which will accept more than 25 types of containers previously unacceptable in regional blue boxes, such as empty aerosol cans, milk cartons and paint cans.

Still, Mr. Campbell is part of a growing number of municipal managers and politicians in favour of a hybrid system: a combination of Blue Box recycling and

deposit-return.

"A take-back-to-vendor is the best form of product stewardship," Mr. Campbell said.

Clarissa Morawski, a Toronto independent consultant and researcher, agreed recycling is flawed and companies are largely to blame.

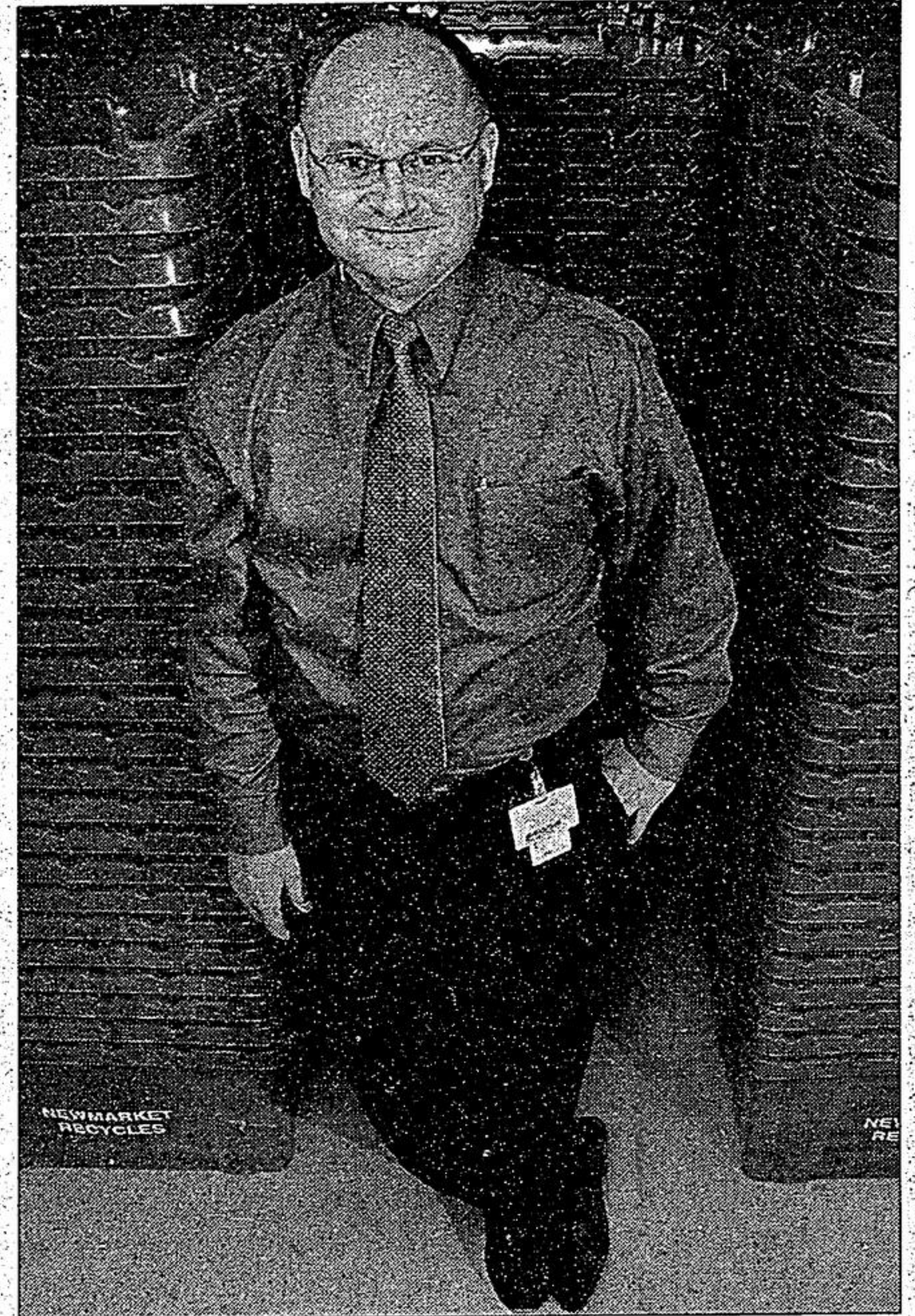
She and business partner Melissa Felder of CM Consulting completed a 2003 report called Who Pays What?, taking a close look at the costs associated with recycling beverage containers in Canada in 2001 and 2002.

Ontario companies prefer to subsidize the blue box program than switch to a deposit return system, which generally has a 75-per-cent recycling rate, because a return system is more expensive.

In some industries, it's even higher. The Beer Store, for example, boasts a return rate of more than 90 per cent.

By comparison, Ms Morawski estimated just 40 per cent of containers are returned through the blue box program.

"Ultimately, it's political at the end of the day," Ms Morawski, also a board



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York's director of solid waste, Andy Campbell, believes manufacturers should pay the full cost of recycling their containers. Others, including an industry group, disagree.

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