

Hargrave wanted contract trashed

# Angry councillors demand answers from waste firm

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Apparently Green for Life Environment Corp. - Waste Management's phones, along with its collection trucks, experienced mechanical issues over the past month as they would not take or return calls from Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville officials, Mayor Wayne Emmerson and Councillor Rob Hargrave told The Sun-Tribune this week.

"It was really disturbing the lack of communication between the staff at GFL, they basically unplugged their phone lines and left our staff and residents out to dry. This is unacceptable," Councillor Richard Bartley told The Sun-Tribune via e-mail.

Mr. Hargrave wants GFL's contract terminated and for Whitchurch-Stouffville to break away from the N6 (York Region's northern six municipalities) agreement currently in place for waste collection services so it can hire its own contractor.

## CALLS NOT RETURNED

"You can't do a bulk buy and get all the efficiencies," he told The Sun-Tribune.

Miller Waste was the municipality's collection contractor from 1999 to 2007. In 2007, the N6 (Aurora, East Gwillimbury, Georgina, King, Newmarket, Whitchurch-Stouffville) banded together on waste collection services and awarded Turtle Island the contract. GFL purchased Turtle Island in 2011.

Mr. Hargrave, who was against the contract switch from the beginning, saw Miller going about its collection duties in Peterborough on one of the coldest days.

In late November/early December town staff were alerted to collection issues as its customer service department started receiving a disproportionate number of calls related to

missed collections, according to a Jan. 14 council report.

"I'm not saying it's an essential service but it's critical to have our garbage picked up in a timely manner," Mr. Hargrave said.

About 423 calls were fielded by town staff on Jan. 2 and 3 and another 1,017 from Jan. 6 to 9 regarding the lack of blue box and green bin collection, according to the report.

"Our staff took the brunt of the blame and the complaints and they didn't deserve it," Councillor Phil Bannon told The Sun-Tribune.

"It hijacked my entire week," Councillor Ken Ferdinands told The Sun-Tribune of the roughly 75 calls he received last week from his constituents in northwest Whitchurch-Stouffville.

Mr. Bannon and Mr. Hargrave both noted their frustration, not just because their blue box and green bins sat curbside for days, but because of the lack of information GFL representatives provided town staff.

Wards 1, 2 and 6 were among the hardest hit, according to Mr. Hargrave.

"Just tell them they're going to be a day late and they'd be OK with that," Mr. Emmerson told The Sun-Tribune. "I'm hoping GFL will come through and make the adjustments and apologize."

A GFL rep apologized to Newmarket councillors earlier this week. However, one councillor refused to accept it.

"GFL is a national company. You expect me to buy this story?" Joe Sponga said, addressing GFL representatives. "You're making money on my back. It's private industry. I shouldn't feel sorry for you. Get your act together and pick up the garbage like you agreed to do."

For unknown reasons, it appears as though the N6 may have been



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

A GFL truck clears some of the curbside waste backlog in northern York Region last weekend.

among GFL's most poorly treated customers.

Other GFL clients, such as Northumberland County and the City of Toronto, experienced only minor delays in their collection service, according to the council report.

## APOLOGY - FOR NEWMARKET

Despite Mr. Hargrave's wish to have GFL's contract deemed null and void, town staff recommended against it because they continue to work with all those involved to raise the service level back to contractual standards, according to the council report.

Replacing GFL would take 18 to 24 months due to the complexity of the tender, final contract terms and the need for a competitive bidding process, according to the report.

Staff also noted that "any hastily conceived course of action could affect the level of service even further."

But that does not mean their

hands are tied.

Among the options outlined in the contract pertaining to GFL's failure to complete services, municipalities can assess liquidated damages for every non-performance episode. Each incident carries a specific dollar value that can be levied against GFL, according to the council report.

"What's that going to do for residents?" Mr. Hargrave said.

For now, the plan is to review the contract performance in conjunction with the other N6 municipalities; identify any other expenses incurred by the town resulting from GFL service deficiencies and examine whether or not routes in Whitchurch-Stouffville should be shortened and more trucks added.

GFL officials did not return calls before our deadline.

A special council meeting regarding GFL was tentatively been scheduled for Feb. 4, 9:30 a.m. in council chambers, 111 Sandiford Dr.

with files from Chris Simon

## 'WHY WASN'T MY TRASH PICKED UP?'

A multitude of reasons were given to town staff for GFL's decreased service levels.

Extreme cold weather caused mechanical breakdowns.

Additional breaks were required by the drivers due to the cold temperatures, slowing route coverage.

On Jan. 7 all of the N6 GFL crews were pulled off the road due to cold temperatures.

The ice storm, which was followed by large amounts of snow, created windrows and snowbanks that caused driver injuries when collecting material from on top of snowbanks.

"This is Canada. It happens. Surely, we have back-up mechanisms to solve them," Mr. Ferdinands said.

source: Jan. 14 Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville council report

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