

Community mailbox u-turn unlikely to impact Aurora: Town

By Brock Weir

Canada Post's decision to halt the implementation of their community mailbox program has raised questions around Aurora where door-to-door delivery was expected to cease at the beginning of the week.

Aurora neighbourhoods still receiving door-to-door mail delivery have been undergoing a transformation since mid-August with new community mailboxes being installed in many pockets of the community in anticipation of an official fall launch. However, Canada Post announced Monday it is temporarily suspending future deployment of the program to determine the best path forward with the incoming Federal Liberal government.

Efforts are now underway to place the comprehensive program on hold in an orderly fashion, said Canada Post in a statement. This involves roughly 460,000 addresses across the country which are currently in the process to be converted to community mailboxes.

As a result, all conversions planned for November and December and those announced for 2016 will be placed on hold. Customers impacted by this decision will receive a letter within the next few weeks advising them of the status of their mail delivery service.

Aurora's conversion rate currently stands at 90 per cent, according to Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure, but there is a question mark on what will happen with the balance.

It sounds like based on the information we have right now they are going to continue with the next 10 per cent to finish them off, he says. Who knows if there [will be a further mandate] from Canada Post saying everything must stop at the moment, but what we're hearing from the ground is they are just going to continue to finish it.

Although these questions have to still be cleared up, Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP-elect Leona Alleslev, it was an exciting development as it showed her party almost immediately made good on a commitment to halt the conversion.

I think Canada Post and communications are as integral a part of our infrastructure in this country as even roads and transit, said Ms. Alleslev. To ensure we're going to make a comprehensive review of what Canada Post delivers and to ensure it is delivering the right service for Canadians is obviously very important. People moved into communities with a certain expectation of service. Some of those communities do have an older population who are, perhaps, not as flexible. Door-to-door was a very important issue for them in terms of being able to stay in touch and communicate. [This is as] important to a country's development as bricks and mortar infrastructure.

Newmarket-Aurora's MP-elect Kyle Peterson was also on the same wavelength, noting this was a hot-button issue on the campaign trail for residents of both Aurora and Newmarket. While Mr. Peterson speculated the decision to halt the program was indeed made in light of the election results, it will give both communities the chance to address concerns they have had since the program was announced.

Both communities felt they were not adequately consulted necessarily with the implementation of these community mailboxes, including where they went when the construction was done and things of that nature. I think the best way forward is to consult with the communities to find out how we can best move forward and find out how the Canada Post corporation itself is consulted, and their union, to see how we can keep every stakeholder engaged, informed, and come up with a solution [that works] for everyone. At the end of the day, they have a mandate to make sure Canadians get mail delivered and we also want to ensure that is at a reasonable cost to all involved. We're going to try and work towards that balance.

For Councillor Tom Mrakas, who was the leading advocate on Council to get the municipality involved in halting the community mailbox conversion, uncertainty leaves Aurora in limbo.

?Everyone is up in the air with no idea on what is really happening and what to expect,? he said. ?The one thing that is unique for our town is Monday was supposed to be the first day for the community mailboxes to actually start receiving mail and I believe a lot of residents mentioned a letter went out to them saying they would continue to receive door-to-door. Aurora didn't start the delivery to mailboxes, so I don't know where that puts us.

?I think at the end of the day it comes down to speaking to our new MPs and working with them to see if we can get the best solution for our Town.?

Calls to Canada Post had not been returned by press time.