

Green For Life to provide more resources following ice storm

By Brock Weir

Poor decision making on the part of local garbage collectors is one of the main reasons cited for extensive service failures following the pre-Christmas ice storm.

These are the findings of a service assessment by the Town of Aurora and a review of its contract with waste collectors Green For Life (GFL). Council authorised the review after mounting garbage and public complaints prompted a special Council meeting in early January.

In a report before Council this week from Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure, \$4,500 worth of penalties have been levied against GFL for service disruptions, but the company has implemented sweeping changes to the internal aspects of their business to provide continued effective service.

During the early days of the ice storm, GFL was experiencing significant collection challenges and equipment failures, said Mr. Simanovskis in his report. This should have been an early indication for a call for additional corporate resources to get ahead of the delays. However, post-event information has revealed that local management falsely assumed that the delays could be addressed internally and failed to call on additional corporate resources in a timely manner to address the acute challenges. When the issue was reported to GFL senior management by the municipalities, immediate corporate action was implemented through additional fleet support and staffing. However, by this time, the backlog of waste on the streets was resulting in the need for extraordinary effort to recover from the delays.

Additional factors include inaccurate and optimistic reporting of service levels to municipalities like Aurora, creating a dialogue between the Town and the company, but also the Town and residents based on inaccurate information resulting in chaos at the street level.

According to the report, mayors from York Region's Northern 6 (N6) Municipalities - Aurora, King, Newmarket, Whitchurch-Stouffville, East Gwillimbury and Georgina - began discussions with GFL to address this issue and the company has since developed an action plan. These include a restructuring of their own management team, daily route reports, an effort for the timely completion of routes, more communication before the cancellation of any routes, and more resources available overall to make sure they are not caught short.

This plan still needs to be approved by the N6.

It looks like we're making progress, said Mayor Geoffrey Dawe at the committee level last week as other Councillors noted marked improvement in their own local garbage collections.

You now have to get your garbage out by 7 a.m. and you don't get to wait until 6 p.m., so it is much better, added Councillor Chris Ballard.

At last week's meeting, Mr. Simanovskis noted that the \$4,500 in penalties levied against GFL will simply be taken off what Aurora normally pays the service provider. Some Councillors, however, suggested something more productive should be done with this money, possibly to provide some degree of assistance to residents most impacted by the lack of service.

[It could be] something that gives back to those impacted, speaks to the event or the circumstances of it, rather than it just flowing back into the kitty, said Councillor Michael Thompson. Maybe there is a better utilization of these monies that have been levied against GFL to either speak back to the residents on the improvements that are happening through different marketing materials, or put some thought into thinking outside the box. Maybe it is a community barbeque by GFL for hanging in with them.

Councillor Wendy Gaertner, on the other hand, said she was pleased with the report and happy to continue as we are. The

problems had been identified, she said, solutions to the problems had been offered, but she questioned whether municipal staff were happy, considering many complaints received by Councillors and at Town hall regarding GFL even prior to the ice storm, to stay the course as well.

?The situation we found with the ice storm and the cascading events as to what really impacted our service was concerning to us, considering how the company was managed,? responded Mr. Simanovskis. ?There is [now] a lot more confidence in the competency of that structure. I don't see any issues coming forward. What we're looking at going forward is better communication, more accurate communication, and more timely communication because that is really where a lot of the downfall had occurred.?