

New hope for organics collection

Councillors' move to kill plan amended to allow more study

By Bartley Kives

A MOVE to kill off organic-waste collection in Winnipeg has been kicked to the curb itself. City council's water and waste, riverbank management and environment committee voted Thursday to amend a motion by Counc. Ross Eadie (Mynarski) and Russ Wyatt (Transcona) to suspend plans to create an organic-waste collection program and cancel community consultations about it until the city reviews all of its garbage and recycling programs.

The committee instead voted to give curbside organics collection a chance by asking Winnipeg's water and waste department to conduct broader public consultations about the options available for collecting kitchen scraps.

Eadie, a member of the committee, wound up voting against his own motion. Counc. Jenny Gerbasi (Fort Rouge-East Fort Garry), Shawn Dobson (St. Charles) and committee chairman Brian Mayes (St. Vital) voted in favour in a 3-1 decision.

Mayes said it was important to him Winnipeggers be given as many options as possible.

"Let's have a real public consultation. It took us a long time to get there, but I think we got to the right end point," he said.

Eadie and Wyatt launched their motion after councillors were told in January about three potential organic-waste collection options facing the city: just fruit and vegetable scraps, all kitchen waste, or

kitchen scraps and pet waste. The additional annual cost per household was pegged at \$55 to \$100 — a flat fee several city councillors oppose, for reasons ranging from the burden it would place on low-income homeowners to the fact most other city services are financed through property taxes, not user fees.

Eadie's and Wyatt's motion came to council in March and was referred automatically to the water and waste committee. That led to a sometimes acrimonious, eight-hour committee meeting in which Eadie argued with some of the delegates who spoke in favour of organics collection.

No fewer than 26 delegates, including Counc. Wyatt, Cindy Gilroy (Daniel McIntyre), Matt Allard (St. Boniface) and Jeff Browaty (North Kildonan), registered to speak to the committee. Gilroy and Allard spoke in favour of organics collection, while Wyatt and Browaty opposed it.

During the morning, tempers flared between Eadie and delegate Curt Belton after the Mynarski councillor demanded evidence landfills produce greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. Eadie also questioned the science presented by a pair of Grade 9 students and told Green Action Centre composting director Jennifer Feschuk he did not believe Statistics Canada data about greenhouse gas emissions.

"I'm just learning about science and so on, but I'm trying to understand," Eadie said.

The City of Winnipeg's Brady Road Landfill, which handles most of the city's household waste, is the second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases

in the province. This is the main impetus behind the push for curbside organic-waste collection in Winnipeg, one of the last large cities in Canada that doesn't ask its residents to separate their vegetable peels, coffee grounds and steak bones from the rest of their trash.

When organic waste breaks down aerobically — that is, in the presence of oxygen — the decomposition process generates carbon dioxide. That is what happens in a properly maintained backyard composter. But when organic waste breaks down anaerobically — below the ground, where there's no oxygen — the decomposition generates methane, which is 21 times more powerful as a greenhouse gas.

Feschuk responded diplomatically when asked to comment on Eadie's familiarity with the relationship between landfills and greenhouse gases.

"I think the councillors have to know a lot about a lot of things, so that's not easy," she said. "I would like to think that if they're going to have a position on something that they know what they're talking about, and I assume that they do."

Gerbasi said she was dismayed by the tone during the morning portion of the meeting, stating delegates who come to council should expect to be treated with respect. Mayes said he did not believe he failed to maintain decorum.

The motion moves on to executive policy committee, which has the power to amend it or reverse it before it proceeds to council April 27.

Water and sewer rate hike up in the air

COUNCIL'S water and waste, riverbank and environment committee failed to agree Thursday on a series of increases to Winnipeg's water and sewer rates over the next three years.

Winnipeg's water and waste department asked council to approve water and sewer rate hikes of 9.2 per cent on April 1, 8.9 per cent in 2017 and a further 7.4 per cent in 2018. The impact will be a \$23 increase on the typical household's quarterly bill, with further annual quarterly increases of \$25 and \$23.

The committee voted 2-2, which means the hikes move forward to executive policy committee with no recommendation. Counc. Brian Mayes (St. Vital) and Jenny Gerbasi (Fort Rouge) voted in favour, while Counc. Ross Eadie (Mynarski) and Russ Dobson (St. Charles) voted in opposition.

The water and waste department said the increases are necessary to offset the department's operating costs and build up financial reserves needed for \$1 billion worth of upgrades to the city's sewage treatment plants.

In 2003, the province ordered the city to improve its sewage treatment plants and replace combined sewers as part of an effort to reduce nutrient loads into Lake Winnipeg, where phosphorus and nitrogen spawn blooms of algae that are changing the lake's ecology.