

Report

Date November 9, 2021

File:

Subject Automated Waste Collection Public Engagement Survey Results

PURPOSE

To review the feedback received on an automated waste collection system survey and provide direction to staff on the next steps for curbside collection in North Cowichan.

BACKGROUND

At the May 11, 2021 Committee of the Whole, Council approved the implementation of a communication and engagement plan to obtain public feedback for an automated truck curbside system for solid waste collection. As part of the recommendation, staff were to report back to Council on the results of the engagement. The first goal of the engagement was to provide residents with an overview of the existing manual system and outline potential limitations. As well, to provide an overview of the automated system, including costing and benefits. The second goal was to invite feedback from residents and offer the community an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the project.

Zinc Strategies and staff prepared a detailed survey of 13 questions that queried residents on their current curbside collection practices and whether they were interested in automated collection, yard waste pickup and larger bin sizes. Survey respondents were also asked for reasons they were for or against these proposals, with general comments welcome. A copy of the survey analysis is attached to this report (Attachment 1) and the consultant will be presenting the findings at the Committee of the Whole meeting.

Several methods were used to bring forward the manual and automated information and promote the survey's completion. These included radio, newspaper, website, cart hangers and online information sessions. The engagement and survey window ran from August 23 to September 13. There was a very good response to the engagement, with over 2300 surveys completed or approximately 23% of the 10,000 homes. Typically general/open surveys have a 5% response rate.

Staff will be providing information on the results of the automated truck survey following the November 9 Committee of the Whole meeting. The Public Feedback Summary Report completed by Zinc Strategies will be available to residents on the North Cowichan webpage.

DISCUSSION

Survey Results

A majority of residents who participated in the survey indicated a preference to move forward with an automated truck collection system. There was over 50% support for yard waste collection and automated recycling carts, with over 1000 residents supporting options for larger bin sizes.

For those that supported the automation option, participants listed the following justification:

- Concern for the safety of waste collection workers – 1188
- Would like yard waste collection – 1036
- Would like larger garbage carts – 835
- Carts offer better mobility – 834
- Other – 66

For those that did not support the automation option, participants listed the following justification:

- Increase in waste collection costs – 518
- Fees/taxes in general already too high – 489
- Difficulty of cart storage – 260
- Mobility/accessibility challenges – 195
- Benefits are not a priority (worker safety, new services) – 103
- Other – 92

Several themes came out of the survey and are outlined below:

- Support of an automated system was contingent on the protection of jobs and workers at the municipality
- Curbside collection of recyclable material should include glass, plastic bags and styrofoam
- Changes to the schedule should be considered, including set collection days and weekly collection
- Changes to the collections system should include consideration of electric vehicles
- Many new residents indicated that their experience with automated collection in other municipalities was very positive
- Increased waste would be the result of any increase in the size of the garbage bins

Addressing Concerns

- *Increase in waste collection costs*

An increase to the garbage fee from \$111 per year to \$182 is required to move to an automated cart collection system. This fee is comparable to other automated systems on the island, such as Saanich, Nanaimo, and Port Alberni, ranging from \$180 to \$250.

- *Difficulty of cart storage*

This could be an issue for residents with limited carport or garage space. During the implementation phase, consideration will be made into bin sizes. Smaller bin sizes of 80 litres could be made available that are comparable in size to the existing 77 litre maximum size for garbage bins.

- *Mobility / accessibility challenges*

Feedback was received from residents with mobility challenges who felt that transportation of the bins down their long gravel driveways would be an issue. Some residents load current bins into their car trunks and unload them at the curb. The larger and heavier automated bins will not support this method of transportation. The options available for these residents include leaving their automated bins near the road and loading on pick-up day using the existing transportation method. Also, the municipality could consider a door-to-door pick-up service for residents that qualify.

- *Protecting of Jobs and Workers*

North Cowichan currently employs 2.5 full-time refuse packers. Although it is anticipated there will be some improved efficiency with the automated system, no job loss is expected. Staff expect that increases in curbside participation will offset the efficiency.

- *Additions to Accepted Recyclable Materials*

Recycle BC regulates the accepted and non-accepted materials that are collected as part of the curbside collection system. Glass, plastic bags and styrofoam are accepted at Bing's Creek Transfer Station only.

- *Changes to Collection Days and Weekly Collection*

Changes to the collection system to allow for set collection days and weekly garbage/recycle pick up would require a four-day per week schedule and increases to collection costs. This increased level of service is not recommended at this time.

- *Purchase of Electric Vehicles*

Electric vehicles will be considered prior to the request for proposal process for purchase of the new trucks as part of the planning and implementation stage. Staff will consider the vehicle range and capital costs and required upgrades to charging stations to determine whether these trucks are viable at this time.

- *Increased Waste with Larger Garbage Bins*

Over 800 residents in the survey stated that they typically have more than 77 litres of garbage on collection day, and they are in favor of an option for larger garbage bin sizes. Many communities using the automated system offer larger sizes for garbage and recycling. The smaller bins would be at a lower annual cost, and therefore there would be a cost incentive to generate less waste. Also for larger families, a larger bin would eliminate the need to use garbage tags (cost savings) and reduce the number of trips to the transfer station, reducing GHG emissions.

OPTIONS

1. **(Recommended Option)** THAT the Committee of the Whole direct staff to prepare a report to Council prior to the end of 2021 that outlines the options, costs and timelines for proceeding with an automated truck collection system, including the process for improvements and the schedule for continuing with the existing manual collection system.
2. THAT the Committee of the Whole recommend that Council continue with the existing manual waste collection system and discontinue exploring the use of an automated truck collection system.

IMPLICATIONS

Option 1:

If the Committee endorses the recommended option, staff will prepare a report that will detail the major components of an implementation plan for an automated system that would need to be developed and approved by Council. It is anticipated that there would be an increase in the garbage fee in 2022 to develop this plan. The earliest that trucks and bins would be ready to commence service

would be 2023.

The report will also provide an overview of the steps required to continue with the manual collection system. The current garbage fee will remain similar to the current amount with the manual system. In addition, staff will outline methods and strategies to reduce worker injuries and turnover.

Option 2

Should the Committee decide to accept the report for information purposes only, staff will continue with the replacement of the manual trucks and maintain the current system. Also, staff will identify and implement improvements to our existing system to reduce injuries.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Committee of the Whole direct staff to prepare a report to Council prior to the end of 2021 that outlines the options, costs and timelines for proceeding with an automated truck collection system, including the process for improvements and the schedule for continuing with the existing manual collection system.

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Attachment:

(1) Public Feedback Summary Report