Project Synopsis

CIF Project # 1098 – Ottawa, Curbside Waste Diversion Policy Alternatives

Background

The City of Ottawa (municipality) recognizes there is a short-term opportunity to increase waste diversion from curbside households prior to transition to full producer responsibility. The municipality's Four-Season Curbside Waste Audit Study found that more than half of the material in the garbage could have been diverted through recycling and Green Bin programs. The average household set out falls well below the municipality's garbage item limit outlined in its Solid Waste Management Bylaw.

The need was identified to explore alternative waste collection policies to encourage waste diversion. This project involved the development of a business case to explore various policy mechanisms to support reducing waste to landfill and encouraging participation in waste diversion programs:

1. Partial Pay-as-you-throw (PAYT) for garbage
2. Firm Garbage Limit
3. Banning Recyclable and Organic Waste from the Curbside Garbage Stream with a Partial PAYT or Firm Bag Limit program
4. Clear Bag Garbage Collection with Recycling and Organics Bans

The project is also considering reducing the current garbage set-out limit. A model was developed to estimate the performance impact of each option on the municipality's waste management stream and to model financially to provide estimated capital and operating costs, as well as the estimated cost per household.

The results of the business case were used to consult with residents and key stakeholders to obtain feedback on the options being explored. The feedback will be considered in the development of recommended service levels for the next curbside collection contract.

Summary of Results

Under this project, a detailed business case was developed to assess the benefits, challenges and key considerations of each policy option being explored. A municipal scan and literature review was undertaken to gain better insight into the options being considered. The municipality retained a consultant that developed a model to estimate the performance and financial impacts of each policy option on the municipality's waste streams. The model

estimated garbage tonnage reduction per capita and increased diversion rate by assessing shifts in material from the garbage stream to the recycling, organics, and leaf and yard waste streams. Capital and operating cost estimates were compiled for each option being considered.

The detailed analysis completed through the business case supported the completion of robust public engagement. The high-level findings of the business case were presented to the public for comment and feedback. More than 20,000 responses to the online survey were received. Four virtual dialogue sessions attended by 88 participants and five focus group sessions with equity-deserving groups.

Financials

A total project budget of $135,000 was set for this initiative. Final project costs were approximately $170,000, which was partially offset by CIF funding. This included the development of the business case, building out a model to estimate the impact of policy options on the municipality's waste stream, and robust public engagement.

Learnings

This exercise proved to be very beneficial for the municipality and the municipality is planning to present a recommended option to City Council for consideration in early 2022. Some learnings include:

Business case:

- Completing a business case in advance of public and Councillor engagement positioned staff to address questions and concerns regarding the options being considered.
- Information provided from other municipalities was beneficial in understanding the activities undertaken to support implementing a new policy option, however it is important to use local costs whenever possible. Some municipalities' approaches to P&E and staffing, for example, vary greatly from others. Have a multi-disciplinary project team to provide inputs so the financial estimates are as reasonable as possible.

Modelling exercise to estimate impact of a policy option on the municipality's waste stream:

- Review changes to each waste stream on a per capita basis to avoid population growth minimizing the estimated impact of a policy option.
- Difficult to receive consistent data from comparator municipalities as each municipality tracks information slightly different due to data availability, program offerings and Councillor requests. As such, RPRA data was used for all municipalities.
- Do not base future estimates on annual collected tonnages during the pandemic. While municipalities have experienced increases in collected tonnages across all waste streams during the pandemic, it was unknown at the time of this project's completion the potentially lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the curbside waste stream.
- Be clear in communicating the results that they are planning estimates and there are a number of unknown factors that can influence diversion and collected tonnages such as

population growth, demographic changes, changes in product packaging, and new regulations.

Public engagement :

- It is critical to educate the public on each of the options being considered prior to soliciting feedback. There were many misconceptions about the options (particularly a partial pay-as-you-throw program). The municipality invested in a trademarked platform called Choicebook that provides participants with background information on each policy option and then guides them through a series of questions.
- Ensure to host focus groups or engage with equity-deserving groups to understand any concerns or considerations that need to be had with the options being considered.
- Collect demographic information to run cross-tabs on feedback received by certain individuals. For example, the municipality was able to compare responses from participants living in an urban setting compared to a suburban or rural, responses from larger households, and responses from participants that self-identified as setting out higher volumes of garbage.