

Town of Ajax Report



Report To: General Government Committee

Prepared By: Cameron Richardson, Supervisor of Environmental Sustainability & Climate Change

Report #: PDS-2021-22

Subject: **Textile Diversion Program**

Ward(s): All

Date of Meeting: May 10, 2021

Reference: GGC – March 8, 2021 (Environmental Sustainability Projects and Programs Update – PDS-2021-05)
Integrated Community Sustainability Plan, 2013
Council - September 16, 2019 (Climate Emergency Declaration)

Recommendations:

1. That Council approve the proposed implementation plan and corresponding actions to achieve a Town of Ajax Textile Diversion Program; and
2. That Council endorse a Council Charter on Textile Waste Reduction to showcase leadership as part of a community outreach strategy.

1. Background:

According to the Council for Textile Recycling, 85% of all textiles are going directly to landfills rather than being recycled or reused. The term “textiles” refers to materials that are made up of natural and/or synthetic fibres, thin threads and filaments. Common textile items that can be diverted from landfill include:

- Clothing
- General household textiles (towels, blankets, sheets, linens, curtains)
- Accessories and bags
- Shoes and boots

Adding to this issue, the past two decades has seen a dramatic shift of the retail industry into what is known as “Fast Fashion”, where inexpensive, disposable clothing is being sold in the North American marketplace. The average Canadian throws out 37kg (81 pounds) of textiles every year, of which 95% could potentially be diverted.

Failure to address textile waste is a lost diversion opportunity that has resulted in inadequate consumer education, limited diversion data, and lack of end-market accountability. The production and transport of textiles is a major emitter of greenhouse gases (GHGs) and these

emissions are consistently rising every year. Local governments have historically taken a hands-off approach to textile recycling due to high costs and contamination. This has resulted in charities and for-profit textile collection companies leading textile collection programs.

The Town of Ajax has proactively introduced policies and taken leadership roles related to environmental stewardship and waste diversion including a Waste Reduction Plan, Green Event policy, corporate water bottle ban, and a corporate ban on single-use plastics. At the March 8, 2021 General Government Committee meeting, the recommendations of report PDS-2021-05 were amended to recommend “*That staff be directed to further investigate options to implement a textile diversion program in the Town of Ajax and report back to Council or the appropriate standing committee by May of 2021 with considerations and recommendations on such a program*”.

In response to this direction, staff immediately took steps to investigate existing textile diversion programs across Southern Ontario. The Supervisor of Environmental Sustainability & Climate Change completed research and developed a proposal for the fulsome implementation of a Textile Diversion Program. This proposal was shared with an internal working group made up of staff representatives from the Office of the CAO, Corporate Communications, Legislative & Information Services, Planning & Development Services, Operations & Environmental Services, and Recreation, Culture and Community Development, . Feedback from the working group was incorporated into the final proposal, which is supported by the Senior Management Team, and is being presented in this report.

Sustainability staff in Planning & Development Services will be the lead in ensuring action items are completed and timelines are adhered to upon approval of this plan by Council.

2. Discussion:

A fulsome implementation plan for a textile diversion program is being proposed. Staff are recommending that the program be implemented in five distinct phases, which are described with key milestone tasks below. This phased approach is consistent with other waste management plans being implemented by the Town. Staff are also committed to executing a strong public awareness campaign as part of the Textile Diversion Program.

2.1 Key Considerations

During the research phase and consultations with several local and regional municipalities, staff identified a number of noteworthy considerations that have been incorporated in the implementation plan.

a) Relationship to the Region’s Waste Management Practices

Staff are mindful that work related to implementing a textile diversion program will require close consultation with the Region of Durham to ensure all communications are consistent and avoid creating confusion about recycling and diversion practices within the Region. The Region of Durham is currently drafting the Long Term Waste Management Plan 2021 – 2040 (LTWMP) with anticipated completion in 2022. Any Town of Ajax textile diversion program will be adaptively managed to remain consistent with recommendations of the LTWMP.

b) The 5Rs

Recently, the traditional 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) has been expanded to communicate the steps needed to achieve a sustainable, zero-waste lifestyle. The 5Rs should be incorporated in

to all public education and communications related to any textile diversion program. The 5Rs include:

- Rethink – The first step to waste diversion is to rethink daily choices to eliminate unnecessary purchases, limit necessary purchases, and switch to more eco-friendly alternatives.
- Reduce – Limit the waste you produce.
- Reuse – Switch from using disposable or single-use items to items that are reusable or investigate opportunities to repurpose an item.
- Recycle – Following the first 3Rs, recycle items through proper methods.
- Recover – Utilize waste to recover any resources possible (i.e. Energy from Waste)

Engaging with residents to build an understanding of the 5Rs is one of the objectives identified within the Region of Durham's LTWMP.

c) Ghost Bins

Clothing donation bins run by for-profit companies under the guise of giving proceeds to charity are known as "ghost bins". These ghost bins are typically constructed using cheap materials like plywood and do not adhere to any design safety regulations. They are often placed on vacant or private property without the landowner's knowledge and become hotspots for illegal dumping.

d) Existing Town of Ajax By-Law

Section 4. of the Town of Ajax *Clean Community By-Law* addresses donation bins to help prevent complaints commonly associated with them. The by-law states that:

- No person shall place or cause to be placed any donation bin on any property without the expressed permission of the owner of the said property.
- No person shall place or cause to be placed any donation bin on any highway, park or property of the Town or any local Board thereof.
- No owner or occupier of a property shall allow, place, or cause to be placed any donation bin on any property without first having applied for a Site Plan Amendment pursuant to the Planning Act, from the Town.
- Legally stored donation bins must be maintained in a tidy condition and emptied as often as necessary to avoid overflow.

e) Collection Organizations

Although public awareness is typically focused on just a couple charitable textile diversion organizations, there are several charity and non-profit organizations operating textile donation programs across Ontario. The National Association for Charitable Textile Recycling (NACTR) is a collaborative Canadian network that currently has 12 member organizations across Canada.

2.2 Textile Diversion Program Five-Phase Implementation Plan

a) Phase I: Spring 2021 – Fall 2021

The first phase of the implementation plan will include strategic communications and opportunities to introduce the Town's Textile Diversion Program to the community.

The key milestones of Phase I are:

- Endorse a Council Charter on Textile Waste Diversion, and subsequent public-facing communications campaign
- Develop content for a dedicated Textile Diversion page on the Town's Environmental Sustainability website and launch the dedicated page prior to Waste Reduction Week in October 2021
- Complete a public survey, similar to the one completed by City of Markham, to determine the baseline knowledge of textile diversion options within the community and to identify any existing barriers to increasing textile diversion rates
- Leverage the Town's Green Team to educate staff on proper textile diversion practices to increase diversion rates at their work locations and at home

b) Phase II: Fall 2021 – Winter 2021

The second phase of the implementation plan will focus on addressing the issue of illegal donation bins being placed throughout the Town of Ajax.

The key milestones of Phase II are:

- Work collaboratively with By-Law Services to assess the existing Donation Bin standards within the Clean Community By-Law and update if required
- Work collaboratively with Operations and By-Law Services to investigate the feasibility of removing illegal bins when reported
- Educate Town staff and Town residents on how to identify illegal donation bins and report them for removal through the appropriate means (i.e. AppJAX)

c) Phase III: Winter 2022 – Fall 2022

The third phase of the implementation plan will focus on strategic communications and opportunities to raise public awareness of existing textile diversion approaches.

The key milestones of Phase III are:

- Complete a scan of existing, publicly-available textile donation bin locations within the Town of Ajax and promote their locations on the dedicated Textile Diversion webpage
- Complete a scan of existing, publicly-available, household pick-up options and promote these options, including how to schedule them, on the dedicated Textile Diversion webpage

d) Phase IV: Fall 2022 – Winter 2022

The fourth phase of the implementation plan will focus on evaluating the program and investigating a licensing program to host textile collection bins on Town-owned property.

The key milestones of Phase IV are:

- Work collaboratively with By-Law Services, Facilities and Operations to investigate the feasibility of initiating a licensing program for charitable textile donation organizations to operate Town of Ajax-branded donation bins on Town property (similar to the City of Markham program)

- Analysis of the impact of the Region of Durham's finalized LTWMP and identification of any required changes to the Textile Diversion Program
- Report to Council to provide an update on the progress of implementation of the Textile Diversion Program by Fall 2022 and adaptively manage the program as required

e) Phase V: Ongoing

Similar to the Corporate Ban on Single Use Plastics, staff felt it important to define an ongoing phase of the implementation plan in recognition that the Town's work is not being done independently. There are initiatives related to waste diversion being completed regionally, provincially and federally, as well as in the private sector, concurrently with this plan.

These initiatives will undoubtedly influence and affect the Town's Textile Diversion Program, so staff will need to remain engaged and flexible while ensuring the Town showcases leadership.

The key milestone tasks for ongoing implementation of the plan are:

- Continuous improvement for internal waste diversion and ongoing compliance with internal policies and procedures related to waste management
- Participation in consultations related to the Town's textile program held by other levels of government, including the Region of Durham, the Province of Ontario, and the Government of Canada
- Encouragement of residents, businesses, stakeholders and community partners to increase their textile diversion through leadership and public communications

3. Financial Implications:

While the proposed Textile Diversion Program will be a staff-led program that is not expected to require significant additional financial resources to achieve successful outcomes, the phased implementation could potentially result in requiring some additional staffing hours or other resources.

Financial impacts related to this program, such as staff time to remove illegal bins, manage a permitting/licensing protocol, site plan amendments, and/or communication and education activities will be brought forward to Council for consideration as part of future budgets.

Any unforeseen in-year financial impacts related to the phased implementation plan will be subject to the Town's Operating Budget Management policy.

4. Communication Issues:

The Textile Diversion Program and associated implementation plan will require substantial communication to both internal and external stakeholders. The Town will leverage its Corporate Communications group and Green Team to help educate and engage staff on textile diversion and responsibilities. Externally, staff will focus on the promotion of the Town's leadership, sustainability undertakings, and successes to all relevant stakeholders including residents, community partners, local businesses, and other levels of government.

5. Relationship to the Strategic Plan:

This report aligns with the following sections of the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan – Stronger Together:

Focus Area: Leading our Community
Goal: Providing continued leadership in environmental sustainability
Action: Increase community sustainability events and outreach to encourage proper waste education and urban green living

6. Conclusion:

In response to Council's direction to develop a plan for a textile diversion program, staff are proposing a reasonable implementation timeline with attainable milestone tasks.

The proposed phased approach allows for incremental shifts towards a fulsome diversion program, while enabling staff to understand and manage unforeseen impacts and financial considerations.

The Town of Ajax will continue to exemplify strong leadership and advocacy to fulfill our vision of becoming a sustainable community. Cross-collaboration between all departments, other municipalities, and government partners will be required to ensure that the Town of Ajax maximizes opportunities to increase waste diversion.

Attachments:

ATT-1: Council Charter on Textile Waste Diversion

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