

# Property Management

A REGIONAL REPORT FOCUSING ON THE GTA, HAMILTON & NIAGARA

## REPORT

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Toronto zoning by-law update



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## Toronto to expand multi-res organic waste removal City attempting to overcome strategy's initial hiccups

By: Daniel Viola

**Toronto's green bin** program for multi-residential building has not exactly been meeting its goals.

A report from the City's Solid Waste Management Service says that while more than 80 percent of City-serviced multi-residential buildings have been invited to join the program, only a handful have taken up the offer.

Jim Harnum is the General Manager of Solid Waste Management for the City of Toronto, which oversees the green bin program. He says that the City services about 4,500 apartment buildings, but only diverted organic waste from about 1,500 of them as of April 2013.

But property managers who are not on board with the program may want to reconsider; every time a tenant throws organic waste into the trash, they are throwing away cash.

Since 2008, the City has been charging multi-res properties for garbage removal based on volume. But recycling and organic waste is removed free of charge. "Over 50 percent of garbage is food waste," Harnum explains.

In 2007, the City announced a plan to reach 70 percent residential waste diversion by 2010. By 2012, waste diversion in both multi-res and single-home dwellings had only hit 52 percent.

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## **In large apartment buildings, there can be a certain level of anonymity where residents can just throw their organic waste in the garbage chute without giving it a second thought.**



One reason cited for this failure was the City's inability to implement the green bin program among the majority of apartments and condos.

The program hit a wall from the beginning due to the City's inability to process a large amount of organic waste. However, a new processing plant is scheduled to open later this year, which will be able to meet the demand of all residential buildings.

But Toronto faces another pressing problem: property managers are looking to other sources for waste removal. Daryl Chong, President of the Greater Toronto Apartment Association, says that the private sector is wooing property owners away from the City.

As it stands, property owners who have their waste collected by the City receive a \$185 rebate per unit each year. "They've basically handcuffed us to their system," Chong explains. However, many property owners are volunteering to give up this rebate in order to work with private companies. Chong says this is due to three reasons: the City's high costs, low flexibility and poor customer service.

City staff have noticed this flight away from their services, and have begun changing tactics. Owners previously had to buy the large containers that collect the green bin refuse from individual units. A pilot program has started that will give these containers to some multi-res buildings free of charge to see if it would be a factor in getting more buildings to apply for the program. They are also giving away the kitchen bins that tenants use to collect organic waste.

To improve customer service, Solid Waste Management Services is creating a dedicated Waste Diversion Implementation team to focus on increasing multi-res waste diversion. They are also creating a dedicated Customer Service Team that will be responsible for working with specific buildings.

Working with tenants may be one of the most important factors for a successful rollout of the green bin program. According to Ivan Murgic, Vice President of Operations at Greenrock Property Management Limited, education was a major focus when bringing the organic waste program to his buildings.

**"Environmentally it's the right thing to do. But also economically it's the right thing to do."**



Greenrock manages more than 2,000 units across the city, and all of their high-rise buildings (six in total) joined the organic waste program in 2012.

"[We brought in] third-party consultants to assess how we were currently doing things and then make recommendations to lower waste," he explains.

The consultants were brought in on multiple occasions to show residents how to prevent cross contamination of organic waste and recycling, and follow up on their progress.

In large apartment buildings, there can be a certain level of anonymity where residents can just throw their organic waste in the garbage chute without giving it a second thought — unlike single-family dwellings where you can see if your neighbor is using a green bin and drop some not-so-subtle hints their way. To combat this, Murgic says social media has allowed residents to point out when pizza boxes or other divertible waste is tossed in the garbage chute.

Another important factor for Greenrock was making green bin usage as convenient as possible. Organic waste bins were placed in the parking garage so residents did not have to walk outside to dump their trash. There have also been no complaint about smells or rodents.

It appears this strategy worked. "We are seeing [green bin use] improve over time," Murgic says, noting that he has only praise for the City's program.

Toronto recently outlined new goals for its multi-res green bin program. Harnum says that they are aiming to sign up 2,000 buildings by the end of this year, and 4,000 by the end of 2014. He is optimistic that they will reach these goals, and points out that the City has managed to sign up about 300 new buildings in the past two months alone.

Harnum says that once fully rolled out, the program will benefit both Toronto and property managers. Increased waste diversion can help prevent the City's garbage removal rates from increasing, as well as increase revenue from energy creation at the processing plants. According to Harnum, it's a win-win situation: "Environmentally it's the right thing to do. But also economically it's the right thing to do." ❀

*Daniel Viola is the editor of Property Management Report.*

## Reduce your waste, reduce your fees

To help property managers increase their waste diversion, Toronto has created a list of ten tips for multi-residential buildings:

- Invest in training staff
- Create weekly log sheets to track garbage and recycling
- Keep equipment maintenance schedules for the compactor
- Set up convenient recycling stations throughout the building, and provide in-unit recycling containers
- Provide adequate recycling capacity
- Communicate with residents on a monthly basis
- Hand out the Recycling Calendar to new tenants
- Post signs
- Have consistent messaging
- Support an active residents' group and/or 3Rs Ambassador Volunteers

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