

## **Unionized workers keep green job**

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Byline: Jordan Press

By the end of the year, residents will have a new bin - a green one for organics - to join the blue and grey boxes they have now, but the people picking up the waste and recycling won't change.

Unionized city workers walked out of City Hall Tuesday night with a victory after city councillors refused to revisit an earlier decision to have city workers continue collecting recycling in the central part of Kingston after a new organics program is launched.

Originally, that wasn't to be the case. The original proposal was to shift those workers to organics collection, so unionized staff would collect from the green bins across the city. A private company would collect recycling in the city centre, which has been the case in the east and west ends since amalgamation.

At the start of the meeting, Peter Boyle, past president of the Kingston and District Labour Council, told councillors that the extra jobs the city will create because of its previous decision would benefit the community.

Eliminating those jobs now was also a bad idea because the city is in the midst of contract talks with the union, he said.

"The issue was discussed and decided last summer," Boyle said. "There's no need to consider it now, again."

Contracting out the service would have saved an estimated \$260,000 a year, which is why two city councillors wanted to have it re-evaluated.

Both said it wasn't about putting people out of work.

"I want to see the options," said councillor Mark Gerretsen. "A quarter-of-a- million dollars a year could be a potential savings to taxpayers."

Councillor Ed Smith said the city would be spending the extra money on a service change that residents wouldn't be able to notice.

"We owe it to the taxpayers" to revisit the decision, he said.

The move required two-thirds of councillors, eight in total, to approve revisiting the decision. By a vote of 8-4, council voted to stick with what they already decided.

## **Council asked to reconsider recycling plan**

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Byline: Jordan Press Whig-Standard City Hall Reporter

The local labour council hopes a proposal to contract out recycling pickup in the central part of Kingston doesn't have a chance to live.

The proposal would overturn an earlier decision to continue having unionized city workers collect recycling in the central area and could save taxpayers \$260,000 a year.

But it must jump through several procedural hoops before any of that can be considered.

The Kingston & District Labour Council hopes it won't make it through the first hoop.

"I hope it doesn't go anywhere. I'm hoping it will die a quiet death," said labour council president Debi Wells.

Tonight, city councillors will be asked to reconsider an earlier decision that saw the city stick with the status quo on recycling pickup instead of making a change that could produce some savings when the city introduces an organics pickup program later this year.

A representative from the labour council will be at the meeting to dissuade councillors from revisiting the earlier decision.

To revisit the decision, two-thirds of councillors need to vote in favour of reconsidering their decision. If it receives the nine votes required, councillors will be able to debate whether to change their earlier decision. If not, the debate is over.

"To me, it's a no-brainer," said Councillor Ed Smith, who first presented the idea during budget deliberations. The savings, he said, could be used for other city services, such as increasing transit or recreation programs.

He said the move could save taxpayers money not only this year, but in the years to come.

Sticking with the earlier decision would make it a permanent fixture in the city's budget. It wouldn't be possible for future city councils to change the way recycling is collected in Kingston without possible job losses, Smith said.

"You can't change your mind. This is the time to make the decision," he said.

Over the summer, city councillors decided against a city staff recommendation to contract out recycling pickup in the central part of Kingston, instead of having unionized workers continue

doing the job. A private company has collected recycling in the east and west ends since amalgamation.

When staff from the city's waste department first proposed a system to collect organics, they recommended that city workers should collect waste from the green bins. City staff doing recycling pickup would be shifted to organics and a private contractor would move in to collect recycling in the central part of the city as a way to save money.

No unionized workers would lose their jobs and the city could save an estimated \$280,000 a year to offset the costs associated with beginning an organics pickup program, estimated to cost about \$385,000.

Those costs to run the recycling program would change if councillors amend their earlier decision because the city wouldn't have to hire four new workers. That's not the case with the organics program, set to launch later this year.

"The organics program is going to cost the same amount whether it is collected by city staff or contract staff," said John Giles, the city's manager of solid waste.

Although the proposal comes two weeks before city councillors are expected to finalize the 2008 budget, Wells said the labour council was concerned with the timing of the proposal.

"We think it's in pretty bad form to be in the middle of [contract] negotiations with city workers and talk about contracting out their jobs," she said.

Smith said he didn't think the move would impact talks that started in earnest last month.

"I don't think this is any threat to municipal workers because there's no threat to their jobs. We're not decreasing our unionized workforce."

Wells said the organization wants to see an investment in well-paying jobs, something that can benefit the entire city.

"The whole city gains when we have jobs that are steady and have benefits," she said.