

## Staff proposes garbage-bin fee hikes

Councillors object, pointing to this year's 'atrocious service'

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To cover waste pickup next year, Toronto households with a medium-sized garbage bin will have to write a cheque \$5 bigger than the one they wrote last year – an increase of 13 per cent – if city council accepts a staff recommendation.

A city news release says the increase amounts to 2 per cent over the current fee, but that's calculated using a complicated formula of charges and rebates.

Whatever the percentage increase, the proposal may get a rough ride at city council, with the odours of the six-week garbage strike fresh in councillors' nostrils.

"I'm just not prepared to support a solid-waste increase," said Councillor Paul Ainslie (Ward 43, Scarborough East). "I think I speak for a lot of people who say they're not willing, with their hard-earned money, to throw more into a system that they don't see is working right."

"I don't think there should be an increase at all," agreed Councillor Denzil Minnan-Wong (Ward 34, Don Valley East).

"Service has been atrocious this year, and based on such poor service I can't see how the city can go out and ask for higher prices."

But Councillor Glenn De Baeremaeker, who chairs the works committee, said the extra is needed to fund waste-diversion projects and cover inflation, and is only 50 cents a month for a typical household.

About 40 per cent of households have medium bins. This year, they paid \$39 for garbage pickup; next year they'll be charged \$44. That's a 13 per cent increase.

But that's not the way the city calculates it.

The city wants to run garbage on a fee-for-service basis, as it does with water. Wiping the cost of garbage off the tax bill should have given householders a \$209 average tax refund, the city says. Then, householders would have had to pay the full cost of garbage, which is now mixed in with all other costs.

De Baeremaeker says provincial rules prevent the city from completely separating garbage on the tax bill. So the city deducts a theoretical tax refund from the garbage fee, and charges or refunds the difference. In this case, the refund is a flat \$209 per household.

For medium bins, the city says the true cost of waste service was \$248. After deducting the \$209 tax refund, that worked out to \$39 net. Next year's recommended cost is \$253. Minus the \$209 refund, that's \$44 net, a \$5 increase.

What's the percentage increase? Calculated on a base of \$39, it's 13 per cent. Calculated on a base of \$248, it's just 2 per cent.

City staff would like to raise fees for all bins. People using the extra-large (1 in 10 households) paid \$190 this year; in 2010 the recommended fee is \$8 more, or \$198. That's a 4 per cent increase. But according to the city, it's only 2 per cent because the true cost of a large bin rises to \$407 from \$399.

Large-bin users (1 in 4 households) paid \$133 this year; the recommended fee is \$7 higher, or \$140. That's a 5 per cent increase, but the city says it's 2 per cent because the true cost rises to \$349 from \$342.

Users of small bins (1 in 4 households) got a \$10 refund this year. Next year it shrinks 40 per cent, to \$6. The city says that's a 2 per cent cost increase, from \$199 to \$203.

Meanwhile, city staff want water rates to rise by 9 per cent in 2010, as they have for each of the past several years. That amounts to about \$51 for an average household. The city is renewing old pipes and forecasts 9 per cent hikes through 2014.

*With files from Paul Moloney*