

Vancouver moves to weekly green bin collection

City expands food scraps program and reduces garbage collection

BY DARAH HANSEN, VANCOUVER SUN APRIL 11, 2013



Meat scraps, bones, pizza boxes, eggshells, garden clippings and a variety of other organic waste can be put in the City of Vancouver's green bins. The city will start weekly collection of green bin waste in May.

Photograph by: Ian Smith, Vancouver Sun

VANCOUVER -- Green bin waste will soon be picked up every week and garbage every other week from more than 100,000 Vancouver households as the city rolls out the next phase of its food scraps program.

The change in collection schedules will affect residents living in single-family homes and duplexes. Weekly pickup, which still includes recycling, begins in some neighbourhoods May 1 and will be phased in across the city over the following weeks.

Residents can also expect to receive a small green food scraps container, along with a collection calendar and details of the program, delivered to their door. The container is designed to be used to collect food scraps in the home. The contents can then be transferred to green bins outdoors.

"This is a big shift for some people," Mayor Gregor Robertson acknowledged Thursday morning at a media event staged in the backyard of a city employee's home east of Cambie Street.

"We've been a culture of 'Just throw everything in the garbage can.' But that's not OK anymore," he said.

The latest move by the city to change how we treat garbage is part of a larger Metro Vancouver plan to divert all organic material from the landfill by 2015.

Vancouver began allowing residents of single-family and duplex homes to throw food scraps in the green bin instead of the garbage can last September.

Before the expansion, residents could dispose of uncooked fruit and vegetables, tea, coffee and eggshells in their green bins. Now meat scraps, bones, pizza boxes, napkins and other food-soiled paper can be thrown in.

Deputy city manager Sadhu Johnston said results of a pilot project launched in 2011 in the Sunrise and Riley Park neighbourhoods saw “significant participation” among households involved. The program initially attracted about 17 per cent participation. That rate rose to about 55 per cent when the garbage and organics collection schedules were altered.

Johnston said participation remains optional, noting, “We don’t plan to go through the back lanes and look through the bins.”

But, he said, “Not participating is going to mean having organics rotting in your garbage for two weeks and that is not going to smell good.”

The food-scraps program is costing the city an estimated \$5.4 million to develop. For taxpayers, that is expected to translate to an additional \$16 this year.

Another \$5 million has been budgeted for the construction of a new organics transfer facility in the city’s south transfer yard to handle the waste before it is trucked to Richmond to be turned into compost, soil and even electricity.

“This is the same material that has been in the lanes already, goes in our garbage trucks already, and goes to the transfer stations already so there is not really a difference. It’s not like we are adding a bunch of new material,” Johnston said in response to questions about how the city will control odours emanating from piles of rotting food. But, he added, the new transfer station will be equipped with air-filtration equipment to eliminate smells.

“We are actually hoping it will improve odour overall in the system,” he said.

Odour has already proved a big problem for residents living near food-composting facilities. Metro Vancouver, which is responsible for air quality in the region, reported a dramatic increase in the number of odour-related complaints in 2012 compared to previous years.

At least half of the complaints were traced to Richmond-based Harvest Power, which has been receiving increasing amounts of food waste over the last two years as more and more municipalities added food scraps to their yard trimmings collection programs in an effort to divert them from the landfill.

Food scraps make up approximately 40 per cent of Vancouver’s residential garbage. When it is buried in the landfill, garbage that contains food scraps rots and creates global-warming pollution.

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