

north shore news

JAMES: Blue box 'fix' will add to consumer costs

[Elizabeth James](#) / North Shore News

March 19, 2014 12:00 AM

"On May 19, the government's new multi-material recycling regulation will formally end the days of local decision-making over our blue-box programs and hand it over to some of the largest producers of plastic and paper packaging the world has ever known."

- Peter Kvarnstrom, North Shore News Viewpoint, March 12

Last Wednesday's column by Peter Kvarnstrom, chairman of the Canadian Newspaper Association, brought a new voice to the discussion about changes being proposed for our neighbourhood recycling services.

That said, as he described the proposal's threat to the survival of B.C.'s newspapers, Kvarnstrom exposed only one tip of an iceberg into which B.C. municipalities are being driven full speed ahead.

If and when this latest provincial privatization goes ahead, it will be the ubiquitous "little guy" who pays the full shot - many of them more than once.

The first payment comes when residential and commercial owners pay their property taxes. The second happens when landlords pass on their hit by raising rents to their residential or business lessees. The third hit arrives when business owners pass on their recycling costs to purchasers of their goods and services.

Since most taxpayers belong in the second two categories, their recycling-related costs will skyrocket. The only upside for businesses will be that private waste collection services can be claimed as a business expense on their income tax return.

For North Shore property owners, the history of solid waste collection is long and tedious.

So, picking on the District of North Vancouver as being somewhat representative of the three North Shore communities, here is a much abbreviated chronology: At the urging of the Canadian Union of Public Employees and to save wear and tear on collectors' backs, DNV Bylaw 5287 introduced the 306-litre mechanical-lift Schaefer cart program in October 1988.

Householders purchased the carts for about \$150. The amount of garbage collected remained the same, as did waste removal property taxes. One resident recalled, "We used to see one municipal truck make a single pass down a street collecting everything from both sides; now we see three trucks making six passes."

As environmental awareness caught on and recycling increased, the allowable amount of garbage was reduced - first to eight inches below the top of the cart, then to half-full carts and then to two large garbage bags only. Not only were taxes increased as the years rolled by, large families that generated more garbage either had to buy over-limit tags, or take the garbage to the transfer station and pay there. Further municipal regulations required diversion of paints, pesticides and larger items for separate disposal - again, at additional fees.

To be clear, none of this commentary is meant to suggest the evolution of our attitudes to waste collection and disposal was unnecessary or a bad idea; property owners of all

stripes have embraced the changes for the good of their environment.

But that doesn't mean taxpayers haven't noticed that, as they assumed an increased share of the collection workload, waste removal taxes continued to increase. Furthermore, those taxes are in addition to significant fees for package/bottle deposits and other recycling charges - which sends us back to Kvarnstrom's estimate that the "mighty blue box. .. gets the job done at an average cost of \$35 per household each year."

Is that just for recycling newspapers? If not, \$35 doesn't come close to the amount charged on two homeowners' tax bills for the Blue Box program.

The 2012 bill for one DNV homeowner: Solid Waste: \$199.50 Recycling: \$83.50 The 2013 bill for a CNV homeowner: Solid Waste: \$139.00 Recycling: \$206.00

Eco-Levy: \$37.98 Given today's market values of condos and townhouses, it's hard to believe those assessments would pull the average recycling fee down to \$35.

And with respect to the city's Eco-Levy, the message for DNV property-owners is simple: If you haven't been charged this levy, your next increase is yet to come.

You can learn more at cnv.org. Enter "Eco-Levy" as your search parameter and read the eight-page document there.

British Columbians are fast-losing what remains of their right to "no taxation without (direct) representation." Governments are off-loading their elected responsibilities to private corporations over which citizens have no control.

If you don't like this new incarnation of Legacies Now and its implications for the provincially driven Multi-Material BC proposal, re-read and bookmark Peter

Kvarnstrom's column and do the same for CNV's Eco-Levy info. Then, spend some time on your computers and read multimaterialbc.ca, paying particular attention to the governance section. You have 42 business days to make your voice heard.

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