



Ontario's recycling changes not fair to small businesses, not-for-profits, community organizations

By Elizabeth Roy

Ontario's move toward a more environmentally responsible recycling system has the right intentions: making producers responsible for the waste they create.

The Town of Whitby supports environmental stewardship, reducing waste and protecting the environment for future generations.

However, it is becoming increasingly clear that the province's new approach to recycling is placing an unfair burden on small businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and the community services our residents rely on every day.

Under Ontario's new Blue Box Regulation, recycling collection is no longer a municipal or regional responsibility.

In Durham Region, it is now managed by Circular Materials, a group founded by large consumer product manufacturers, restaurants and retailers – the idea is that those that produce waste are responsible for collecting it and recycling it.

As of January 1, recycling will continue to be collected from single-family homes and the residential portions of multi-residential buildings.

But collection will end for what the province classifies as “non-eligible” sources — including not-for-profit organizations, places of worship, community centres, libraries, shelters, daycares, post-secondary institutions, and all industrial, commercial, and institutional properties.

They are now required to contract and pay for private recycling services or transport materials to a waste management facility themselves.

I am already hearing from food banks, faith-based organizations, and community service providers that are deeply concerned about this change.

Many operate on limited budgets, rely heavily on volunteers, and are already stretched responding to growing community needs.

Asking these organizations to divert scarce dollars away from feeding families or delivering essential programs in order to pay for private recycling collection is not practical or fair.

Small businesses are facing similar challenges.

One Whitby business owner recently shared that health regulations require the use of disposable items. Transitioning to reusable dishware would mean costly renovations, new plumbing, and equipment upgrades — investments that many small businesses simply cannot afford, especially as some are still recovering from pandemic-related debt.

These are not large corporations with deep pockets. They are the local employers and community builders that give Whitby its character and strength.

In addition to the strain these changes will place on “non-eligible” sources, there is very real concern that the unintended consequence of this new system will be illegal dumping, increased litter and more recyclables going into the garbage stream – the opposite of what the province is trying to achieve.

I have written to Environment, Conservation and Parks Minister and Durham MPP Todd McCarthy about the operational challenges and increased financial burden this approach will place on businesses, not-for-profits, and other affected organizations – and I will continue to advocate and share the concerns I am hearing.

In that correspondence, I urge the province to consider exemptions or financial supports for registered not-for-profits and faith-based organizations, and to engage directly with impacted sectors to co-design solutions.

We can and must protect the environment. But we must do so in a way that is practical and fair for everyone in our community.

■ ***Elizabeth Roy is mayor of the Town of Whitby***