



Clear Bags for Garbage

This backgrounder describes what is meant by ‘Clear Bags for Garbage’ and provides information to help assess this Curbside Garbage Collection Option, including:

- The potential to increase the City’s waste diversion rate
- What the option may mean to you financially
- What you may have to do differently with your garbage set out
- Potential benefits with this option
- Key considerations for this option
- How this option has increased the diversion rate in other municipalities

What are Clear Bags for Garbage?

A clear garbage bag program requires households to use transparent bags for curbside garbage collection. The intention with the policy is that it encourages residents to separate their waste. A clear bag allows collection contractors and enforcement staff to see if residents put divertible material and items in their garbage.

A clear bag program is often coupled with recycling and organics bans. This means that residents would not be able to place recyclables or food and organic waste into the clear garbage bags. Recyclables or food and organic waste would need to be placed into the recycling and green bins. This helps ensure that only non-recyclable garbage ends up in the landfill.

How could this option increase the waste diversion rate?

The waste diversion rate represents the amount of waste kept out of the landfill through recycling and green bin programs. The City of Ottawa calculates its waste diversion rate based



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on collected tonnages, and is done so by dividing the weight of collected material in our waste diversion streams by the total amount of waste collected by the City:

$$\frac{\text{Weight of collected recycling, organics, and leaf and yard waste}}{\text{Weight of collected recycling, organics, leaf and yard waste and garbage}} \times 100$$

If this option were implemented in Ottawa, and coupled with recycling and organics bans, it has the potential to increase the diversion rate by up to 10 per cent. This means we could see the per capita garbage disposal reduced by up to 33 per cent.

What would this mean for me financially?

If this option was introduced with a recycling and organics ban, homeowners could see their garbage fee increase by up to \$1 per month (\$12 per year). The fee increase would support ongoing program oversight, enforcement, and additional costs associated with processing recyclables and turning organic waste into nutrient-rich compost.

What would I have to do differently when setting out my garbage?

Your garbage would need to be set out at the curb in purchased clear bags on collection day, rather than the typical black garbage bags used currently. Households will need to ensure recyclables and organic material are separated from the garbage and disposed of in the appropriate bin.

Potential benefits of this option

- Most effective policy to pair with material bans as collection staff can identify the content of the garbage bags.
- Increased worker safety as collection staff can identify and avoid hazardous items (sharp glass, needles, tin edges, etc.).



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Key considerations with this option

- Privacy concerns are cited as the most pressing issue with a clear bag policy. Due to this, many municipalities permit the use of an opaque privacy bag to conceal waste items at the homeowner's discretion (either one small privacy bag inside each clear bag, or one full-sized privacy bag each set out).
- Surveyed municipalities indicated residents were concerned with having leftover black garbage bags and that clear bags might cost more.
- Surveyed municipalities experienced residents attempting to use tinted bags instead of clear garbage bags.

What other cities have a clear garbage bag program in place? Have these programs been successful in other places?

Forty cities in Ontario have a clear garbage bag program in place, including the Town of Markham, Dufferin County, Orillia (starting 2022) and Tay Valley.

The City of Markham introduced their clear garbage bag program in 2013, along with a curbside ban on recycling and organic material from the garbage stream. The City of Markham allows residents to set out an unlimited number of clear garbage bags as long as the garbage does not contain banned materials. Each clear bag is allowed to contain a small opaque privacy bag. The Town of Markham also has a curbside garbage ban on textile waste and Styrofoam (these items can be brought to local recycling depots to be recycled) and accepts diaper waste in the Green Bin program. The City's diversion rate has increased to 81% since the introduction of clear bags and material bans. Outside of Ontario, the Province of Nova Scotia has banned organics from landfill, meaning that no organic waste can be disposed of in garbage bags. Almost two-thirds of Nova Scotia uses clear garbage bags. The City of Halifax allows households to place up to six clear garbage bags out for collection every two weeks, one of which can be a solid black garbage bag for privacy. Halifax has a 54% diversion rate.