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LOCAL NEWS

Gibsons opts to decline curbside recycling

Multi-Material BC John Gleeson/Staff Writer

Gibsons council has voted to decline the financial incentive for curbside recycling offered under a new province-wide packaging and printed paper stewardship plan.

Faced with a Sept. 16 deadline to respond, council voted July 30 to indicate its preference for depot collection service, but agreed to wait until early next month to inform Multi-Material British Columbia (MMBC), since new information could come to light before then.

The decision was complicated by the lack of hard data on the program and its financial implications for municipalities.

Despite those gaps, however, Coun. Gerry Tretick said the option of retaining the depot system was preferred by the Sunshine Coast Regional District directors for Elphinstone and West Howe Sound.

“Our neighbours to the east and west have clearly indicated that they’re not interested in curbside collection,” Tretick said.

Mayor Wayne Rowe concurred: “My sense of it at the moment is that we do have a very workable system here and we’re going to have to co-operate with our neighbours in areas E and F,” Rowe said. The Town’s current service provider, Gibsons Recycling Depot, employs 17 people and is “very diligent about re-use and recovery,” he added.

The Town’s response will not be legally binding, he said, but will give MMBC “an indication of where we want to go.”

Approved in April by the province’s Ministry of Environment, the stewardship plan is scheduled to come into effect in May 2014. Under the plan, municipalities that currently offer curbside garbage or recycling pickup can opt in to the curbside recycling program, subject to some cost conditions.

Asked whether MMBC would launch a curbside recycling program without the Town’s support, public works director Greg Foss said, “There is that threat. They could tender for curbside pickup.”

Under the MMBC offer, communities could be eligible for financial incentives for a depot collection service, Foss said in his report to council.

“However, MMBC is obligated to meet a packaging and printed paper recovery target of 75 per cent and can

decide that curbside collection service is needed to achieve this target. Therefore the outcome of these discussion is not certain,” Foss said.

CAO Mani Machado explained there was no staff recommendation on the offer because of the program’s lack of clarity, unknown impacts on local business, and the fact that MMBC is “changing rules almost daily.”

As a result, Machado said, the Town’s focus has been on local and regional consultation. “That part has been quite worthwhile,” he said.

Based on the numbers provided, MMBC would cover about 50 per cent of the cost for curbside recycling, but staff could not say whether the Town would be charged anyway if MMBC tendered for the service on its own.

Coun. Dan Bouman asked what guarantees were in place for local bidders who operate a depot service.

“We really don’t know the full impact of that,” Machado said. “There’s obviously an element of risk, but there’s not much we can do to minimize that.”

“We’re discussing three options and we don’t really know the impacts of any of those options,” Coun. Charlene SanJenko said. “There are just so many unknowns.”

While agreeing that the depot option was “the most sensible position to take at this point,” Coun. Lee Ann Johnson said she would like more information on the Town’s current garbage collection service, in order to devise a plan to reduce the amount of material dumped in the landfill.

One idea she suggested was going through garbage cans and extrapolating data on household waste — “not on a personal level, but on a block level.”

Bouman said he would like the community to be consulted before a final decision is made.

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