



**SUBJECT:** Loose leaf collection program update

**TO:** Environment, Infrastructure & Community Services Cttee.

**FROM:** Roads, Parks and Forestry Department

Report Number: RPF-02-23

Wards Affected: All

File Numbers: 795-01

Date to Committee: May 4, 2023

Date to Council: May 16, 2023

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### **Recommendation:**

Receive and file roads, parks and forestry department report RPF-02-23 regarding an update on the Loose Leaf Collection Plan.

### **PURPOSE:**

This report has been prepared to provide a review of the 2022 Leaf Collection program and to provide guidance for the 2023 program.

### **Vision to Focus Alignment:**

- Deliver customer centric services with a focus on efficiency and technology transformation.

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### **Background and Discussion:**

The primary service for leaf disposal throughout the City of Burlington is provided through the Region of Halton's bagged yard waste pickup program, with bi-weekly collections scheduled from April to mid-December. The city also provides a loose leaf collection service which supplements the regional service, and was originally put in place to help residents in areas where leaf drop volumes are very high, and where it would not be convenient to bag/collect through the Region's yard waste collection service.

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Prior to 2020, the city's Loose Leaf Collection Program was delivered annually over a six-week period commencing in early November, with two collections planned for designated areas of the city. Occurrences of winter weather during the program period would often cause collection delays and in extreme cases prevent the completion of the program. The later was the case during the 2018 and 2019 program years, with continuous winter weather causing an early end to leaf collection activities, leaving many areas not serviced with uncollected leaves remaining on the roadway. Understandably, this caused intense resident dissatisfaction with a high number of complaints, which resulted in a program review and the establishment of a two-year pilot in 2020 and 2021.

The 2020 and 2021 program years were restricted to a single pickup to select areas of the city, over a reduced four-week period. This pilot program was designed to mitigate service delivery risks associated with the Covid-19 pandemic as well as to reduce program costs.

The current Loose Leaf Collection Program was approved by Council for the 2022 program year and was restricted to a single pickup to select areas of the city over a reduced three-week period. The 2022 program was designed to improve upon the parameters of the two-year pilot by deferring the start of the collection period by one week, which better aligns with leaf drop timing and thereby increases the ability for residents to take advantage of the city's collection service.

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### **Evaluation of the 2022 Three Week Program**

In 2022, the city implemented a single pick-up, three-week Loose Leaf Collection Program which leveraged the findings of the earlier two-year pilot by adopting two major changes:

- deferring the start of the collection period by one week, which better aligned leaf drop timing and thereby increased the ability for residents to take advantage of the city's collection service
- adjusting collection zones to better align with higher tree density areas, with collections in these areas occurring later in the program (Refer to the 2022 Loose Leaf Collection Zone Map in Appendix A)

Implementing these changes also required additional resources, in the form of one contracted collection crew to accommodate the compressed collection schedule.

Loose leaf volumes collected for the 2022 program year were approximately 5,220 tonnes and slightly below the average 5,500 tonnes collected when two-pickups were scheduled as part of the previous six-week annual collection programs. Loose leaf volumes collected during the single pickup, four-week pilot in 2020 and 2021, averaged

4,400 tonnes per year. A further breakdown of leaf volumes collected in each zone for the 2022 program is noted in the table below:

Collection Zone	1 (3,060 ha)	2 (2,220 ha)	3 (1,930 ha)	Total
Leaf tonnes Collected	1,550	1,450	2,220	5,220
tonnes/hectare	0.51	0.66	1.15	

Program costs incurred for the 2022 collection program were \$816,000 and exceeded the annual budget of \$720,000. This exceedance was primarily due to the higher-than-expected costs for the single contracted collection crew retained to accommodate the compressed collection schedule. 2022 program costs incurred were close to the previous six-week, two-pickup program budget of \$835,000 where a similar volume of leaves were collected.

Loose leaf collection program enquiries or requests for service, received through Service Burlington were 240 for the 2022 program year in comparison to 330 received for the 2021 program year (program period plus week prior utilized for this data range). Most of the calls received were for program information with a handful of service requests for missed collection (due to parked cars) or requests for follow-up street sweeping services. A breakdown of enquires received is noted in Figure 1 below.

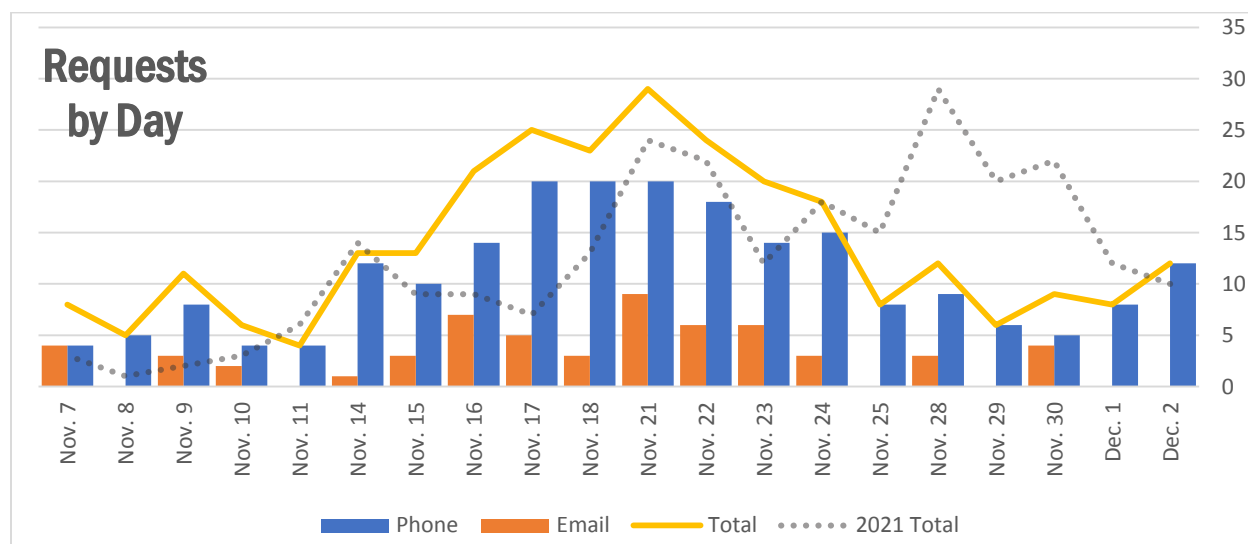


Figure 1 - 2022 Loose Leaf Collection Customer Enquiries/Service Requests

## **Strategy/process/risk**

### Collection Schedule

From a customer perspective, the most common request is to amend the collection schedule with a desire to delay collection in order to maximize the amount of leaves collected through the city's service.

In order to mitigate such enquiries, the current collection schedule has been compressed with the collection period occurring within the last three weeks of November. This collection schedule improves alignment with leaf drop timing and increases the ability for residents to take advantage of the city's collection service. This realignment has been very successful for the 2022 collection year as the volume of leaves collected were very similar to when the program occurred over a six-week period.

Practically speaking, given the variety of tree species within the city, it would never be possible to align leaf drops with all trees within each collection zone. Therefore, residents will continue to be encouraged to supplement the city's collection service by utilizing the region's yard waste program, as well as using other environmentally friendly disposal methods such as mulching, composting or utilizing leaves for the winterizing of flower beds.

Furthermore, moving the program later into December would increase the risk of winter weather interfering with collection operations as experienced during the 2018 and 2019 program years, increasing the risk to an early end to the program, leaving areas not serviced with uncollected leaves remaining on the roadway and resulting in a high level of community dissatisfaction.

### Collection Zones

Historically loose leaf collection zones were delineated on a grid pattern in order to outline the limits of each collection area and simplify the understanding of the collection schedule. The zone layout was revised for the 2022 collection program with one zone being serviced each week, as well as being sequenced to better align and maximize leaf drop volumes.

The zone realignment for 2022 was very successful in achieving program objectives with leaf drop volumes fairly even for zones 1 and 2, with zone 3 yielding the most leaves collected. Completing collection operations for Zone 3 as per the schedule was challenging due to the larger leaf volumes, and consideration to modify zone layouts and equalize leaf yield per week/zone is under consideration for future program years. However, staff are not recommending any significant changes to the zone layouts until further leaf collection data can be attained through another collection season. An opportunity also exists to further align collection zones based on tree canopy density

with data generated from the upcoming Urban Forest Master Plan update expected in the fall of 2023.

## **Options Considered**

### Program Expansion or Reduction

Options to expand or reduce the city's Loose Leaf Collection Program have previously been considered by council with the most recent change occurring for the 2022 program year with the implementation of a single pickup, 3 three-week loose leaf collection program.

Expansion of collection area coverage has historically been undertaken at the direction of council, has aligned with development growth and generally has been limited to areas with the urban boundary. It is staff's experience that newer developments have smaller caliper trees and therefore generate lower leaf volumes than older and more mature areas of the city. On this basis, staff recommend that a minimum development age threshold of 25 years be established for future service expansions, with the primary service for leaf disposal in these areas being the Region of Halton's bagged yard waste pickup service.

Notwithstanding the above, the likely next area for loose leaf collection expansion would be the Alton Village community, which is circa 15 years old, situated north of Dundas Street and south of Highway 407. Inclusion of this area using an average program collection cost of \$160/tonne and a yield of 0.5 tonnes/ha would add approximately \$24,000 to the annual program budget.

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## **Financial Matters:**

For 2022, expenditures for the Loose Leaf Collection Program were \$816,000 which exceeded the annual program budget of \$720,000. The exceedance was primarily due to higher costs for the contracted collection crew which was procured mid-2022.

### **Total Financial Impact**

Financial impacts related to the current Loose Leaf Collection Program as well as options for expansion are provided in the body of the report. The additional costs for the contracted collection crew were not incorporate in the 2023 budget as the 2022 program was newly configured, and actual costs for the compressed program were not yet substantiated. The additional estimated costs for the contracted collection crew will be incorporated into the 2024 budget.

### **Source of Funding**

The source of funding for the Loose Leaf Collection Program is the operating budget and the 2023 budget amount for the program is \$710,000. The 2024 operating budget will be adjusted to account for the additional contract costs for leaf collection.

### **Other Resource Impacts**

Not Applicable

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### **Climate Implications**

The Loose Leaf Collection Program is currently dependent on gas and diesel powered equipment that contribute to the city's corporate greenhouse gas emissions. The Region's yard waste collection program also utilizes diesel powered trucks that contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. Through its green fleet replacement strategy, the city will be investigating opportunities to reduce its reliance on vehicles powered by internal combustion engines. Regardless, the best practice for homeowners to reduce the climate change impact of leaf collection would be to mulch and compost on their own property to the greatest extent possible.

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### **Engagement Matters:**

Communication of the Loose-Leaf Collection Program and any related changes is very important to ensure the public have a good understanding of the program specifics, challenges, the variables that impact collection, where to look for information, and what happens if winter weather occurs.

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### **Conclusion:**

This report has been prepared to review the 2022 Loose-Leaf Collection Program and provide guidance for the 2023 program. Based on the success of this program, staff are recommending that the city continue with the single pickup, three-week program with no significant changes to the collection schedule or zone boundaries.

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Respectfully submitted,

Matt Koevoets

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**Appendices:**

- A. 2022 Loose Leaf Collection Zone Map

**Report Approval:**

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Counsel.