

Councillor seeks ban on using parks as dumps

Sandra Bussin doesn't want to see a replay of garbage strike, which saw many parks and arena parking lots used for trash

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Toronto should ban the use of city parks and recreation facilities as temporary garbage dumps in any future strike by municipal workers, says one councillor who will raise the issue at a public works committee meeting later this month.

Sandra Bussin (Ward 32, Beaches-East York) said she wants a policy that will restrict temporary dumps to city properties in commercial or industrial areas. She also wants a guarantee councillors will be consulted before the drop-off locations are approved.

More than 25,000 tonnes of garbage accumulated at 25 temporary dumps – mostly parks and arena parking lots – during the 39-day municipal strike, angering nearby residents who complained about odour and vermin.

Ms. Bussin said city staff got an emergency certificate of approval for the sites from Ontario's Environment Ministry about three months before the strike began. Many of the temporary dumps were the same as those used in the 2002 garbage strike. When councillors raised objections, they were told it was too late to make changes, she said.

In Ms. Bussin's ward, an entire neighbourhood of townhomes had built up around Ted Reeve Arena between the two strikes – a fact overlooked by city staff, she said. As well, the arena was being used for summer recreation programs.

Councillor Joe Pantalone (Ward 19, Trinity-Spadina) said he took considerable heat from residents in his ward upset about the Christie Pits dump, even though he had no input on the location and tried to stop it after the fact. He recently wrote the city manager asking for a review of the policy, although he doesn't think it's feasible to ban the use of all parks.

“There are huge parks which are kilometres away from people's homes, and there are parks which are five feet away from peoples homes. Surely one size may not fit all,” he said.

“Study the thing, because these [dumps] have to be evenly distributed throughout the city.”

During the strike, residents were encouraged to mix their green bin organics with regular trash before dumping at the temporary sites.

With the resumption of normal curbside collection, the city has embarked on a \$355,000, month-long newspaper advertising campaign to reacquaint people with the program.

The ads, in about two dozen newspapers including The Globe and Mail, list what items are acceptable for the bin. They also trumpet the program as “one of the most successful waste-diversion programs in North America.”

Vincent Sferrazza, director of policy and planning for the solid waste department, said the ad campaign has nothing to do with a recent libel notice sent by the department's general manager to the Toronto Star over a series of articles that suggested the city does not divert as much organic waste from landfill as it claims.

“We do this every year. We have an education budget and this is part of our plan to talk about the green bin,” Mr. Sferrazza said. “We haven't done the green bin in a while and it was certainly due.”

Meanwhile, Mayor David Miller's executive committee will consider tomorrow the question of giving residents rebates for lost services during the strike, and separate motions to request the province make garbage collection, daycare and paramedics essential services.