

Town of Taber's Municipal Solid Waste Initiative

2016 saw a massive shift in the way Taberites viewed their waste, how it is disposed of, and where it eventually ends up. In May 2016, the Town of Taber implemented the Municipal Solid Waste Initiative (MSWI), which is a comprehensive system that includes three separate carts for recycling, organic waste, and residual waste. The MSWI replaces an outdated system which used large commercial bins that provided little in the way of recycling or composting, and caused intermixing of various waste types. Quite literally, the entire project changed the way Taber residents thought about their waste in a matter of a few days. Within the first four weeks of implementation, many residents got on board with the new system, sparking such a significant change that following the 13 months the project has been live, only 28.5% of the previous tonnage of residential waste is now being transferred to landfills.

Mirroring the Government of Alberta's focus on sustainable practices, the Town of Taber knew it could provide an efficient and cost-effective system for its residents and businesses. It has also been our goal to move even further and faster than other municipalities who would typically start with their own cart collection systems. As the Taber area is so invested and involved in agriculture, it made sense to include organic waste collection in our system right from the onset. The Town wants to provide accessible avenues for citizens to make their waste diversion as convenient as possible, and so the Initiative has been designed in such a way that the residents "learn to do by doing," using the information provided to them upon the carts being delivered. At the beginning stages of the Initiative, staff worked on a comprehensive information package and communications schedule that would provide all the necessary information users would need to use the program successfully. Town Staff also created a unique Coupon Voucher System that helps offset costs to residents who choose to dispose of additional waste (due to construction, moving, large yard waste, etc). Each household has the opportunity to use 3 vouchers per year which covers the cost of 250kg of waste (per coupon) at the Transfer Station. This program has proven to be an effective way of alleviating any discontent among residents who were used to disposing large amounts of waste in large bins. The Vouchers also aid the Town in keeping better track of the types of waste being disposed of at the landfill. The Town even provides compostable dinnerware and many of the three types of carts to our annual August Cornfest festival, so over 10,000 visitors to our community can participate in the MSWI.

Ultimately, it has been a main objective for the MSWI to result in no additional cost or fees to residential or commercial users, and the Town of Taber is proud to say that this has been achieved and maintained. Not a single user has seen an increased fee on their utility bill, which has gone a long way in helping people see the benefits of this system. Not only is our Initiative cost-neutral to taxpayers, but it has demonstrated a surprising cost benefit to the municipality. From April 2015 to December 2016, the Town of Taber saw cost savings of over \$85,000.00. These funds are a combination of savings from the decreased tipping fees and increased revenue to the Transfer Station. Other notable savings include a total decrease of 80 truckloads leaving the Station, and a decrease of 1232 tonnes of waste brought to the Transfer Station.

Many municipalities introduce their residents to cart collection systems in stages, but the Town of Taber has proven that a comprehensive 3 cart waste system can be successfully implemented simultaneously as long as adequate preparation is completed. This entire process required extensive preliminary planning on the part of Administrative staff, but that extra effort has paid off in the ease it provides to residents. The Town of Taber's sincerest hope is that the innovation with our own project will lead to the very same in villages, towns, and cities all across Canada, and we are happy to help any municipality considering the same Initiative in their own community.