

Staff Report



To	General Committee
Subject	Needle Collection Kiosks
Date	April 9, 2025
Ward	All
From	K. White, Director of Emergency Services
Executive Member Approval	J. Schmidt, General Manager of Community and Corporate Services
CAO Approval	M. Prowse, Chief Administrative Officer
Staff Report #	CCS001-25

Recommendation:

That Staff Report CCS001-25 concerning Needle Collection Bins/Kiosks in the Parks be received for information purposes and the needle collection kiosk program be discontinued apart from continued collection of the bin/kiosk at the H-Block near the downtown library.

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to provide additional information regarding the needle collections kiosk pilot program, after modifications were made to the kiosks in accordance with previous Council direction.

Key Findings:

Following the recommended modifications, the kiosks consistently yield minimal needles within them and Operations staff continue to find needles in the parks and flower beds regularly.

Although there has been a slight reduction in needles found on the ground, staff suspect this is attributable to the County of Simcoe's introduction of a program involving a contractor that completes walking routes and removes needles from sites within the downtown.

Based on the Council direction, staff worked with the vendor to have each of the bins modified and then replaced. During this period, the City also assumed responsibility for the collection from an additional bin, located at the H-Block near the downtown library. The bin at the library is an older style with a larger opening.

The majority of the bins/kiosks (with the exception of the one at the library) have had minimal weights collected and, in most cases, limited to no visual evidence of needles within them. A number of the bins/kiosks have been vandalized.

On a recent visual check, there were fewer needles on the ground around the kiosks than in the past. The reduction in the number of needles on the ground surrounding the kiosks may be attributable to the County of Simcoe's introduction of a program involving a contractor that completes walking routes and removes needles from sites within the downtown.

However, Operations staff are still encountering needles in the parks and flower beds on a regular basis.

The bin/kiosk with higher levels of utilization, is the one located at the H-Block parking lot near the downtown library. This bin is used from time to time by the County's contractor to dispose of the needles collected during their walking tours of the downtown and area parks, if their smaller sharps containers are full during their shift.

The County has advised that it would be helpful to maintain the bin at the H-Block or the disposal of needles collected mid-shift by its contractor. As this bin is not leased, the City would only incur collection costs, which are estimated to be less than \$1,000 per year.

Financial Implications:

The current costs associated with the multiple location needle collection kiosk program have not been included in the 2025 Business Plan. They were originally funded from the Community Benefit Reserve and Operations Department has addressed the continued cost between budget years utilizing total budget management, until this report could be considered by General Committee and Council.

If the recommended motion is approved with only a single location at H-Block, it is estimated that collection from the H-Block bin/kiosk would cost approximately \$1,000 per year, which can be accommodated through the Operations Department budget.

Alternatives:

The following alternatives are available for consideration by General Committee:

Alternative #1 General Committee could recommend making the current program permanent for all locations, with the addition of \$12,000 to the Operations Department's budget to cover the associated costs. There will also be costs in the future associated with purchasing replacement new units once the current ones reach end of life.

This alternative is available. This alternative is not recommended as it requires a funding source to be able to continue the program and Operations staff have indicated that they are not seeing a notable decrease in the number of needles discarded in the parks with the kiosks.

Alternative #2 General Committee could recommend discontinuing the entire program.

This alternative is available. This alternative is not recommended as the one kiosk at H-Block appears to be well-used. An alternative disposal location would need to be arranged by the County for its contractor. The City would maintain the existing needle collection locations within its buildings. However, their size is smaller and may not be sufficient for the volumes collected by the contractor.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

The recommendations included in this Staff Report are not specifically related to the goals contained in 2022-2026 Strategic Plan.

Additional Background Information and Analysis:

In 2020, eight needle collection kiosks were approved for installation throughout the city. Data shows they have failed to achieve considerable improvement in the number of needles discarded on the ground.

In November 2020, City Council directed the implementation of needle exchange/collection bins within City parks or parking lots on a pilot basis (in addition to containers already located within parks washrooms).

Eight locations were initially chosen for the pilot, after collaborating with the Parks and Recreation team to determine where staff had frequently encountered discarded needles or had received resident complaints regarding discarded needles. The locations were as follows:

- Heritage Park
- Queen's Park
- Collier Street Parking Garage (rear)
- 83 Perry Street (west entrance to Milligan's Pond)
- Sam Cancilla Park
- Stephens Park
- Kearsy Park
- Berczy Park

The cost to lease the kiosks and provide monthly collection was approximately \$25,000.

As part of the needle collection kiosk pilot program, the vendor was required to report the estimated number of needles collected from each kiosk during the duration of the pilot program.

Due to the unusual weights recorded, the vendor also provided monthly pictures of the products collected in each kiosk. The pictures showed the kiosks were often contaminated and contained significantly more garbage than used needles.

Staff reported significant numbers of needles on the ground around the kiosks, and no notable decrease in the number of discarded needles in the parks. Garden areas continued to be an ongoing health and safety concern for staff.

On March 28, 2022, City Council adopted motion 22-G-057 that included direction for staff to investigate other needle kiosk designs to only allow needles to be added and a report back.

Staff reported back with two options for consideration including a new kiosk/bin style or modifications to the existing bins to limit the opening size to potentially reduce the amount of refuse disposed of in the kiosks.

Staff were directed to extend the pilot utilizing a modified version of the kiosks and with a change to the collection schedule to allow for every other month collection. The estimated cost of the revised approach was \$22,000 (inclusive of costs to modify the bins, lease them and collection every other month) and was funded from the Community Benefit Reserve.

Consultation and Engagement:

There was no public consultation required in relation to this staff report.

Environmental and Climate Change Impact Matters:

Discontinuing the availability of most of the needle collection bins could lead to greater discarding of needles elsewhere. In most cases, the existing bins have not demonstrated a significant improvement to health and safety of residents or the environment as the discarding of needles has not decreased significantly in the parks.

Appendix:

Appendix A – PDF containing images of bin locations and condition

Report Author:

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File #:

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Pending #:

Not Applicable.