

From garbage to gold

City looks to increased recycling efforts at new facility to fatten civic coffers

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CITY ENTERPRISES THAT MAKE MONEY

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Edmonton is finding treasure in its trash.

There aren't many gold coins hidden among the ripped T-shirts, rotten eggs, broken plywood and other junk people throw away, but sorting, selling, composting and recycling the useful bits is expected to put more than \$6.4 million into city coffers this year.

While that's a small fraction of the \$145-million budget to run Edmonton's waste-management system, the money helps offset the cost of a fee-based utility operated without property taxes.

"If not for these revenue sources, the money would have to be recovered from the monthly fees, so they would be higher," says Bud Latta, director of processing and disposal for waste management services.

The biggest money-spinner for local garbage gurus is selling the paper, glass, plastic, metal and other recyclable items that pass through the materials recovery facility in Clover Bar.

The facility is run for a per-tonne fee by Waste Management of Canada, which markets the cleaned and sorted products nationally and internationally.

While these sales are budgeted to bring in \$4.4 million in 2011 — one quarter of that amount goes to Waste Management — the market fluctuates drastically, says Jim Schubert, general supervisor of conversion technologies.

"The recession hit everybody, including us, in a big way. Back in 2009 ... that \$4.4 million was \$1.9 million," he says.

"The recycling markets didn't need all this recycling stuff, so they paid virtually nothing for it. For old high-grade newspaper, we (now) get \$130 a tonne, but for a short time we had to pay companies to take it."

Paper and cardboard make up about 85 per cent of the roughly 50,000 tonnes of material processed annually, Schubert says.

"Newspaper is about 70 per cent of the incoming stream. We couldn't store it. Within a week's time, our facility (would be) full of newspaper."

Aluminum, which accounts for less than one per cent of the recycling waste, has taken an even bigger jump, to about \$1,000 a tonne from virtually worthless two years ago.

Used paper and metal aren't the only products people want to buy. About 30,000 tonnes of rich black dirt pumped out by the compostier is expected to sell for \$750,000 this year.

Although most of that goes out by the truckload to such customers as farmers, landscapers and reclamation companies, individual 30-litre bags of Second Nature brand are being test-marketed at several garden stores, Latta says.

A major new recycling focus is the mixed construction and demolition waste processing operation, scheduled to open by the end of the month.

Jumbled loads of concrete and asphalt, lumber and tree branches, shingles, drywall, cardboard and carpet mainly now wind up in the landfill.

But a \$4.3-million plant at the waste management centre will soon



DAN RIEDLHUBER, THE JOURNAL FILE

Greys Paper Recycling Industries is building a domed facility near the Edmonton Waste Management Centre to recycle paper and glass, projected to give Edmonton about \$600,000 in revenue when it opens in 2012.



RICK COVILLE, THE JOURNAL

rial as possible from landfill," Latta says.

The goal is to double the amount of mixed construction and demolition waste they receive to 85,000 tonnes annually by 2014, creating a profit of \$1.4 million.

Approximately 90 per cent of that year's anticipated \$6.3 million revenue from the plan will be tipping fees, or the charge to drop off waste.

The remaining revenue is actually savings from using this processed material in various city operations rather than buying it from outside sources.

Although the province backed away from laws forcing builders to recycle much of their debris, this market is expected to grow as local landfills close, disposal fees rise and companies pay more attention to green issues, a city report says.

"There's quite an appetite in the industry ... in being able to recycle some of their waste stream," Latta says.

"Even though the legislation went away, we decided to go ahead anyway. We believe there's enough (material)."

be able to shake, blow, and mechanically or manually separate mounds of junk sent from construction sites so it can be reused.

Wood, the largest category, is ground up to add bulk and carbon to composting sewage sludge; crushed concrete is a good road base, and cardboard is an ingredient in shingles made by an Edmonton company.

"One of the big factors for us in making this a profitable operation is being able to divert as much mate-

See TRASH / C7



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The construction and demolition waste-recycling facility at the Edmonton Waste Management Centre is expected to process 85,000 tonnes of material annually. The building is still under construction and will be on stream in a few weeks.