



CITY OF YELLOWKNIFE

GOVERNANCE AND PRIORITIES COMMITTEE AGENDA

Monday, September 22, 2025 at 12:05 p.m.

Chair: Mayor B. Hendriksen,
Councillor S. Arden-Smith,
Councillor G. Cochrane,
Councillor R. Fequet,
Councillor R. Foote,
Councillor C. McGurk,
Councillor T. McLennan,
Councillor S. Payne, and
Councillor R. Warburton.

<u>Item</u>	<u>Description</u>
1.	Opening Statement: The City of Yellowknife acknowledges that we are located in Chief Drygeese territory. From time immemorial, it has been the traditional land of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation. We respect the histories, languages, and cultures of all other Indigenous Peoples including the North Slave Métis, and all First Nations, Métis, and Inuit whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant community.
2.	Approval of the agenda.
3.	Disclosure of conflict of interest and the general nature thereof.
4.	A presentation from Administration and from Stantec regarding the Community Plan Phase 1 Consultation.
5.	A presentation from Deton Cho regarding waste solutions in the north.
ANNEX A	
6.	A memorandum regarding whether to cancel Amnesty Days at the Solid Waste Facility or to transition to a voucher system.



CITY OF YELLOWKNIFE

MEMORANDUM TO COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE: Governance and Priorities

DATE: September 22, 2025

DEPARTMENT: Public Works & Engineering

ISSUE: Whether to cancel Amnesty Days at the Solid Waste Facility or to transition to a voucher system.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council authorize Administration to end Amnesty Days at the Solid Waste Facility.

BACKGROUND:

The City of Yellowknife's Solid Waste Facility (SWF) has hosted Amnesty Days in its current format since 2005. Amnesty Days are held to offer residents an opportunity to dispose of household waste free of charge. Surcharge items (as written in Fees and Charges By-law No. 4436, as amended) are still charged the associated surcharge fee, but the residential light waste load fee (\$16.50 in 2025) is waived.

Historically, Amnesty Days served as a convenient way for residents to dispose of additional household waste that accumulated throughout the year. As the SWF continues to assess its operational priorities and its ability to meet expected levels of service, decisions need to be made that are in line with effective waste and cost management. Note that the SWF coordinates the following waste diversion programs for the public:

- Blue Bin Recycling Collection
- Leaf & Yard Waste
- Source Separated Organics Processing
- Concrete/Asphalt Recycling
- Household Hazardous Waste
- Scrap Metal
- Tire Shredding
- Clean Wood
- Honey Buckets

Where the above programs support the City's diversion goals by targeting specific materials and waiving or subsidizing associated fees to incentivize the public, Amnesty Day does not align with diversion efforts that are set forth in the adopted Strategic Waste Management Plan. Amnesty Day

instead does the opposite by contributing to the devaluation of the landfill's airspace and increasing processing challenges.

A decision needs to be made to either cancel Amnesty Days altogether or implement a different system that is safer, less costly and more manageable. The division's preference is to end the event.

If Council chooses not to end Amnesty Days, the SWF has prepared an alternative that will provide the majority of residents with an opportunity to access the service while making it safer, more cost-effective and manageable to staff.

This memorandum outlines:

1. The reasons behind the division's push to cancel Amnesty; and
2. A summary of how an alternative voucher system would work if Amnesty is not cancelled.

Note that the proposed voucher system is ready for implementation.

COUNCIL STRATEGIC DIRECTION/RESOLUTION/POLICY:	
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Strategic Direction #3

Sustainable Future

Key Initiative 3.1.2

Implementing the Solid Waste Management Plan

APPLICABLE LEGISLATION, BY-LAWS, STUDIES, PLANS:

1. Solid Waste Management By-law No. 4376, as amended;
2. Fees and Charges By-law No. 4436, as amended; and
3. City of Yellowknife Strategic Waste Management Plan Update, 2025.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Spring 2023 Amnesty Day Overall Cost

The Spring 2023 Amnesty Day was held for a total of 7 hours on May 20, 2023 with an overall cost of \$33,483.29. For each hour of Amnesty, it cost the City approximately \$4,783.33. The overall cost takes into consideration administration costs, lost revenue, staffing costs, equipment costs, landfilling costs, and clean up costs – which are summarized in the below considerations.

In addition to the staffing costs noted above, there is also the costs associated with depleting landfill space with no cost recovery. In 2017, the City estimated the cost of landfill space at \$200.00 per tonne. The costs associated with landfilling municipal waste have significantly increased due to regulatory requirements, contracted costs, landfill closure activities, and fire prevention activities. In 2025, Administration estimates that the cost of landfilling has increased to at least \$275 per tonne and the facility is only recovering \$163.00 per tonne. This represents significant undervaluing of one of the City's most important assets.

Continuing to take waste for free further compounds this deficit which the general tax base must account for.

Safety Concerns

The Solid Waste Facility is a continuous construction site. The safety concerns are a result of the high number of residents attempting to access free disposal and the significant quantity of waste that comes in. Spring 2023 Amnesty Day was held over 7 hours and saw 672 vehicles enter the SWF, an average of 96 vehicles per hour in the Public Drop off Area.

Visit Purpose	Vehicle Count
Salvage	138
Amnesty	534
Total Visit Count	672
Avg Count per Hour (7hr period)	96

SWF personnel directions are often ignored and waste is disposed of where it is unsafe to do so, even with staff supervision in the Public Drop-off Area, as a result of the surplus of vehicles. Operators have to maneuver heavy duty equipment around residents and vehicle traffic to ensure that there is sufficient space for waste to be placed. Operators find resident visibility difficult, and residents are not aware of how to operate a vehicle around heavy equipment, adding more responsibility on the Operator to ensure no accidents occur.

Percentage of Residents Reached

The Spring Amnesty Day had 672 vehicles cross the scale, accounting for a small portion of the City's population. Essentially, despite the optics of long line-ups, this additional level of service is provided only to the benefit of few residents, while the majority of taxpayers opt to pay the \$16.50 fee to dispose of their additional waste.

Staff Requirements

Given that public safety, waste diversion, and regulatory compliance are SWF priorities, Amnesty Days require the majority of SWF staff to supervise the public, and MED officers have been necessary on site to direct traffic flow. Amnesty requires more resources and does not bring in any revenue to compensate. For the following reasons, SWF personnel are required to supervise the public:

- To inspect vehicles for surcharge or hazardous waste items that are concealed with the acceptable waste load for regulatory purposes;
- To decrease the potential of injury or harm of visitors seeking to salvage in prohibited areas;
- To monitor and educate visitors on site safety expectations (no smoking, children supervision);
- To direct visitors to dispose of material in designated areas; and
- To remind visitors that there is heavy duty equipment working on site and to mitigate risk through traffic control.

Regulatory Consideration

When the waste fee is waived, there is no incentive to sort or divert waste, which results in an undervaluing of airspace, increased risk of non-compliance with regulatory expectations and an unsustainable use of the landfill's workers and resources.

Public Reaction

There have been several complaints from the public about Amnesty Days, including but not limited to:

- The length of the line ups;
- Frustration that the City is wasting money supervising people to provide free dumping, which in turn costs taxpayers;
- That commercial vehicles are not included;
- That surcharge items must be paid for regardless of Amnesty; and
- The Spring 2020 Amnesty Event resulted in two articles (CBC & Cabin Radio), numerous complaints on Facebook pages, and attention on a National Radio show (CBC Radio).

Ending Amnesty would be the easiest, least expensive way to address the issues above. Amnesty is not a critical or essential service and steers the division away from dealing with more important services.

New Amnesty Voucher Program

If Council would rather not cancel Amnesty, the SWF is ready to implement a new voucher system to replace Amnesty Days for residents who participate in the Curbside Cart Program. Each voucher would waive the residential fee for one visit to the SWF.

How it works

Residents who participate in the Curbside Cart Program and pay the monthly solid waste levy on their utility bill are eligible to receive two amnesty vouchers per year, which will expire at the end of each calendar year. Each amnesty voucher will waive the residential vehicle charge for one trip to the Solid Waste Facility. Amnesty vouchers can be used at any time during regular public hours.

Household eligibility

- Residents who participate in the Curbside Cart Program and pay the monthly solid waste levy on their utility bill are eligible to receive two amnesty vouchers per year. Vouchers can be accessed online and emailed to the recipient, or they can be issued at the Solid Waste Facility.
- The number of vouchers per household is determined by how many sets of carts each household pays for. For example, a multi-family unit with two sets of approved carts are eligible to receive two sets of vouchers each year (4 vouchers total).
- Residents who do not participate in the Curbside Cart Program are not eligible for amnesty vouchers.

Waste guidelines

- Amnesty vouchers can be used for the disposal of household garbage and anything else that is covered by the standard residential vehicle rate (\$16.50 in 2025).
- Residents can dispose of up to 150 kg of waste per voucher. The gatehouse reserves the right to have a voucher holder weigh in and weight out in order to assess eligibility.
- If the voucher holder's load exceeds 150 kg, both vouchers can be used provided the weight does not exceed 300 kg.
- Commercial entities are not eligible to receive amnesty vouchers. The Solid Waste Facility retains the right to turn away loads that are deemed to be commercial (e.g.: vehicles with c-plates and/or company decals).
- Amnesty vouchers do not cover surcharge items, such as appliances, mattresses, empty barrels, oil or propane tanks, car batteries, electronic devices, or tires. A reminder to residents that

many electronic devices can be recycled for free at the Bottle Depot. Appliances, such as a fridge or washing machine, may also be brought to local metal recycling companies. Please refer to the [Fees and Charges](#) page for a full list of surcharge items.

- Vouchers can only be used during regular public hours (Tuesday-Sunday, 11:00 a.m. to 4:15 p.m.).

Benefits

The amnesty voucher system comes with the following benefits:

- Residents can dispose of household waste at their convenience and avoid line ups;
- Staff can better support residents with proper waste sorting and diversion;
- This system promotes a safer site for both residents and staff; and
- Staff can more effectively and efficiently measure and manage waste.

Council Request for Additional Information

At the July 28, Governance and Priorities Committee meeting, Council advanced the option to end Amnesty Days to the next City Council meeting on August 25, 2025. During the scheduled Council meeting on August 25, 2025, Council requested additional information summarizing all the options available in regard to Amnesty Days. The table below summarizes these options:

	Option 1 - No Amnesty	Option 2 - Vouchers (1 voucher per household)	Option 3 - Status Quo (Amnesty)
Operational Requirements	No additional staff needed. No additional equipment needed.	Occasional IT/front desk support. Scanner for admin.	Overtime staff; MED support when required. Roll-off trucks, excavator, dozer and skid steer need to be manned and ready. Working face of landfill needs to be expanded in order accommodate influx of waste.
Annual Cost	\$0	\$65K to \$100K per year	\$80k to \$120k/ per year (assuming two events per year) *does not include the future costs of landfill fire response/safety incidents that can result from unavoidable mismanagement of Amnesty waste.
Considerations	Perception that illegal dumping will increase. Less “undervaluing” of landfill space. More staff time to landfill operational tasks. Better site/resource management. No safety implications associated with Amnesty	Only available to households that pay the monthly waste levy. Limited to a max net weight of 150 kg per voucher. Dependent on weigh out scale and scalehouse installation (end of 2025). Perception that illegal dumping will increase. Safety risk reduced by spreading intake	Safety risk continues. No incentive to sort problematic material out of the waste stream which exacerbates site safety issues and reduces diversion objectives. Negatively affects regular service delivery (delay in blue-bin pick-up, inefficient compaction). Impacts city operations for days/weeks after event.

ALTERNATIVES TO RECOMMENDATION:

1. That Council authorize Administration to implement the Amnesty Voucher System; or
2. That Council direct Administration to continue with Amnesty Days in typical practice.

RATIONALE:

Amnesty Days puts significant pressures on site operations. These pressures result in the inability to process waste effectively, serious safety concerns, and frustrations from both staff and the public. No revenue is generated from this activity and so the cost to manage waste is unfairly placed on the taxpaying community as opposed to the individual waste generators. Amnesty is often exploited, with excessive waste coming in and concealed surcharged/hazardous items being smuggled in at no cost to the waste generator. Waiving the fee for household waste diminishes any incentive to properly sort material, which goes against the ongoing work the City is doing to divert waste and optimize airspace utilization. The division strongly recommends cancelling the event.

ATTACHMENTS:

None

Prepared: June 9, 2025, CV/cg
 Revised: July 21, 2025, CV/cg
 Revised: September 15, 2025, CG