



COMMUNICATION UPDATE

TO:	Mayor and Members City Council
DATE:	March 20, 2026
SUBJECT:	Status of the Blue Box Program Transition for Residential and Non-Residential Properties (WM2601) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
SUBMITTED BY:	Angela Storey Director, Waste Management Public Works Department
SIGNATURE:	

This Communication Update is to provide the Mayor and Members of City Council a status update following the first two months of the full transition of the Blue Box Program that went into effect on January 1, 2026.

Background

As of January 1, 2026, the transition to the provincial Blue Box Program is complete. As outlined in the Blue Box Regulation O. Reg 391/21 (the Regulation), which transitioned the Blue Box Program to Individual Producer Responsibility, all residential properties, and some select public spaces within the City of Hamilton have now fully moved from a municipally managed Blue Box Program to a provincially managed system where packaging producers assume 100% of the cost and operating responsibility. The residential program is now operated by Circular Materials on behalf of packaging producers.

The Regulation, however, did not include non-residential properties, such as businesses, places of worship and City facilities. As a result, they are now deemed non-eligible and not included in the transition to the provincially managed system. As approved in the 2026 City of Hamilton budget, the City will continue to collect non-eligible curbside blue box recycling until the end of 2026.

Below, Staff have provided updates based on several themes related to the transitioned Blue Box Program. The information identifies both benefits of transition and acknowledges service issues experienced by both residents and businesses because of the transition.

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

Post-Transition Residential Blue Box Program

Promotion and Education

Circular Materials is responsible for educating all Ontario residents on the new Blue Box Program. The City has a funding agreement with Circular Materials to include blue box information in our annual waste guide and on the City's waste app to ensure our residents are able to find the information they need whether they are on the Circular Materials site or using resources provided by the City.

Staff acknowledge resident confusion and frustration over not knowing how the new program worked at the beginning of the year as Circular Materials did not mail or post on social media updated program information to impacted properties. To assist, Waste Management staff developed a number of social media posts informing who to call about missed recycling, how to get new and replacement blue boxes, and what items are/are not acceptable in the new program.

Who to contact: To report a concern with missed or stickered and left behind recycling, residents are to contact GFL Environmental Inc. (GFL) directly at Hamiltonrecycling@gflenv.com or 1-844-620-4351.

How to get a blue box: The Regulation only requires a contractor to have one location in a municipality for the exchange of broken and damaged blue boxes or to pick up your initial set of blue boxes if you are new to the municipality. The GFL pick up location in Hamilton, albeit inconvenient for many residents in the central, southern and western parts of the city, is at 560 Seaman Street, Stoney Creek and they are available Monday – Friday from 7am to 6pm. Residents who require additional blue boxes are asked to purchase them at a local retailer as GFL is not required to provide these.

“New to Hamilton” items now accepted in the Blue Box: One of the benefits of the province-wide Blue Box Program is the introduction of new items that are now allowed to go in the blue box across Ontario:

- Black and dark coloured plastic
- Styrofoam cups, meat trays and take out containers
- Aerosol containers (empty)
- Deodorant containers, toothpaste and hand cream tubes
- New plastics i.e. bubble wrap, pouches and snack wrappers such as chip bags, granola bar wrappers, cookie and cereal bags.

Items no longer accepted in the Blue Box: As the transitioned Blue Box Program is now the responsibility of packaging producers, some items are no longer accepted in the blue box:

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- Hard or soft cover books
- *Alcohol containers (bottle and cans) as these items are part of a separate Provincial deposit return system.

*Although alcohol containers are not listed as an acceptable item for the blue box, Circular Materials has said that if there are a few in the blue box, their contractor should be collecting them. Hamilton staff have both written to, and communicated during collaborative Province-wide meetings that the mixed-messaging related to alcohol containers is confusing and that they should either be fully accepted or not accepted at all.

Inquiries to Customer Service

Although the residential program transitioned on January 1, 2026, and GFL is responsible for responding to all inquiries related to residential curbside blue box collection, the City's Customer Contact Centre and Waste team continue to receive a number of these. While the City is happy to assist all residents by transferring the call to GFL, it is frustrating for the residents to not know who to contact or to escalate collection issues to and contact the City in hopes staff are able to help resolve the issue.

Table 1 provides a comparison of the number of residential blue box recycling-related inquiries customer service staff received in both January and February 2026 compared to the same months last year. This table illustrates that there were considerably more inquiries in January 2026 compared January 2025, and that the numbers have decreased to historical levels in February 2026. The decline is favourable month over month, however due to the transition, the city would expect even less calls in February since all customer service calls should be received by GFL.

Table 1: Blue Box Related Inquiries Received by Waste Customer Service

	2025	2026
January	312	806
February	473	437
Total	785	1,243

Impact of the Transition on the City's other Waste Programs

To monitor the impact of the new Blue Box Program, staff collect and analyze data of the contents of residential garbage through waste composition audits. Seasonal audits were completed in September 2025 and February 2026 with two more scheduled in the spring and summer of 2026. This information is key in determining the impact of the new program on Hamilton's garbage stream and the Glanbrook Landfill. Audit information is routinely shared with the Waste Management Sub-Committee.

Post-Transition Non-Residential Blue Box Program

As a reminder, the Provincial Blue Box Program only includes residential properties deeming all other properties that municipalities previously provided blue box services to as non-eligible. These non-eligible sources include, but are not limited to, businesses, places of worship, City facilities, and special events. Through various reports and approvals, City Council approved the continued collection of blue box materials from non-eligible sources until the end of 2026. The blue box collection change in service to non-residential properties has resulted in challenges.

Collection Day Changes

With the approval to continue collecting non-eligible blue box materials in 2026, and to realize more favourable pricing and operational efficiency for GFL, the recycling collection days for non-eligible sources needed to be changed. Although letters were sent to affected properties in late October 2025, some were unaware of the change to their collection day beginning January 1, 2026. Table 2 provides the number of inquiries received weekly by the City from non-eligible sources from January 1, 2026 to February 28, 2026. These inquiries include missed collection, confirmation of collection days, and other blue box related questions. Call volumes peaked in weeks three and four (from January 11th to 24th) and have since steadily declined. To assist non-eligible sources with confirmation of collection days, Staff have hand delivered letters to many businesses and have updated the Business Waste page on the City's website with a map look-up tool that provides non-eligible sources receiving collection from the City with their new recycling collection day.

Table 2: Weekly Recycling Inquiries from Non-Eligible Properties

Week since January 1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Number of Calls	21	197	231	231	126	155	97	83	102

Mixed-Use Properties

There are many mixed-use (commercial with residential) buildings in Hamilton that now have recycling collected on two different days; one for the residential blue box material and another for the non-residential blue box material. Since January 1st, some material has been mistakenly left at the curb by the collector due to difficulty in determining the source of material. Staff are working to improve this through communication with non-eligible sources and cooperation with the GFL.

The Waste Management Division remains committed to supporting residential and non-eligible property owners and ensuring an improved transition with the City-provided

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recycling collection service ending in January 2027. Staff are developing communication pieces to ensure non-eligible properties are informed, supported and prepared for this change in service.

For further information, please contact Ryan Kent, Manager of Waste Policy and Planning, at Ryan.Kent@hamilton.ca or extension 7686.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

N/A