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**City will can high garbage rates for apartments****Competition from private collectors forces change**By **SUE-ANN LEVY**, TORONTO SUN

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**Brad Butt of the Greater Toronto Apartment Association has been leading the fight against the high cost of city run garbage disposal on behalf of his members. (GREG HENKENHAF/Toronto Sun)**

Faced with an exodus by hundreds of apartments and condos to private haulers, the city is poised to introduce new garbage rates that could reduce costs to those buildings by at least 30%.

A public notice advising of the changes — released last week on the city's website — says the details of the revised waste reduction fees will be contained in a report to the June 15 public works committee.

However, in a briefing note to the Multi-Family Waste Diversion Group — obtained by the *Toronto Sun* — officials propose the rebate per unit on the property tax bill (to offset the garbage levy) be increased to \$175 from \$157 to better reflect the average cost of pick-up.

The plan is also to alter the billing (over and above the rebate) from one that classified buildings according to small, medium, large, extra-large and excess container volumes (similar to the residential system) to one based on the cubic yards of garbage actually collected.

The waste reduction levy was first introduced in condos and apartments on July 1, 2008 amidst complaints it was confusing and was nothing more than a tax grab that unfairly punished these buildings, most of which still are not part of the city's green bin program.

At the time, city officials insisted the levy was needed to drive up the amount of trash being recycled and not going to landfill, a rate that hovered around 13% for condos and apartments.

The city's notes indicate the new rates are "in line" with the private sector, "reducing (the) incentive" for customers to leave the city collection system. They also say that the billing system proposed is "less complex" which will make it "easier for buildings to understand their bills."

Both Geoff Rathbone and Vince Sferrazza of the solid waste division refused comment Wednesday.

"You're going to have to wait for the report," said Sferrazza. "I do have a protocol I have to follow and I'm fine with that."

But Dean McCabe, regional manager for Brookfield Property Management and v-p of the Association of Condominium Managers, said at one of his buildings, a 214-unit condo at Bathurst and Steeles, he figures the new plan will lower yearly garbage costs by about 32%.

"It will definitely represent an improvement," he said. "Condos were pretty hard hit."

He said the old system was "extremely punitive" and not based on a "sliding scale" that increases rates after a building exceeded a particular container category.

"(It seems) the city's Target 70 plan was just to drive 70% of buildings off to private collection," McCabe said.

Brad Butt, executive director of the Greater Toronto Apartment Association, said the proposed changes will lower the levy by as much as 50% for some of his larger apartment buildings with 150 units or more, which have been "unfairly charged" under a "very convoluted" system.

"From Day One we felt the system was not transparent, it was difficult to understand, it was unfair to many buildings in the city," he said, noting Toronto Community Housing Corporation actually got hammered the most by the program.

"The billing system was a colossal screw-up."

In my own condo building of 100 units, we've been faced with a garbage bill of \$16,000 a year with no idea how city officials calculated the amount.

Public works committee chairman Glenn De Baeremaeker, who also refused to comment on the new proposals, has repeatedly claimed in the past the garbage fee was “adjusted” to compensate for the fact condos and apartments don’t have green bins. He has also insisted city officials do “garbage audits” all the time.

Butt said he has no doubt the fact buildings were starting to opt out of city collection has had “some impact.” He estimates some 500 apartment buildings have gone private so far.

McCabe said the cost he has received for collection by private haulers at that same Bathurst and Steeles building will be some 50% less.

“Even though the rates are going to be lower (under the city’s new plan), there’s still savings to be had going to private collection,” he said.

Butt has asked officials whether buildings that were overbilled in the past two years will get a credit. So far he has received no answer.

“If our guys have been overcharged, they (city officials) should be crediting back every single one of their customers,” he said.

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