

A Blue Box full of trash



By Nate Smelle

IF YOU HAVEN'T already heard the chatter regarding the Ford government's changes to the Blue Box Program, buckle up buck-a-roos you're in for a bumpy and confusing ride. In what the Premier is claiming will be "a move towards more efficient and sustainable waste management practices," Ontario is trashing its existing Blue Box Program and replacing it with one that removes responsibility for the service from municipalities, and makes the producers of recyclables "fully" responsible for keeping them out of our landfills. When I initially caught wind that between 2023 and 2026 the Ford government was planning to transition our provincial recycling program to a system that makes the producers pay for the cost of recycling, re-using, and/or disposing of the products they manufacture, I thought "wow, I actually agree with the Premier on something." But, as I have found to be the case with every single thing this government says or does, the Devil is in the details. Under the current system, municipalities throughout the province are responsible for designing and operating their own residential recycling programs. Costs are split between municipalities and the manufacturers and those responsible for producing plastics, metal, household glass, and paper products in the province. Once the new system fully comes into effect on Jan. 1, 2026, the producers "some of which include small businesses such as McDonald's, Loblaws and Unilever, will have to pick up the tab for the implementation and operation of the program. Big business covering the cost of responsibly collecting and processing the excessive amount of packaging they produced sounds good, right. Unfortunately it's not quite that simple. Because these corporate giants are going to be responsible for covering the cost of the new Blue Box Program, many who truly care about the main goal of program "diverting more waste from Ontario's landfills and cleaning up our environment" are expressing their anger with the Ford government for bowing to corporate lobbyists and setting a low bar in terms of the provincial waste diversion targets these companies must adhere to. According to several waste diversion experts in the province, the one thing everybody seems to agree upon when it comes to the new system is that it raises more questions than answers. For instance, considering the fact that the large corporations which produce the packaging have been instrumental in setting the Ford government's waste diversion targets, would it not make "good" financial sense, at least from their shareholders' perspective on the bottom line, to push for targets as low as possible, so that they are not responsible for processing recyclables that are more costly to recycle? What about commercial entities and other sources of recyclables that no longer qualify to receive recycling services under the new Blue Box Program? Will such non-eligible sources continue recycling when they have to pay out of pocket? If not, and I suspect for many their bottom line will be the deciding factor, what will be the impact of this potentially massive influx of trash on our communities and local landfills? For now, municipalities such as Bancroft will continue providing their own collection and processing services, as they have done for many years. However, we will really start to feel the winds of change blowing on July 1, 2025 when the provincial government takes over until the new system fully kicks in on Jan. 1, 2026. In the past week, councils from both Carlow Mayo Township and the Town of Bancroft have addressed the province's new recycling strategy, so it is fair to say that this issue is officially on our radar locally. To some, January 2026 may seem like a long time away, but as we all know, time flies when we are having fun. Looking ahead to 2026 when it will be too late to add the public's

input to the program, now is the time for our governments on all levels to answer all necessary questions and smooth out all wrinkles. If we fail or refuse to participate in the process and allow industry to ride our government like a rented mule, the only thing our blue boxes will be good for is collecting trash.