

Editorial, April 2, 2008

Clarington ready for a waste challenge

One would think the council of a municipality which uses "leading the way" as their slogan would not hesitate to show leadership.

The way council has responded to the challenge it received from the Mayor of Whitby to enter into a friendly waste diversion competition, is nothing short of cowardly. On February 13, Ms. Pat Perkins, Mayor of Whitby sent our Mayor Abernethy a letter, challenging the Municipality of Clarington to a competition to see which municipality could achieve the highest waste diversion rate in 2008.

When the competition was first raised on the council floor in February, Councillor Trim, who is also Chair of the Works Committee for the Region of Durham (the committee responsible for waste in the Region), suggested that Clarington decline the challenge. At that time, he said that Clarington residents already had their plate full with striving to achieve a 70 percent waste diversion target by 2010, and they had recently been challenged to turn off their lights for an hour on March 29, in support of Earth Hour.

Regional Councillor Mary Novak said the challenge would be frustrating for Clarington residents as we would have to change our garbage program midstream. Unlike the other Lakeshore Municipalities in the Region of Durham, Clarington has weekly garbage and green bin collection, and bi-weekly blue box collection. The other Lakeshore communities, including Whitby, have weekly blue box and green bin collection, and bi-weekly garbage collection. Diversion statistics show that municipalities on the bi-weekly garbage collection system have an increased diversion rate. Clarington is scheduled to go on the weekly blue box collection, and bi-weekly garbage collection system in March of 2009, so it is unlikely this would have any effect on how Clarington residents would respond to a waste challenge in 2008. Councillors did feel that the competition was not on a level playing field, as Clarington was at a disadvantage with the weekly garbage collection system.

When the challenge, which was tabled at the March 3rd council meeting, was lifted off the table at the March 25th council meeting, Regional Councillors Trim and Novak reiterated their feelings that the challenge was not on a level playing field. Novak said, "People will find themselves trying to struggle with too many things."

As the stakes were not too high (the Mayor of the losing municipality had to send congratulations to the Mayor of the winning municipality), Councillor Foster said we really had nothing to lose by entering the waste diversion challenge, and he felt it was more important that we play the game.

It is interesting that the two councillors - Novak and Trim, representing the Region of Durham, who are proposing to operate a waste incinerator in Clarington, would stand in the way of a proposal that could reduce garbage. Are they afraid we might reduce our garbage so much that the proposed incinerator would be redundant before it is built?

Clarington participated in a very successful Earth Hour challenge on March 29, along with many municipalities around the world. Residents were asked to turn off their lights for an hour from 8 to 9 p.m. on Saturday, and did so in great numbers. Veridian Connections, electricity provider to the urban portion of Clarington, reported on Monday that hydro consumption was reduced by an average of 5.8 percent in the communities that participated in Earth Hour. The reduction in the use of electricity in Clarington for that hour was 7.7 percent. It appeared, from driving through a few Clarington neighbourhoods at the end of the hour, that about 85 percent of the homes were dark. Sorting recyclables from

the garbage stream is far less onerous than sitting in the dark for an hour on a Saturday night.

The residents of Clarington are not afraid of a waste challenge. But we will never get to take on Whitby in a waste challenge because our political leaders don't think we can handle it. Councillors decided at the March 25th council meeting to enter into a kitchen waste challenge with Whitby for 1 week in April. They determined that, as kitchen waste can be weighed, it would make for a fair competition. We have no word yet whether Whitby has accepted our watered down counter challenge to see which municipality can produce the most kitchen waste in one week. This challenge now has nothing to do with waste diversion.

Populations by and large want to be part of the solution, not "part of the problem. If politicians are afraid to show leadership in dealing with our waste issues, they should move over and let those who want to provide viable solutions, do so.