

Council divide must be bridged

Locals vs. Regionals could mean no work gets done

Wed Jun 06, 2007

By Jennifer Stone

I'm not always a big fan of having a completely unified council.

After all, a little healthy debate at the political level can be a good thing.

But right at the moment in Clarington, particularly after last Monday night's council meeting, I'd say there's a downright unhealthy dynamic taking shape.

At a time when unity may indeed be necessary so that Clarington can show itself as strong against a major issue, it appears just the opposite is taking place.

It would appear, at least on the issue of incineration, Clarington's council is deeply divided.

Last week's rejection of Regional Chairman Roger Anderson's request to speak to council draws only too clear a picture of what's going on.

Local councillors voted, as a block, not to allow him the opportunity to speak.

With four votes amongst them, the group was able to overwhelm the three Regional councillors. It was, they said, imperative to send a message to the Region. Specifically, one said, it was necessary to send a message to their own Regional councillors, from whom they feel they are not receiving proper amounts of information and who, they feel, aren't listening to their concerns.

Nothing against Roger, they told me, but they don't want the Region dictating which studies they can do to peer review the project before making a decision on whether they are a host to incineration.

And the previous week Mr. Anderson had been very clear that he felt it imperative to "send a message" to Clarington: the Region would only be committing to up-fronting \$200,000 worth of funding for the peer review studies.

No more, at least not without Clarington coming back with a further request. It would not be a blank cheque.

Having been told by Clarington staff that the studies they felt necessary to peer review all the information brought forward so far in the environmental assessment could cost upwards of \$500,000, that wasn't OK with the locals.

It tied the hands of the Municipality, they said.

There were also indications the locals might be right about whether Clarington's regional councillors were listening -- after all, Clarington's motion about the money it expected from the Region said nothing about it being an upfront contribution.

But, that's certainly the message from the Region.

Seems like there was some fairly passive-aggressive message sending going on. Not the most effective form of communication, I think.

Better to have heard Mr. Anderson out, then ask some very pointed questions, begin some important dialogue and make it clear Clarington would not be a pushover on this matter.

Clarington's councillors could have used the opportunity to work together to let the Region know the Municipality needed all the answers before making a decision on whether it was a willing host to an incinerator.

Instead, they drew battle lines, at a time when we need council to be showing itself as strong and unified.