

Metroland – Opinion Column

A year in, council still hasn't hit its stride

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By Jennifer Stone

Sad but true, Claringtonians -- your council, a year post-election, is significantly less than the sum of its parts.

Much of that, I argue, rests squarely on the shoulders of your regional representatives, who seem to have dug their heels in on what is likely to be the most important issue to ever hit Clarington, beyond the long-ago choice to build nuclear reactors here: incineration.

No one, at this stage, could argue we have anything but a fractured council. Over and over, we're seeing votes -- even on non-incineration related matters -- split along regional-local lines. When all four local councillors are there, they generally win the vote.

But winning the vote is only half the battle.

Take, for example, a recent motion passed by Clarington council asking the Region of Durham to outline the advantages of the Municipality indicating it would be a willing host to the incinerator.

The motion passed, as usual, 4-3, with the local councillors voting for it.

What they were looking for, they said, was clarification on whether Clarington declaring itself an unwilling host would really taint the process and possibly make it harder for Municipal staff to negotiate a host community agreement down the road.

The issue came forward the next day at the Durham York Waste Management Committee meeting and was immediately derided by Durham Chairman Roger Anderson.

"I just can't believe Clarington has to write a letter to ask us to tell them the advantages to the Municipality of Clarington to an EFW," he said somewhat snarkily, taking a bit of a shot at Clarington staff while he was at it.

Now this is where Clarington's three regional representatives -- all of whom were in attendance at that Sept. 25 meeting -- should have stepped up. They may not have agreed with the request but it was the official position of council. It's the job of a regional councillor to ensure Clarington's position is well-explained, even if not defended.

Regional Councillor Charlie Trim essentially shrugged, acted like he shared Mr. Anderson's feelings and didn't understand it either ...though it had been clearly explained to him the night before. Regional Councillor Mary Novak sat mute. Mayor Jim Abernethy did speak up, but instead of explaining his council's position -- and that's exactly what a motion that wins is -- he did the opposite.

"Personally, I thought it was premature," he said. "If we start to look at the advantages and create a list of those, I think our decisions, everyone's decisions, could get skewed."

Experienced regional councillors should be aware of their role in terms of representing the position of council. Clearly, ours don't. Barring that, the relatively experienced team of local councillors we have should be going to the committee meetings themselves, as delegations if necessary, to ensure Clarington's stance is appropriately explained.

But neither is happening. Council is split at a time when it should be working together.

Reporter Jennifer Stone's column appears every other Wednesday. E-mail jstone@durhamregion.com.