

Friendly challenge, serious issue

Clarington's refusal to participate bad optics

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By: Metroland Durham Regional Media Group

Clarington council isn't up to a challenge.

That's the sentiment expressed by Mayor Jim Abernethy after the Town of Whitby suggested a friendly competition with the municipality. Whitby Mayor Pat Perkins wanted to see which community could achieve the highest waste diversion rate in 2008 and the winner would receive congratulatory praise at a 2009 televised council meeting.

Sounds simple enough. But Clarington refused the challenge.

With the amount of trash talk that's taken place concerning the proposed energy from waste facility in Clarington one would think that, given the opportunity to put a positive spin on Clarington's waste-management system, councillors would jump at the chance. However, that's not the case because a few of our local reps believe the two municipalities are playing on an unfair playing field.

Whitby achieved a 68 per cent diversion in 2007 -- about 20 per cent better than Clarington. And this year Clarington will prepare to make changes -- to be implemented in April 2009 -- that will bring this municipality's collection schedules in line with Whitby's. In Whitby, garbage is collected every second week, while recycling and green box waste gets picked up weekly. Clarington has the opposite schedule, with garbage picked up weekly and recycling every second week.

Granted, Whitby looks to have an advantage when it comes to waste diversion. But let's be honest, the purpose of this challenge was to increase waste diversion across the board through friendly competition. All the trash produced goes to Michigan anyway, so the less we send south of the border, the better. With two years remaining until the border is closed to our garbage the clock is ticking. The competition would only get people talking and thinking about more waste diversion. How can that be a bad thing?

Mayor Abernethy did send back a counter-challenge about a similar waste diversion challenge during Pitch In Week, which traditionally takes place in April. However, the optics of refusing Whitby's 2008 challenge makes it look as if Clarington is more willing to wait for an incinerator to take shape than work on the challenge of waste diversion now.

-- *Clarington This Week*