

Region to pilot clear garbage bag program

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By Reka Szekely

DURHAM -- A group of Pickering and Clarington homeowners will be the first to switch to clear garbage bags when the Region launches a pilot project in January.

Durham is considering moving to the clear bags in a bid to reach its 70 per cent waste diversion goal by 2010. The three-month pilot program will affect roughly 1,500 homes along two garbage collection routes, one in each municipality, at a total cost of \$30,000. The Region is also testing the program in two highrise apartment buildings, one in Ajax and one in Oshawa, and will look for partners to fund it. The routes and buildings have not yet been selected.

The Region's works committee endorsed the pilot project on Wednesday and it comes to council on June 18.

Pickering Councillor Rick Johnson was among those who advocated moving to the clear bags.

"This is not something new; there's a lot of municipalities in North America that have done this," he said, adding the Region did a similar pilot program in Pickering, with 500 homes, before launching the Green Bin program.

According to the report presented to the committee, the move to clear bags has worked in other communities. In 13 Nova Scotia municipalities, where data has been collected since 2005, there was a 41-per-cent decrease in regular garbage, a 35-per-cent increase in recycling tonnage and a 38-per-cent increase in organics tonnage after the clear bags were introduced.

Options include allowing only clear bags at the curb, a limit of one standard colour bag while all other bags must be clear, or one opaque or grocery bag allowed per clear bag for bathroom and health items.

Coun. Johnson said he's impressed with the options available and thinks the program is necessary to reach the Region's mandated diversion goal.

"This is an ambitious goal, but I think to achieve it, we have to introduce strategies similar to this."

Though there may be a little confusion at first, Whitby Coun. Gerry Emm thinks people will jump on board.

"It's fashionable to be recyclable today," he said.

The \$30,000 price tag for the program will cover a public education campaign for the routes and building selected, free clear bags for the participants and fees for auditing the waste and collecting and compiling the data.

Regional Chairman Roger Anderson wanted to know whether drivers on the pilot routes will know what they can and can't pick up.

The drivers will be trained, Regional Works Commissioner Cliff Curtis said.

"You're right; it depends on the judgement of the driver," Mr. Curtis said.

In addition to the clear bags, staff also recommended spending \$45,000 on a consultant's review to investigate other options for meeting the Region's 70 per cent target. It would look at lessons learned in both North American and European communities.