

Delegates speak of possible waste alternatives

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By Jennifer Stone

BOWMANVILLE -- Halifax was once in a similar position to the Region of Durham.

Waste was an issue. There, landfill and open burning were both being used as a means of getting rid of garbage.

An incinerator was proposed and went through the environmental assessment process. Durham too is in the midst of an EA aimed at building an incinerator.

But down east, in the 1990s, the provincial government turned down the incinerator, said Bob Kenney, a solid waste resource analyst from Nova Scotia. There was no choice but to try something else.

Now, after taking advice through an array of forms of community input and implementing legislative and educational tools aimed at diverting waste, Nova Scotia is seen as a leader in waste diversion, Mr. Kenney said in a presentation to Clarington council.

"We branded ourselves as world leaders in recycling," he said. "We told people that, and people became proud of it."

An array of products is banned from regular waste. For example, drink containers except those containing milk require payment of a 10-cent deposit, which is 50 per cent refunded on return. Computer equipment has been removed from the regular waste stream. Like here, food waste is taken out to provide compost.

It was partially a matter of enforcement, Mr. Kenney said.

"We went to the public and said 'You pretty much have to do this, because it's banned,' " he said. The message was, "We're required to have the programs and you're required to recycle."

Many programs were introduced, including one that deals with construction and demolition waste in an array of different ways.

With the "environmental capital" available as a result of a new consciousness surrounding the issue, it's been a relatively easy sell, even with the recent implementation of clear garbage bags, Mr. Kenney said.

"If someone says 'I don't want to do this,' someone will turn around and say, 'You don't want to recycle?' " Mr. Kenney said. "Then there's silence."

Mr. Kenney was one of several presenters who has been invited to Clarington council over the last several months to provide insight into waste issues. Maureen Carter-Whitney of the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy was also on hand Monday. She delivered a message about the need for an unbiased study on incineration, which she argued should be done at the Provincial level.

Recent streamlining of the EA process for some types of waste management sites, including incinerators, makes it appear "the Ontario government is quickly trying to find solutions to emerging problems" without appropriate study, she said.

She wrote a paper that has several recommendations for the Province, including a need to evaluate whether incineration is an appropriate method of waste management, and develop a "strong, effective and comprehensive waste management policy," Ms. Carter-Whitney said. As well, current emissions guidelines should be reconsidered and strict packaging regulations should be put in place, her recommendations said.

Further consideration should be given before using incineration as the go-to for waste management, Ms. Carter-Whitney said.

"I hope that before leaping into that, we take an opportunity to look at how much waste we are producing, and look at ways to reduce that," she said.