

The Orono Weekly Times

Wednesday, May 5, 2010

All roads lead to the incinerator

Often when people say they don't have money for certain projects, what they really mean is, we chose not to spend the money we have on said project.

Such is the case with the Region's decision to put off reconstructing Liberty Street in Bowmanville, a Regional Road, until sometime beyond 2017.

Liberty Street redevelopment has been on the Region's 'to do' list since the early part of the previous decade. In 2002 the Region conducted a study of Liberty Street and concluded that the number of accidents on the stretch between King Street and Base Line Road was above average, and was associated with increased traffic volume. The Region's remedy was to widen the road to accommodate centre left-turn lanes at key intersections. This project was immediately put on its four-year Capital Road Program.

Almost ten years later, we find out that the improvements to this road, which Councillor Ron Hooper recently called a "1940s road," are not only off the four-year Capital Budget, they are off the radar screen. Clarington's Director of Engineering Anthony Cannella recently heard this news from a Region of Durham staff person who sits on Clarington's Traffic Management Advisory Committee. Cannella said at a recent council meeting that he was surprised and very disappointed with this development.

When the matter came up at a recent council meeting, Clarington's Regional Councillor Charlie Trim, who happens to be the Chair of the Region's Works Committee, had reasons as long as his arm as to why the Region did not need to spend money fixing Liberty Street in the immediate future. One reason he gave was that other municipalities to the west had more traffic and needed the money more, and that Clarington has done nothing to 'help itself' alleviate the traffic congestion on Liberty Street. Cannella reminded councillors that a few years ago the Municipality built Longworth Avenue, a major new road across the top of Bowmanville, which directs traffic from the north of Bowmanville westerly to Regional Road 57, a major access road to Highway 401.

Why is it that all three of Clarington's Regional Councillors this term act more like they are serving the Region of Durham than the residents of Clarington, who elected them to office? There is a lot to be said for co-operation between the different levels of government, but municipal councillors who do not stand up for their constituents at the upper tier are often dismissed.

Not only have Trim and Clarington's other two Regional Councillors, Jim Abernethy and Mary Novak, dropped the ball on the Liberty Street project, but on another project as well. Apparently the Region is assessing capacity at some of its sewage treatment facilities in Clarington, and will slow down new development until it gets a handle on that situation. It's another Regional Works Department initiative that was not brought to Clarington council's attention by Works Department Chair Charlie Trim. As a huge portion of Clarington's revenue is dependent on residential growth, a slowdown in development will be a big hit on the budget.

Unfortunately, Durham Region's infrastructure woes have just begun. Councillor Willie Woo hit the nail on the head on Monday when he said there would be money for Regional projects if the Region had not decided to spend all its federal gas tax money on the incinerator. For the next eight years, the Region is planning to spend its allocation of federal gas tax money on the garbage incinerator project, which it plans to build in Courtice. Despite a groundswell of public opposition to the incinerator, this is one project the Region saw fit to bestow on Clarington. Ironically, the vote at the Region was close enough that if Clarington's three Regional councillors had listened to their constituents and voted against the incinerator, it would not be coming to Clarington either.

In 2008, the Region began banking an amount upwards of \$47- million, its allocation of federal gas tax money, to be used on the \$272.5-million incinerator. Beyond that, more than \$16-million of gas tax money will be used annually to operate the incinerator. When the Region was trying to sell the concept of this incinerator, it was said that this was a solution to Durham's garbage disposal issue that would not cost property tax dollars. Without the gas tax money being spent on roads and other infrastructure projects, we could very well be hit with an increased property tax bill to fill that void.

Clarington just cannot afford another four years of Regional Councillors working for the Region.