

Metroland

Europeans 'way ahead of us' with sustainability

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By: By Keith Gilligan and Kristen Calis

DURHAM -- They went to learn and learn they did.

Ajax Mayor Steve Parish, his Pickering counterpart Mayor Dave Ryan and Durham Regional Chairman Roger Anderson were part of a contingent from the Greater Toronto Marketing Alliance to visit some European countries last week.

The group visited Sweden, Denmark and The Netherlands during the trip.

Mayor Parish said "we saw about three combined heat and power facilities. That's what they call them.

"The real thing I learned is I have fewer concerns about the environmental and health risks. They have a much higher standard for dioxins than we do and they meet them," the mayor added.

He noted in the European Union and in Sweden "landfill is not an option. If you landfill, you get taxed."

Sweden has a diversion rate of 92 per cent, while Durham Region's is about 50 per cent.

He visited a wood-burning plant, similar to the one in Ajax.

"It's new, efficient and all the wood is stored inside. The wood is chipped and processed off-site," he said.

He also spoke with two Swedish businessmen "looking to purchase the steam plant and reconstruct it. It was a very beneficial meeting," Mayor Parish noted.

Upgrading the plant will "make it something we're not ashamed of and we're proud of."

The new facility would be able to generate up to 10 megawatts of power, and could go as high as 50 megawatts.

"I also attended a number of meetings on sustainable development. They're way ahead of us, building sustainable cities," Mayor Parish stated.

In both Stockholm and Copenhagen, "there's no gridlock. There's bicycles everywhere and extensive public transit."

Transit networks and usage in Stockholm would "make Toronto hang its head. They're doing a lot of things there right that we're not," he said.

"A group from Durham businesses made some good business contacts. The Swedes are looking for business opportunities in North America and Canada," Mayor Parish said.

"The trip was productive and informative," Mayor Ryan said. "We met with trade ambassadors and a Canadian consultant introduced us to a broad range of country business people involved in waste management, including energy-from-waste and planners who are designing new, more energy-efficient compact urban areas.

"Business people that accompanied us were complementary and felt there was good value for the investment," he added.