

Mayor views debate as a waste

Clarington councillors found themselves in a debate about debates at Monday's Committee meeting. This discussion on debates was initiated by the Mayor's commitment to hold further public information sessions as part of regular council meetings on our waste management.

The first in the Mayor's series of public information sessions was on the topic of energy from waste (EFW). His intention was to hold three separate meetings, the one on EFW, the next on landfill and the last on zero waste. The EFW session which began at the council meeting of Monday, February 11, was not completed by the 11 p.m. curfew so it had to be concluded on the following Wednesday night. Many of the residents who registered to speak, after the four so-called invited experts were finished with their presentations, asked for a different venue for the following information meetings, where they were not bound by council protocol. At council meetings, only councillors can ask questions of those making presentations. These residents said they felt far more could be gained from an information session if the pros and cons of the issue could be presented by experts in a forum where the public could have the opportunity to ask questions. The Mayor's response to this request was that he found nothing could be learned from the back and forth of a debate.

Mayor Jim Abernethy maintains he intends to continue with his plan to hold further public information sessions as part of the council meeting. He stands by the fact that the municipality's procedural by-law does allow for such meetings, and these meetings are in keeping with that by-law.

The Mayor admitted at Monday's General Purpose and Administration Committee meeting that he was planning to have the second information meeting in May, but he was having a hard time finding anyone to speak on landfill, the topic for his next public information session. The only person who was able to commit to coming was from Nova Scotia, and he would have to be reimbursed for his travel expenses.

Kerry Meydam said she applauded the Mayor for trying to get landfill and all the other alternatives back into the waste management discussion, but she urged him to hold the meetings outside of the council meetings so the public could be engaged in the discussion. She also suggested that the Green Committee had funding that could pay for expenses for delegations.

When questioned by council on whether she wanted to see a real debate on waste management solutions, Meydam said she would **not** have a problem with a real moderated civic debate. "We're looking for a panel of experts in favour and a panel of experts opposed and a moderator taking questions," Meydam said.

This led the Mayor to ask, "Why are the newspapers saying we need a debate? no one is asking for a debate."

"It is you that have given it a debate label," responded Councillor Adrian Foster.

"I have certainly heard the word 'debate' loud and clear for several months now," said councillor Charlie Trim. "You would have specialists on both sides of the fence and you as members of the public would have opportunity to ask experts over here, and experts over there questions, then a follow up question, that is a debate," he stated.

There would have to be a back and forth with each other, "You sort of end up debating," Meydam said. She said this type of information session where you would get the answers from both sides on the same night would be preferable having separate information sessions on different topics on different nights.

Councillor Foster gave notice at the end of Monday's meeting that he would be presenting a motion at the next council meeting requesting the Chief Administrative Officer look into the opportunity of the municipality holding a public information session outside of the council meeting.