

Further waste diversion methods could be explored after Clear Bags flop

By Brock Weir

Council might have killed the proposed Clear Bag program last week, but other efforts to help reduce the amount of garbage Aurorans send into the waste stream are likely to continue.

Speaking out against moving forward with the Clear Bags, several Councillors suggested it was not a wasted effort and the findings of the studies leading up to last Tuesday's vote could ultimately be of use for an overall waste diversion plan.

'If [Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Environmental Services] can come back with a waste strategy for the Town of Aurora to improve our waste diversion rate from a certain figure to a certain figure and look at different options, let's have that discussion,' said Councillor Thompson.

A wide-ranging waste strategy outlining all options available to Aurora would only be beneficial, added Councillor Humfries, noting she would rather see public workshops on recycling strategies rather than continued efforts to persuade the public on clear bags.

'Although I understand the merit and we want to do our best for recycling and keeping the environment healthy, I am not sure this is the right strategy overall,' she said. 'There are so many other things we can work on with our staff and knowledge out there in terms of where it is going.'

'I think waste is important and I think diversion rates are important,' added Councillor John Abel. 'I think as we go down the road it will be a bigger factor in how municipalities in Ontario manage.'

Councillor Thompson suggested it would be more pertinent to seek suggestions on how residents can help make the world a 'greener' place.

'Why not look at ways residents, if they want to, can help reduce the tonnage [of garbage going into the waste stream], which is essential, to help increase the diversion rate,' he said. 'There are many things they can do to help make Aurora a greener place. We have debated the pros and cons of it at length, but I think it is essential we continue to look at ways to achieve a reduction in our tonnage and increase our diversion rate. There are other municipalities that have a higher diversion rate than us that don't have a clear bag program. What are they doing that we're not? There are many other initiatives I think are more appropriate and better suited for Aurora.'

While Councillor Tom Mrakas said moving forward with a Clear Bag program was 'shaming our residents' into doing something that wouldn't ultimately be helpful, using mounting unrecyclable Kuerig K-Cups as an example, Councillor John Abel rejected that idea.

'It is not a matter of shaming,' he said. 'It is an initiative and showing leadership. It is nothing more. I was hoping we would give it a trial basis [but] if we're not interested in doing that and we want to [go] another route, I am all for that as well. We're all for diversion, but we're not going to do it this way. We will find another way to increase our diversion rates.'

'If we vote this down, you're not saying you're not in favour of diversion rates. I understand that. I have seen value in how well this works in Markham. There is resistance at first, but like anything, once it is employed, it works well and the results are significant.'