

INSIDE AURORA: Meltdown

By **Scott Johnston**

The signs of spring in Aurora are all around us; birds singing, grass getting greener, and melting snow revealing cigarette butts, coffee cups, plastic bags and other unsightly debris.

I think I speak for all of us when I say that from the above list we much prefer seeing the former natural wonders over the latter unnatural ones.

But sadly, the appearance of so much garbage after the snow melts is a reality here in Town.

People have lots of opportunities for proper waste disposal other than just tossing things on the ground.

Even in the winter months, there are many municipal garbage pails on our streets and in our parks for residents to use. Except in extreme weather conditions, these are emptied regularly.

There are also trash bins in most plazas, at gas stations and in other public places like the GO station.

Or if they're out and about and can't find a proper receptacle, unless the item to be disposed of is melting ice cream cone, or something exceptionally malodorous, people could just hang onto it a little longer and dispose of it at home.

Although careless littering is a year-round activity, it is a gradual process, and things tend to be picked up eventually in the warmer months, so is less noticeable then.

What makes it worse this time of year is that everything has been accumulating untouched for months since late the previous year, continually being hidden under a blanket of freshly fallen snow.

Out of sight, out of mind, at least until spring.

Then, like some sort of alternate universe Advent calendar, various surprises are unveiled by the melting snow, each seemingly more awful than the last.

Although ideally it shouldn't have to, every year around this time the Town enlists enthusiastic volunteers to help clean things up. Provided with a kit containing bags, gloves and what I hope is litres of hand sanitizer, they're assigned a specific public area of Town, and spend the morning bent over picking up whatever they find.

You'll know where they've been working not only by the subsequently tidier appearance of the area, but also the many garbage/recycling bags and larger debris left by the curb for pick up. Shopping carts, sports equipment, tires? you never know what they'll find.

This year's Clean-Up Day is Saturday April 13. If you're interested in lending a hand, and partaking in the thank you BBQ afterwards, further details can be found at aurora.ca/cleanup.

One of the most common items casually tossed away is the coffee cup. A recent news item suggested that the government may be looking at levying a five-cent surcharge on these containers.

Making people pay a little more isn't necessarily going to change their minds about littering. After all, by the time they're ready to dispose of the cup, they've already paid the extra nickel, which is a negligible amount on top of the \$4 already spent on a tall soy mocha latte with extra foam. But presumably, the funds could go towards recycling, public education and other means of tackling the waste problem.

But that plan isn't in place, yet, and this is a big problem. So, until such efforts begin to take effect and make a difference we will have to rely in part on our more thoughtful residents doing that one-day blitz each April to pick up after our less thoughtful residents.

Again, I think I speak for all of us when I say we much prefer and appreciate the efforts of the former Aurorans over the latter.

Feel free to e-mail Scott at: machellscorners@gmail.com