

Meeting decides

Join GTA and keep Toronto's garbage out of Halton

By NORMAN NELSON

A B.Y.O.M. meeting?
Bringing one's own mug instead of using plastic cups was just one of the innovative ideas that came out of a public meeting on waste management at E. C. Dury School for the Hearing Impaired on Thursday night.

The meeting was hosted by Halton Region to find out what the public thinks about the region joining fellow Greater Toronto Area (GTA) municipalities in a garbage consortium called SWISC (Solid Waste Interim Steering Committee).

However, Halton officials had a tough time keeping people's mind on SWISC. People seemed more interested in the larger issue of what individuals and governments could do to help alleviate our growing environmental problems, rather than the minor details of how government should organize itself to tackle the problem.

Barbara Halsall was typical of the concerned citizens present, many of whom had to contend with another gripping GTA problem — a traffic nightmare caused by a serious accident on the QEW — in order to get to the meeting on garbage problems.

The Georgetown member of the group POWER had a bag of recyclable products that interested both the audience and the panel.

Recycled T-shirts

Holding up an empty bottle of mouthwash, she questioned why it wasn't allowed in the Region's recycling program when it was no different than the recyclable pop bottles. She drove her point home by showing an attractive T-shirt made with polyester that had been recycled from similar kinds of containers.

Next she showed a piece of 'superwood', which, she explained, can be made out of recycled plastic. The soap-sized piece of superwood she brought for display was made by a company that is setting up shop in Mississauga this year, and for which she eagerly handed out business cards. "Mississauga is already collecting and storing plastic bottles for when the company opens," she said.

Earlier in the evening Halton Region waste management director John MacKay cautioned "that much more has to be done to develop the market for recyclables. 'The market's just not there,'" he said. "A lot of it's being storehoused right now."

Milton regional councillor Bill Johnston made the same point when a member of the audience urged the region to collect residents' 'wet' garbage and to take it to a regionally run composting facility. "You've got to have markets for it," he stressed.

When Mr. MacKay was looking at the products at the end of the meeting, however,

Ms. Halsall had some ideas for markets. The superwood, she said, can be used in road signs. The region therefore could collect all the plastic, ship it to the company, and then buy back the road signs.

A Milton postal carrier who didn't want his name used (for reasons that will become obvious) brought forward several suggestions.

He advocated hitting the pocket books of environmentally unfriendly companies and individuals as a way to raise money towards environmental initiatives.

He pointed to a major department store which he said put out five large flyers during one week. "That's corporate irresponsibility," he said. He urged the government to tax such ad mail. And if the paper is not recyclable, an even greater tax should be slapped on, he said.

Third class mail, addressed to 'occupant', also bothered him. He said he's tired of coming home to find "Ed McMahon smiling at me and telling me, 'I've won \$15 million.'"

Sometimes, he added, it's pure waste. "I'm still delivering to the Roxy (a Milton theatre that closed several years ago)," he said.

By the same reasoning, he said if a household does not separate its garbage properly, a charge should be added on to their property taxes "as opposed to not picking it up because they will only dump it on someone else."

His other point was to express disappointment with a Toronto report indicating the city wants to stop their Blue Box pickup of glass. "The reason," he said. "Cost."

As far as Halton participating in SWISC, he said, "if this is the way they want to play, we should take our open spaces and do something a little more constructive."

The meeting began with background on the formation of SWISC.

Halton Region chairperson Peter Pomeroy explained SWISC was "instituted by the provincial government to see if the GTA municipalities could find common ways to deal with the (waste management) issue on the broader scale."

The provincial government has recently set

targets of 25 per cent by 1994 and 50 per cent by the end of the century as the amount of waste it would like to see diverted from garbage dumps.

Milton dump

In Halton's case, however, it's a moot point. Regional officials pointed out that because they have an approved landfill slated for Milton (the town of Milton, among others, are undertaking a final challenge before the courts), Halton must reach those targets within eight years.

The audience was told that SWISC is at the stage of having asked and received several general waste management proposals from various businesses and government agencies. These are being reviewed, and SWISC will then choose a few select ones for more detailed input.

It's at this point where the five GTA regions — Halton, Peel, Metro Toronto, York and Durham — must decide whether or not to participate.

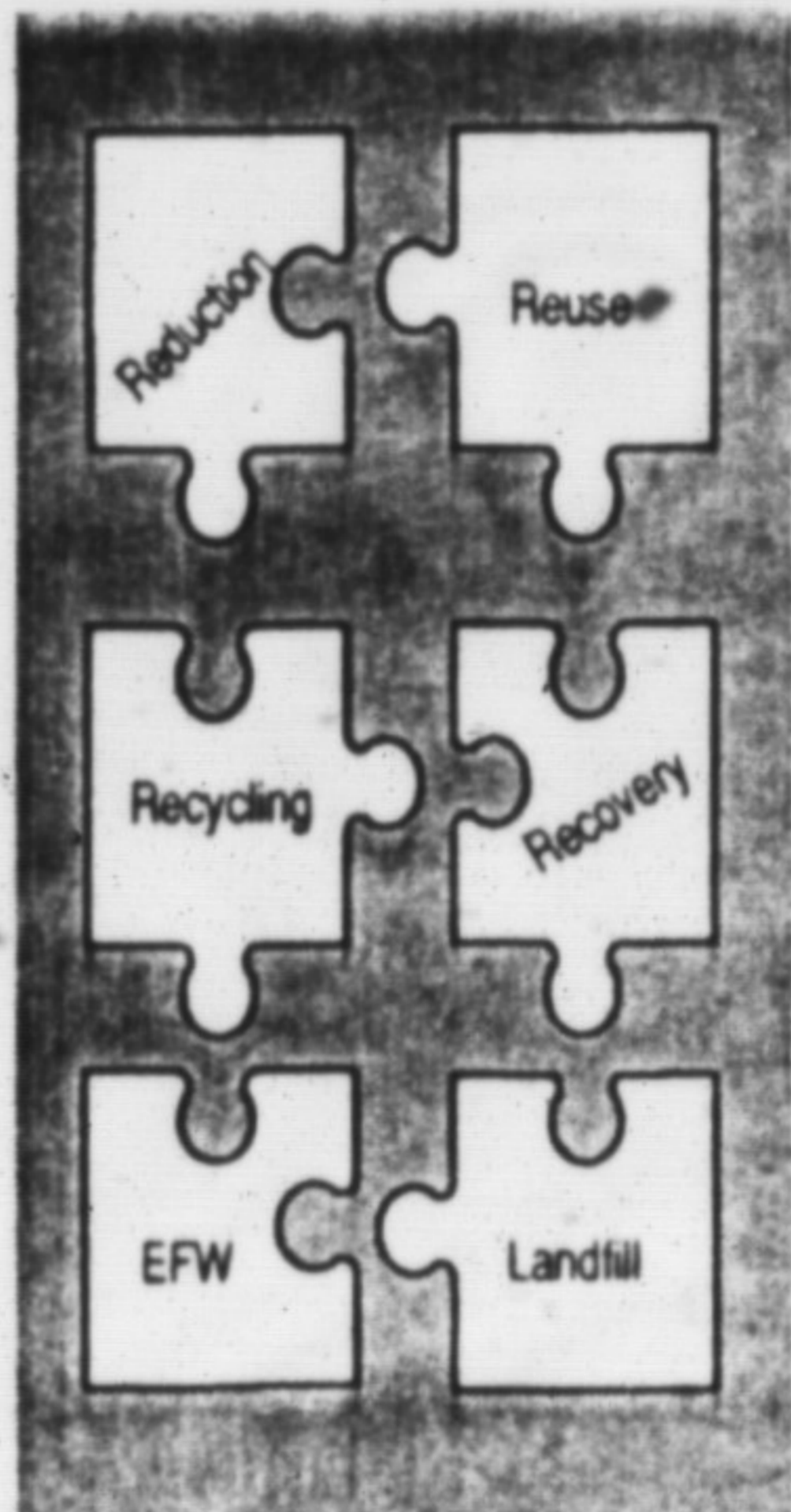
Mr. Pomeroy said SWISC basically has two challenges. The first one is to develop, by 1996, a long-term solution to the area's mounting garbage problems. The second and more pressing problem is what to do between 1992, when the GTA's garbage capacity runs out, and 1996, when the long-term solution ideally comes into effect.

All the GTA municipalities have been asked to put forward emergency contingency sites that could handle this shortfall between 1992 and 1996, and the location of these sites should be made public in the next few months.

Toronto's dumping ground

A well publicized fact, of course, is that of all the GTA members, Halton Region is, by far, the furthest along the long and complicated path of approval for a landfill. Many people at the meeting expressed concern whether Halton would get saddled with Toronto's garbage if it joined SWISC.

Vicki Henderson, the region's representative on the SWISC technical committee, noted it would be an impossible task.



Halton's proposed dump, she said, is designed to take in less than 4 million tons of garbage over 20 years — the same amount of garbage produced by the GTA in just one year.

In a later interview, Peter Pomeroy said discussions have taken place indicating that if Halton joined the municipal garbage consortium that "a reasonable offer to the GTA would be 250,000 tons." The likely beneficiary would be Peel, he said, and it would be with the proviso that Halton could, in the future, transport a similar amount back to Peel's landfill when it opened.

Saying he was fighting a proposal by RSI to fill one of its Acton quarries with 20 million tons of garbage, Len Landry of Halton Hills wanted to know whether it was being considered by the region as a contingency site.

No proposed sites

After being assured by Mr. Pomeroy that it was not being considered, he asked whether Metropolitan Toronto could acquire property for landfilling purposes outside its own municipal boundaries.

"Metro has some power," said the regional chairman. However, he added, "Metro has not identified, to the best of my knowledge, any land in Halton either for their interim or long term needs."

And if they did, he said, "I can assure you that I would be against it."

It's for this reason that Halton Hills councillor Joe Hewitt recommended Halton become part of SWISC. The millions of tons of garbage, he said, has to go somewhere, and he felt it better to be involved in a group of regions discussing the problem. "If you don't take part as equal partners, you won't find out about a lot of things," he said.

He compared it to a lifeboat with six people and five seats. "I'd rather be a part of the discussion on who's going to be tossed into the water, rather than just find myself in it," he said.


Milton councillor Brad Clements, after the meeting, agreed it might be better to be involved in SWISC than "on the outside looking in." He was impressed by the turnout and said the interest shown "bodes well for the political process."

Councillor Johnson said "there's always a good turnout in Milton. They know what they're talking about."

The consensus among the audience was that SWISC would certainly be beneficial for such things as shared recycling plants.

For any subsequent meetings, the Milton postal employee, noting that the coffee was being served in plastic cups, encouraged officials to have it B.Y.O.M. — Bring Your Own Mug.

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