

Strait Talk, May, 2010

Zero Waste

In 2005 the SCRD adopted the goal of becoming a Zero Waste Community. What does that mean and how can we achieve it? The SCRD supports the Zero Waste Alliance definition:

“Zero waste is a goal that is both pragmatic and visionary, to guide people to emulate sustainable natural cycles, where all discarded materials are resources for others to use. Zero waste means designing and managing products and processes to reduce the volume and toxicity of waste and materials, conserve and recover all resources, and not burn or bury them.”

Success in reaching this ambitious goal requires broad public support. It requires a shift in our thinking to turn “waste” from something we discard into a resource with a different use. Getting to zero waste is a journey that the SCRD hopes every resident and business in the region will share. We won’t get there in one single step. It is an incremental process which we must move through in digestible and affordable stages.

In addition to some household recyclables, many items are already diverted from the landfill: green waste, wood, appliances, concrete, toilets, gyproc, roofing, metal, tires, e-waste, paints. Our focus now is to divert and reuse more household “waste.”

This issue is prominent in the SCRD’s 2009-11 Strategic Plan. Our objectives include: reducing the tonnage of solid waste disposed in landfills annually by 5% per capita; implementing curbside collection of recyclables in all garbage collection areas; and determining the viability of organics collection. Some challenges are our linear geography, spread out land use patterns, ferry dependency, unstable end markets, different solutions in our various jurisdictions (Sechelt already has a widely supported curbside collection program), and the costs our citizens are willing and able to bear.

“Garbage” is an emotional issue in this community engendering hot debate about how we should approach it, in what order the steps should be taken, how much it should cost, and how costs should be apportioned. But the message and the goals expressed by all those who care about this issue are the same: We need to take responsibility for our actions, consume less, and find ways to re-form our discarded materials into useful products using as few resources as possible. The debate centres around the how rather than the what. Meaningful debate is important, but this is a pressing issue globally and we must eventually make decisions.

Currently our discussions centre around the sequence of our progress toward zero waste. Do we start with curbside pick up or enhancing collection depots? Can we reduce garbage collection before dealing with organics (estimated at about 30% of what currently goes to the landfill?) Can we choose different solutions for different areas and still have equitable cost sharing?

The key is to work together on this important community service, keep the zero waste goal in sight and all play our part in getting there. donna_shugar@hotmail.com