

Council votes to ban plastic straws at municipal facilities

By Mike Pickford

Orangeville Council did its part for the environment on Monday, agreeing to stop offering plastic straws at municipal facilities and encouraging local businesses to follow suit.

Coun. Don Kidd told Council that reducing the use of plastic straws is paramount as much of the country seeks to become more environmentally responsible.

‘A recent study done by the City of Vancouver states that 57 million straws are thrown away every single day in Canada,’ Coun. Kidd said. ‘That’s an awful lot of plastic.’

He asked that Council consider phasing out plastic straws at municipal locations in favour of biodegradable straws that numerous businesses across town are already offering. In his motion, he asked local businesses to provide alternative options to single-use plastic straws and area residents to decline the use of plastic straws.

Mayor Jeremy Williams said that while he was supportive of Coun. Kidd’s efforts to reduce waste in the community, he feared such a ‘blanket statement’ could have a detrimental effect on individuals who rely on plastic straws for drinking.

‘My son has special needs and he cannot drink without a straw. I worry that people may be shamed for using or asking for something they need,’ Mayor Williams said.

A motion that wasn’t expected to bring much discussion or controversy did just that when Coun. Nick Garisto suggested the anti-plastic straw policy, as he coined it, could have a big impact on the local business sector.

Perhaps misunderstanding the intent of the motion, Coun. Garisto suggested outlawing plastic straws could cause customers to spend their money elsewhere and could even lead to businesses leaving town. In a statement that raised eyebrows amongst Council, Coun. Garisto even likened the issue to that of smoking in public, suggesting any move to eliminate plastic straws should come directly from the provincial or federal government.

‘Likening this to the smoking issue is, quite frankly, absurd,’ Coun. Wilson told Coun. Garisto. ‘All we can do with this motion is suggest that local businesses offer alternatives to plastic straws. We can’t force them to do anything.’

In the end, Council voted 5-2 in favour of the motion with Mayor Williams and Coun. Garisto opposed.