

More people trying to Make a Difference

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DURHAM -- How do you make change in your community if your issue isn't on the radar of your local city council? It's not an easy task but it's also not impossible. Our reporters went out and found four Durham residents who are pushing their councils for changes in their communities. They're four interesting and determined people who are passionate about their issues and willing to fight to make them happen. Their efforts have shaped the issues their respective city councils have been forced to deal with. They prove that individuals can make a difference and give us insights in how you too can Make A Difference.

We hope you enjoy their stories and maybe one day feel that you too can step forward and make change in your community. This is another part in a year-long series of features on Making a Difference leading up to the fall municipal election.

Anti-airport advocate scrutinizes candidates

PICKERING -- Mary Delaney has been fighting the possibility of an airport for decades.

The movement against the airport began in 1972 when the Liberal federal government expropriated more than 18,000 acres of farmland in north Pickering. People Or Planes was born and struck a chord. One demonstration after another and



Jason Liebrechts / Metroland

PICKERING -- Mary Delaney is a long-time member of Land Over Landings, a group that is opposed to a possible Pickering airport. Mrs. Delaney checked out old newspaper stories about the issues on Jan. 20. January 20, 2010

the feds put plans on hold in 1975.

There's still no airport and council has passed a number of resolutions stating its opposition to the possibility.

People Or Planes changed its name to Land Over Landings in recent years, to focus not only on fighting an airport, but to promote the grade-A farmland and agricultural opportunities.

Ms. Delaney joined the cause after moving to Brougham in north Pickering in 1980. Many of the original members from 1972 are also still fighting to save the land today.

Although the issue isn't directly a municipal one since it would be located on lands owned by the feds, Ms. Delaney marches to her polling station for every municipal election, and each candidate's view on the topic plays a strong role in whose name she marks an "X" beside.

"It's very symbolic," she said.

She added local council can act as a partner to the group and others opposed to the airport despite its arm's-length authority, and can help access funds, offices, open doors and basically "recognize we have to be a team in this.

"If any politician or would-be politician in Pickering were in favour of an airport, I would question his or her judgment, common sense, business acumen, honesty and vision," Ms. Delaney said.

And it doesn't stop with her.

"Not only do (Land Over Landings members) vote, we talk to our neighbours and we get them to vote," she said.

Land Over Landings holds an all-candidates' debate each municipal election and the members ensure candidates aren't just paying lip service. Rather than accepting they simply oppose an airport, Ms. Delaney and other members want to learn what the candidates envision for the land's future uses as well.

"That's what we have to focus on: what happens next," she said.

While not one of those who believes all politicians have ulterior motives -- she admits they're people, too -- she does scrutinize their answers.

"I don't look at things through rose-coloured glasses," she said. "I'm always looking at things a little carefully, I'm always cautious."

Although she stands firmly against an airport and wouldn't support any candidate in support of one, she will accept someone

who grows or even changes their mind.

Ajax-Pickering MP Mark Holland, in his early years as a former Pickering councillor, agreed with the idea of a reliever airport. But after hearing from the community and weighing the pros and cons, not only did he change his position, but now works with Land Over Landings and has been an advocate for its cause.

"Flip-flop: no," Ms. Delaney said. "Intelligent, reasoned thought and education, there's nothing wrong with that."

On the other hand, if a councillor is dishonest or does a complete about-face, "I will never trust them again."

In the end, Ms. Delaney wants to see municipal candidates championing the cause that reaches beyond Pickering's borders.

"This is a global issue to protect our farmland, and Pickering has an opportunity to be the vanguard, to lead the way," she said.

-- *By Kristen Calis*

Marina activist sets sail at Oshawa City Hall

OSHAWA -- The stack of boxes in Larry Ladd's basement stands as tall as he does, every one stuffed with documents, newspaper clippings and reports relating to the Oshawa waterfront.

The 66-year-old Oshawa man has spent the past eight years fighting to have federally owned, environmentally contaminated waterfront lands cleaned up and returned to the City -- and fighting equally hard to stave off efforts to further industrialize the port area.

Born and raised in Oshawa, Mr. Ladd says his love for the waterfront dates back to his childhood in the city's south end, when the shores of Lake Ontario were his playground. As an adult, he owned a boat and leased a spot at the Oshawa Marina from the 1980s until 2002, when the facility was abruptly shut down.

"We just got a letter saying we had to be out by a certain date," he recalls. "That's when I got involved."

Mr. Ladd was no stranger to politics. His years as an assembler with General Motors eventually led him to work with CAW Local 222, where he was often in contact with federal and provincial politicians.

"I found out that municipal politics is a different animal," he says. "The system is designed for the mayor and council, not for you and I. If you don't know the players and the process, you're not going to get anywhere."

Since getting involved with the waterfront issue in 2002, Mr. Ladd has written stacks of letters to politicians, government ministries and various watchdog groups, and made countless delegations before council and its committees.

By his count, he's only missed three Oshawa council meetings in that eight-year period.

"You go whether your issue is on the agenda or not because you never know what's going to happen," Mr. Ladd explains. "You see an agenda on a Friday, but by Monday night it could be a different story. Things get added, people file late. If you want to keep on top of things, you have to be there."

Mr. Ladd's advice for people embarking on a council lobby effort is to get educated -- learn about the councillors, what issues they support and what their political affiliations are. Read reports and be knowledgeable on your issue. And, be respectful.

"Sometimes people go in carrying a big stick and they get everyone's back up. Then people don't want to help you," Mr. Ladd says.

While the waterfront issue has moved forward incrementally over the past few years -- in December council approved a landmark deal between the City and the feds that will see some Crown lands cleaned up and returned to the City -- Mr. Ladd says he isn't finished yet.

He won't consider his efforts a success until the lands are cleaned up and returned to the City, and council brings forward a concrete master plan for the marina and waterfront, that includes public input.

-- *By Jillian Follert*
