

*Clarington
Opinion
Panel*



Topic #3: Important Issues for the 2010 Municipal Election
January 2010

Produced by:



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Summary

One hundred and fifty respondents from across Clarington participated in January's Clarington Opinion Panel question which asked residents: "what issues would they like to see addressed in the 2010 Municipal election." The panel topic was opened on January 26th and closed February 2nd. Clarington residents who had joined the panel by signing up at www.collis-reed.com/signup were invited to take part in this online survey.

The top three issues panel respondents would like to see addressed in the 2010 Municipal Election are:

- Incineration
- Job creation/preservation
- Managing the municipal budget

However, a closer look at the comments made by participants reveals three common themes that occur across issues. The first theme is a question of confidence that Council is:

- Making the most informed decisions possible
- Clearly and thoroughly debating issues
- Seriously evaluating options
- Ultimately making the best possible decisions for Clarington

A related theme is the perception that decisions and debate are not transparent and open to public scrutiny and that the public has a voice that is not being heard or taken seriously. Both of these themes were very much in the forefront of people's minds when they commented on incineration, election of the Regional Chair, managing the budget and public input.

The final theme is that there is a desire to see Clarington grow, especially in terms of economic development, so that there are good jobs available in our communities. However, growth needs to be carefully planned and executed to ensure that Clarington does not lose its rural agricultural roots and small town charm. Further, environmental considerations need to be taken seriously when planning new residential and commercial developments.

The panel results clearly indicate that candidates in the upcoming election will be expected to seriously consider a wide range of challenging issues and demonstrate that they have the ability to make difficult decisions while respecting and encouraging public involvement in the process.

The Clarington Opinion Panel is designed, administered, analyzed and reported on by Collis & Reed Research as a free of charge public service to the Clarington community

Question 1:

Here is how question one appeared as this month’s panel question:

1. What are the three most important issues that you would like to see addressed during the 2010 election?

Most Important	2nd Important	3rd Important	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Agriculture
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	The Election of the Regional Chair
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	The Environment
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	The Extension of Highway 407
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Cultural development
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Emergency services
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Job creation and preservation
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Expansion of municipal services
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Incineration
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Managing growth
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Managing the municipal budget
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Nuclear new build
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Services for seniors
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Physician recruitment
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Public input on municipal issues
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Recreational facilities
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Roads and transit
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Tourism
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Youth issues
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Other - Please specify <input type="text"/>

Respondents were asked to indicate, in their opinion, what were the first, second and third most important issues in the upcoming fall municipal election. Each time a respondent chose an issue as being the “most important”, that response received 3 points. The second and third most important choices received 2 points and 1 point respectively. This point system generates the following chart that portrays the combined results of the ranking question.

Rank	Issue	Points
1	Incineration	172
2	Jobs	87
3	Municipal Budget	86
4	Regional Chair	78
5	Environment	62
6	Managing Growth	58
7	Nuclear New Build	43
8	Roads and Transit	43
9	Physician Recruitment	42
10	Extension of HWY 407	40

INCINERATION:

Ranked as the most important issue in the upcoming fall Municipal Election

70 comments about Incineration were received.

Although incineration received the highest rank as an issue and is generally not favoured by respondents, a more salient point arises from the comments. That is, a frustration with the public engagement process concerning this issue. Curtailing delegations to council, insufficient information provided to residents and a perception that councilors failed to heed the opinions of residents are cited as examples of a poorly executed process.

Notable comments:

This was not handled by council in an appropriate manner. Hence, many citizens don't even know that one has been proposed and approved. There's talk of lots of opportunity for public input, but the truth is way off this mark. Totally inappropriate view of citizenry on council's behalf.

This is the worst choice that could be made. The health risks are not understood and the current idea of incineration, along with the company chosen to build it is not even the best options among those in a polluting industry. Our Regional Councillors have not represented the best interests of Clarington by supporting this.

JOB CREATION AND PRESERVATION:

Ranked as the 2nd most important issue in the upcoming fall Municipal Election

31 comments about job creation and preservation were received.

There were significant concerns that the variety of jobs in Clarington and level of wages have diminished. Also, there are insufficient employment opportunities for post-secondary graduates in the area. There is a level of disappointment that residents cannot work in the same area in which they live.

Notable comments:

We have taken a hit on jobs. It must be a priority to create new jobs for the new economy that is taking shape around us. Green energy jobs, new technologies and new facilities for existing technologies must be actively and vigorously pursued to maintain Clarington's competitiveness in the new economy.

University educated people return home, only to pack up and go elsewhere to find sustainable employment. Such a loss!

We need to get our industrial lands serviced in order that we may attract good environmental friendly industry. We also need to make certain that existing commercial/industrial have all the necessary tools available.

MANAGING THE MUNICIPAL BUDGET:

Ranked as the 3rd most important issue in the upcoming fall Municipal Election

36 comments about the Municipal Budget were received.

Comments expressed concerns that taxes are currently too high and steps need to be taken to avoid a tax increase this year. Programs and services offered by the Municipality ought to be evaluated to ensure they are operating as efficiently as possible. Council's budget decision-making process could be improved i.e. proactive, encouraging public consultation.

Notable Comments:

Poor planning has led to the problems this year and Seniors should not have been put on the spot to pay for snow clearing. AS it is the job that has

been done is not even as good a quality as in the past.

Some priorities should be changed, and perhaps town hall meetings should take place (open for discussion forums) so Council and staff could listen to ideas from residents, some of which could be exciting and new and help develop a better budget. There are experts willing to give advice for free, but it's not welcome or utilized (or it appears that way).

Make all departments accountable for what they spend. NO spending to use up budget allocations.

A balanced approach needs to take place. Lower taxes is always desirable, but not at the exclusion of services. The people of Clarington need to feel confident that their council is carefully scrutinizing the numbers, ensuring that services are provided in the most cost effective way possible, and ensure that we can maintain a high quality of life for years to come.

I think the municipality is doing a good job at this, but they could do a better job, especially in light of the fragile condition of the economy. Staff have to realize that we are in a different place now, and at the end of the day there is only one person to deal with the problem (who pays) the residents through the tax base, especially in light of the fact there has been very little growth. It will take a very long time to restore our economy. We never thought the auto industry in this area would be decimated the way it has.

ELECTION OF THE REGIONAL CHAIR:

Ranked as the 4th most important issue in the upcoming fall Municipal Election

53 comments about the election of the Regional Chair were received.

A majority of comments concur that the Regional Chair position should be democratically elected by citizens rather than through appointment. Significant concerns were expressed regarding the activities of the Chair and there is a perception that there is a lack of review and accountability for this position (whether elected or appointed). A minority of comments expressed satisfaction with the current process.

Notable comments:

We need a Regional Chair who is accountable to the public and who will honestly listen to public needs and concerns. Yes, election for the chair.

The Region is too large for a meaningful direct election. The Chair should be elected from within the council. There are issues with this, but resolvable.

THE ENVIRONMENT:

Ranked as the 5th most important issue in the upcoming fall Municipal Election

39 comments about the environment were received.

Comments emphasized the importance of the environment but expressed frustrations with how seriously it is being taken as an issue. The municipality can do more to ensure that development is carried out in an environmentally conscious manner. There are concerns that Clarington has become a host for environmentally unfriendly projects and a perception that citizens who raise environmental concerns to municipal council are not being taken seriously.

Notable comment:

The matter of environment seems to escape the ears of the Clarington Councillors. Interested citizens who take the time to make presentations are left with the feeling they might just as well have been talking to empty seats.

MANAGING GROWTH:

Ranked as the 6th most important issue in the upcoming fall Municipal Election

31 comments about managing growth were received.

Comments emphasized a desire for responsible management of growth. There are concerns that the quantity of growth has surpassed the quality of growth. Significant concerns were expressed about implementing an effective strategy for managed growth across Clarington.

Suggested areas of focus:

- Developing environmentally responsible sub-divisions
- A sensitivity towards preserving fertile agricultural lands
- Developing an increased industrial base to help offset tax increases
- Off-setting taxes when increasing municipal services to accommodate growth in the population
- Provide adequate employment opportunities in the area for new residents

Concerns were also raised over provincial legislation limiting what our municipal council can do to manage growth effectively.

Notable Comment:

Growth management or urbanization must be controlled in a manner to protect the agriculture industry with green buffers. Unfortunately agriculture and urbanization do not fit well close together, and that is only because of the disrespect of the urbanites toward agriculture. Councillors will have to be stronger to prevent developers from coming in with one proposal getting it approved and then two years or maybe sooner re-applying for the original plan to be amended. Also the municipality should not be relying to a large part on income generated by building or Plans of Subdivision to pay for its services. Time and time it has been said that growth is good, it will lower taxes. It hasn't happened. For those in older Bowmanville who have paid taxes on their properties should almost be getting dividends for having been long term residences.

NUCLEAR NEW BUILD:

Ranked as the 7th most important issue in the upcoming fall Municipal Election

31 comments about Nuclear New Build were received.

Comments indicate that the decision to move ahead with new build is out of the hands of Clarington Council, therefore there is no point addressing this as an issue. However, new build presents an opportunity to create jobs and stimulate our local economy and therefore we need to do everything we can to get it back on the track. There were also environmental concerns expressed over expanding the nuclear presence in our community.

Notable Comments:

This would have been an essential part of our future growth. We need to work hard to ensure that this comes back on line soon. Our next mayor needs to clearly state how this is going to happen.

Municipal level of government has no power over this. Out of our hands really. Needed for jobs, but many residents are less excited about it now with the shadow of the incinerator hanging over our heads. Nuclear power is cleaner than incineration, but does still add more pollutants into our environment. If we could choose... take nuclear, not garbage.

This is going to become more difficult with the provincial government putting more and more money into Green Power such as the most recent contract with Samsung. This contract is not just for Samsung but for anyone with enough money capital to invest can build their wind-mills or solar panels and get paid 13++ more per kilo-watt above what a nuclear plant will be paid. The municipality cannot do anything about this but if this expansion were to go it would be a great decade of employment for the trades and businesses of the area.

ROADS AND TRANSIT:

Ranked as the 8th most important issue in the upcoming fall Municipal Election

24 comments about roads and transit were received.

Comments provided numerous examples of poor road conditions, expressed concerns over inadequate budgets for road repairs and the need to review and improve public transit. There was also a level of frustration that it has taken so long for the GO Train to come to Clarington

Notable Comments:

Our roads are very poor. Perhaps if our Mayor and 2 Reg. Councillors had not supported turning all of our Federal gas tax rebate over to the Region to be put towards the incinerator, instead of being spent on roads (where it was intended) we could hope to see some repairs.

Budgets are being cut and roadwork falls by the wayside, we need to keep it going. Also if you only look at low bid you may get poor quality work completed, either get guarantees in workmanship or go to a better contractor

PHYSICIAN RECRUITMENT:

Ranked as the 9th most important issue in the upcoming fall Municipal Election

24 comments about physician recruitment were received.

Although comments recognize the progress that has been made in this area, there are still residents who do not have a doctor or are traveling significant distances to see their doctor. The demand for physicians in the area will continually increase with population growth as well as an aging population.

Notable Comment:

This is a huge issue as for a variety of reasons people continue to find it difficult to get a family physician, resulting in a lack of continuity of care.

EXTENSION OF HIGHWAY 407:

Ranked as the 10th most important issue in the upcoming fall Municipal Election

39 comments about the extension of Highway 407 were received

The proposed construction of Highway 407 is perceived as an unfulfilled promise on the part of Durham Region. Comments are divided between those who eagerly want the extension to be completed as an essential part of economic development and those who are concerned about increased pollution, local traffic congestion and the taxation associated with the project.

Notable comments:

This is going to have a huge impact on Clarington and the Councillors are going to be tested to allow development into areas that are agriculture. It will take a strong force to deflect the offers and promises of these developers who are here only for a short time and then leave leaving the land decimated and ruined with urban or industrial grow.

Congestion on the 401 wastes time and energy resources, an alternative express route is essential

PUBLIC INPUT ON MUNICIPAL ISSUES:

29 comments about public input on municipal issues were received.

Comments suggest that public input into issues has been curtailed and that substantive dialogue is not occurring. There is a perception that resident's concerns were not heeded during the debate over incineration. Reduction of

delegate time, a condescending tone from council toward delegations and insufficient dissemination of information are all cited as exemplifying the impedance of dialogue between the municipality and citizens.

Notable Comments:

Council has made a mockery of public input. This is the foundation of democracy. Shame on our council! This cannot be tolerated further

Of paramount importance! Public consultation is pathetic at the moment - why with all this wonderful technology can't we come up with a better process than the newspaper? Why don't we actually have public dialogue on these issues?

More is needed, but Council appears to not want much public input as it has made it more difficult for people to speak at public meetings. We need public input forums to allow for it, and need to have Mayor and Council attend and listen and not dismiss the public. The optics right now are not good, especially when delegations at Council are cut off mid-sentence at the 5 minute mark if they have a different viewpoint than the mayor, while those supportive of the Mayor's view or special people he feels are more important than others are not so rudely cut off and are allowed to go over the time limit.. Optics are very bad.

EMERGENCY SERVICES:

21 comments about emergency services were received.

There is consensus throughout the comments that emergency services should be a priority. There are concerns about preserving existing emergency services and keeping up with emergency service needs as our communities grow.

Notable comments:

Preserving our community hospitals is of utmost importance and this links in with physician recruitment, our municipality needs to step up and help out.

With growth too fast, hard for emergency services to keep up and pay for 407 and link will also cause higher costs for emergency services locally.

YOUTH ISSUES:

16 comments about youth issues were received.

Comments indicate a concern over a lack of activities for youth and a need to expand programming across Clarington. There is the perception that an absence of activity leads to boredom, leads to criminal behaviour. There is a desire for more youth employment and expanding youth programming beyond sports into areas of arts and music.

Notable Comments:

We need to create attractive and appropriate youth activities to ensure that our kids have something to DO in Clarington! It won't always be what the Councillors THINK the kids want, so create a Youth advisory Board and get some ideas. Not everything is expensive - sometimes it's just a case of creatively using what we have. Go to the schools and talk with the kids - find out what they'd like to begin with.

Youth need a place to be able to go to "hang out" and be able to grow positively - Bowmanville has the Firehouse Youth Centre and Newcastle would benefit from a similar facility perhaps run out of the bottom of town hall.

Because there isn't enough policing, teens are always vandalizing parks and people's personal property that backs onto walkways or greenspaces.

SERVICES FOR SENIORS:

27 comments about services for seniors were received

There are mixed perceptions on senior services in Clarington. Some are pleased with the existing services, other feel that more services are required.

Notable Comments:

As our population ages the shift in the needs and priorities of seniors will have to become more pronounced. A good idea to start planning for better care and better design of our community to accommodate a growing sector of the population.

The municipality has been doing a good job for seniors, It has very good recreational facilities with free skating and reasonably priced swim and exercise programs

AGRICULTURE:

29 comments about agriculture were received.

There is the perception that local agriculture, as an industry, is important to Clarington although it is often overlooked. There is significant concern that rapid development of residential and industrial areas is encroaching onto, and thereby diminishing, prime agricultural lands. Some comments emphasized the need for greater support of locally grown produce. Also, concerns were expressed over the amount of toxic substances used in farming (and toxins generated from other industries) and their affect on the quality of local produce and the health of citizens.

Notable comment:

Agriculture is a really important part of our municipality; however it has increasingly become marginalized. We need to bring the issues to the forefront. Talk about the fact that the most fertile land is being used for development. We need to promote agriculture and get people to appreciate it.

CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT:

15 comments about cultural development were received.

The comments generally emphasized a desire for more theatre, music and art organizations and venues to improve our community's cultural identity. Investments into the arts should be conducted in a fiscally responsible manner and are a potential area for growth as an element of tourism.

Notable comments:

Culture needs a boost in the areas of music and arts. Why haven't we figured out that this can mean major tourism dollars?

Not a big concern for me, only is there is left over money

RECREATIONAL FACILITIES:

20 comments about recreational facilities were received.

Comments indicated that there are currently enough recreational facilities and there are concerns whether the Municipality has the budget to maintain the facilities in existence. Some comments suggest privatizing facilities. Comments also insist that there are not enough recreational activities for youth and seniors. Finally, too much emphasis has been placed on sport complexes and not enough on outdoor nature areas for strolling, hiking, cycling, etc.

Notable Comments:

We have too many and not enough money to pay for maintenance. Planning and approval of these has been irresponsible.

Should consider turning some/all over to the private sector

I suppose this means arenas and sport complexes. Forget it! Concentrate upon wildlife preserves, nature trails, marshes, accessible to people to come and hike and look.

EXPANSION OF MUNICIPAL SERVICES:

15 comments about the expansion of municipal services were received.

Comments expressed concerns that expanding, or even maintaining, current services levels will lead to a tax increase that Clarington residents cannot afford. There is consensus that the municipality requires improving the accountability and efficacy of current services.

Notable comments:

Hold the line! Our taxes are high enough now.

not if it means more taxes!

Municipal services must be scrutinized closely to evaluate what should remain and what should be trimmed. Because a program was created, does not mean it has to continue. All service programs should be evaluated annually to ensure that they are on track for their targets and goals, and if not, they should be removed.

TOURISM:

14 comments about tourism were received.

Many comments are cynical and indicate a disappointment with this area's lack of promoting attractions in our area. Developing a tourism new tourism strategy would have a positive impact on economic development.

Notable Comments:

A solid tourism plan can be a huge part of a community's economic strategy. We need to bring culture to our community, and integrate it into the agricultural landscape

..come visit our garbage incinerator, our sewage plant, St/ Mary's Cement, and our local auto wreckers; live it up like never before!!!

The Bowmanville Creeks and others should be maintained and developed responsibly for fishing, swimming, picnicking and boating...This area is famous for its Salmon fishing and many people locally and from afar come here to launch this should not be allow to get any worse in condition.