

Update on Pump Handle Labelling

District of West Vancouver unanimously passes resolution requesting legislation

In the last issue of *Municipal World*, I wrote about how climate change information labels on gas pumps draw on psychology, sociology, economics, and communications theory to provide greater impetus to transition to a more sustainable future. I was advocating that municipalities use their licensing powers to implement the idea in their communities and, to that end, invited the reader to review a 40-page legal research document on OurHorizon.org.

As an alternative pathway, I also suggested that a community wishing to pursue the concept – but unsure about its authority to do so – could simply request that the province amend its municipal legislation to specifically empower cities and towns to pass the by-law. Since writing that article, a new pathway has emerged that is now getting traction in communities across Canada.

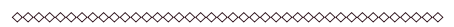
West Vancouver Resolution

On January 26, 2015, the District of West Vancouver unanimously passed a resolution “... that all vendors of retail petroleum products in Canada be legislated to provide warning labels on all pump handles ...”¹ This resolution will be voted on at the annual conference of the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) this September and the annual conference of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities



(FCM) in June 2016. This resolution represents a way for communities to support the concept with little to no exposure to legal, financial, or political risk that might otherwise be invited by passing the concept directly into law.

In reporting on the resolution, Global TV called West Vancouver’s vote a historic Canadian first. When Mayor Michael



ROBERT SHIRKEY is a lawyer and founder of Our Horizon, a not-for-profit climate change organization based in Toronto. He holds an LL.B. from the University of Victoria and a B.B.A. from Wilfrid Laurier University. He can be reached at <robert@ourhorizon.org>.

¹ District of West Vancouver, “Council Briefs – January 26 Council Meeting,” <<http://west-vancouver.ca/news/council-briefs-january-26-council-meeting>>.

In addition to West Vancouver supporting the labels, Mayor Smith is personally leading the way by voluntarily implementing climate change and air pollution information labels at his gas stations.

Smith was asked why he supported the initiative, he replied, “West Vancouver is always at the leading edge of things like this. It’s the nature of our community.”² Mayor Smith’s support is a particularly noteworthy example of leadership as he has been a petroleum distributor in the Metro Vancouver area for close to 30 years.

During the Global TV interview, Mayor Smith also said, “I think the industry realizes that climate change is real. There are a lot of efficiencies in the petroleum industry in terms of using less product and using it more efficiently. This will help move that along. I think it’s something the industry will not object to.”

In addition to West Vancouver supporting the labels, Mayor Smith is personally leading the way by voluntarily implementing climate change and air pollution information labels at his gas stations. Students from Capilano University’s IDEA School of Design are now designing labels that reflect local climate impacts, while students from University of British Columbia’s Sauder School of Business will be conducting a study to gather feedback on the various designs. I left B.C. feeling inspired by the leadership in that province.

Positive Response across Canada

A couple of weeks after the vote, I was at FCM’s Sustainable Communities Conference in London, Ontario to share news of West Vancouver’s resolution with mayors, councillors, and municipal staff from across Canada. The idea was positively received by delegates from all of our provinces and territories (yes, even Alberta). When speaking to a councillor from a community in Alberta, he men-

tioned how he appreciated the downstream, consumer-facing nature of the intervention. In a province that’s frequently vilified simply for delivering a product that we all use, the idea of shared responsibility resonated. The feedback I got from the FCM conference left me feeling very positive about the future success of the campaign.

At the time of writing, the District of Saanich, Vancouver Island’s largest municipality, just passed a resolution to endorse West Vancouver’s resolution. Several communities across Canada are now in the process of actively considering these labels, and I anticipate many more will endorse the West Vancouver resolution in the near future. Up until now, my biggest challenge has been getting a community to pass the idea into law using their licensing powers. I think there will be much greater uptake now that there is an easier pathway forward.

As an unfunded, not-for-profit organization, it’s been a challenge to advance the effort without any budget or staff. Even so, the campaign has come a long way. I’m incredibly grateful for the support of ordinary Canadians: It was a generous citizen in B.C. who paid for my flight there in January. I then spent three weeks couch-surfing with Canadians who opened up their homes and became fast friends. I’m incredibly heartened by the ways in which people have been supporting this project.

While Our Horizon is still working to build support for this idea at the local level, we’ve also reached out to federal and provincial parties to get this item on the radar, since successful outcomes at the FCM and provincial equivalents would bring the idea before other orders of government. While

the labels are intended to challenge the status quo and encourage a transition to more sustainable solutions (which resonates with parties with strong environmental values), they do so in a way that is non-prescriptive and market-friendly (which resonates with those who identify with the right side of the political spectrum). There is potential for broad political support.

Setting a Path for the World to Follow

Ultimately, the hope is that we will all be a part of a story about Canadian leadership for the world to follow. In 2000, Canada became the first country in the world to develop picture-based warning labels for tobacco packages. The innovation spread to approximately 60 countries and studies show that the labels have helped to change both attitudes and behaviour.³ Canada has done this before; as a result, people all over the world have been cognitively primed to adopt our labelling idea.

Communities across Canada now have an easy, tangible way to come together to support a national precedent for the world to follow. Imagine if a simple, inexpensive Canadian policy idea ended up transforming the world. *MW*

- 2 Global TV, “West Vancouver unanimously votes to support warnings on gas pumps,” <<http://globalnews.ca/news/1795333/watch-west-vancouver-unanimously-votes-to-support-warnings-on-gas-pumps>>.
- 3 Sambrook Research International, “A review of the science base to support the development of health warnings for tobacco packages,” <http://ec.europa.eu/health/tobacco/docs/warnings_report_en.pdf>.

as published in

Municipal World

CANADA’S MUNICIPAL MAGAZINE – SINCE 1891

1-888-368-6125

www.municipalworld.com