

The Editorial Desk,
Oshawa This Week,
Oshawa, Ontario.

The Strategic Initiatives Committee (SIC) for the City of Oshawa held its regular meeting on Thursday 2007/11/15. Its agenda included a submission from the Oshawa Environmental Advisory Committee (OEAC) on the proposed incineration issue; the OEAC is appointed by Council supposedly to "assist, advise and educate City Council, staff and the community ..." (Terms of References - OEAC)..

Simply put, the OEAC was making the recommendation that ALL options relative to the waste issue should be considered before the City makes any pronouncement on incineration, particularly stressing the need for a FULL Environmental Assessment. As such, the OEAC was simply recommending prudent action on something of extremely serious implications; it was not taking position for or against any one specific technology. Yet, there were some who apparently took exception to this elementary call for precautionary prudence.

Particularly disturbing is the fact that the chair of the SIC, Nester Pidwerbecki, vehemently objected to the wording and claimed, in a somewhat disgraceful way of spinning the facts, that the OEAC was usurping its role by telling Council how to vote. In fact, he claimed that the recommendations were "muzzling" elected officials.

Brian Nicholson objected to such a stance and unsuccessfully asked the Chair to apologize to people giving out their time to provide politicians with the advisory function that they supposedly solicit. He also added that he found it extremely ironic that the comment on "muzzling" came from a Councilor who himself had contributed so much to the muzzling of dissenting opinions in the past.

A vote was taken and the recommendation of the OEAC was rejected. There are at least two disturbing aspects to this.

The first one is that this illustrates, once again, that elected officials demonstrate autocratic, if not dictatorial, attitudes and see very unfavourably any citizens' encroachment on what they perceive as their little fiefdom, even though they attempt to project a different reality, with catch phrases such as citizens' participation. Unfortunately, the harsh reality is that they will ignore even zero-cost calls for prudence when this suits their agenda.

The second one, and that is the depressing one, concerns the intellectual vacuum at the political leadership level, given the fact that what has happened at the SIC is much more than an isolated, possibly anomalous, instance, but is shared by other members of the Committee.

As a member of the OEAC and as an involved citizen, I find it obnoxious that knowledgeable involvement is solicited, on a voluntary basis I might add, only to have it totally ignored by an highly-paid arrogance that is willing to ignore the facts and jeopardize the health of populations in order to accomplish a personal agenda, either self-serving or totally myopic.

In fact, this whole episode makes as much sense as witnessing passengers on a sinking ship debating the colour of the life vests.

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