

Clarington This Week

Residents ask Region to dump incinerator plans

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By Erin Hatfield

DURHAM -- Questions about energy from waste are piling up, but according to the Region's commissioner of works, they will all be answered. Adding to that, Cliff Curtis said if health and environmental concerns about incineration aren't answered to the satisfaction of council, the plug can always be pulled on the contentious project.

Nearly a dozen residents turned out to a May 16 Durham works committee meeting to plead with the Region to reconsider building an energy-from-waste facility, otherwise known as an incinerator.

"I am alarmed that my elected officials are even considering such a dangerous enterprise," said Jim Richards of Orono. "I don't think (Durham) should be pushing the agenda they are pushing. I think we should be looking at waste diversion."

Durham and York regions have developed independent long-term Waste Management Strategy Plans and energy from waste had been identified as the preferred method of dealing with residual garbage.

Nearly all of the delegations that spoke trumpeted zero waste as the solution to dealing with Durham's garbage.

When asked if the Region was investigating zero waste as an option, Mr. Curtis said Durham is running one of the highest waste diversion programs in Ontario, with rates hitting 60 per cent through green bin and blue-box collection.

"Zero waste is not a realistically achievable objective at this time," he said.

Questions were raised about air quality standards, dioxins emitted and potential health effects of an energy from waste facility.

Pickering councillor Rick Johnson, who has been involved in waste management issues for 20 years, assured the residents their concerns are being taken into consideration by members of council.

"We are listening to you and we will be sure your questions are answered before we even put a shovel in the ground,"

Despite this assurance, residents like Barry Bracken of Port Perry continued to present their opposition.

"I am here to urge you to say 'no' to incineration," Mr. Bracken said. "Common sense tells me burning garbage is not a good idea."

Mr. Bracken and his daughter Wendy Bracken have both taken the time to attend a number of public meetings on the issue.

"I have learned all kinds of reasons incineration is not a good idea," Mr. Bracken said.

His daughter, from Newcastle, said she believes not even the politicians have been made aware of the dangers of incineration.

"First of all, the councillors in here need to educate themselves and second they need to educate the public," Ms. Bracken said. "Then they will embrace landfill."

In an interview, Mr. Curtis said he was paying attention to the concerns raised at the meeting and took note of all of them.

"Most of the concerns are legitimate," Mr. Curtis said. "We will address those concerns as we go through the process."

All of the environmental and health questions will be answered to the best of the Region's ability as they go through the Environmental Assessment process, Mr. Curtis said.

"If we get to a point that we can't come up with answers that are satisfactory to council then we can't proceed," Mr. Curtis said.

"Council will not vote to proceed unless they are certain this process will not have a negative effect on the health of residents or the environment," he said. "Council is not interested in doing something that is harmful."

The other hurdle, according to Mr. Curtis, is the project will have to be proven to be financially viable and make economic sense.

There are three points in the process where York or Durham can pull out.

The first point was when the short list of sites was released in April. The regions will have that opportunity again when a preferred site is chosen and finally when a request for proposals is put to tender.