

York cuts back on Durham incinerator commitment

Look at other options, councillors say, as facility will now cost \$50 million more

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Carola Vyhnač

STAFF REPORTER

A proposed incinerator in Durham Region hit a new snag with the news it will cost taxpayers millions more to build because partner York Region is drastically reducing its share.

Already facing growing opposition from residents over health and environmental concerns, Durham will have to pay up to \$50 million more after York cut its commitment to 12 per cent of the cost.

York had agreed to pay for half of the \$250 million facility but has told Durham it will have much less trash to burn than it first thought.

A smaller incinerator can be built for \$150 million to \$200 million, but Durham will still be on the hook for 88 per cent, or in the range of \$130 million to \$174 million, works commissioner Cliff Curtis told a meeting of Durham's joint finance and administration and works committee yesterday.

He said York "started sending signals" about 2 1/2 months ago that it was scaling back its commitment because it's looking at turning trash into pellets that can be burned elsewhere.

Durham Councillor Brian Nicholson, a longtime opponent of incineration, said Durham taxpayers can't shoulder the burden of building the energy-from-waste (EFW) facility.

"There comes a point where you don't raise a dead horse. We can continue to spend millions and do studies on EFWs ... but I believe we're not going to go through with this.

"York is looking for us to break the engagement because they haven't got the guts to walk away from it themselves."

Citing health risks and environmental concerns, he urged the committee to look at other options.

Councillor Howie Herrema agreed the price tag wasn't economically viable.

"I have huge concerns financially that York Region only wants to be a little bit pregnant," he said.

There are five short-listed sites for the incinerator – four in Clarington and one in York's township of East Gwillimbury, which has rejected being a host.

York will commit 20,000 tonnes a year to the proposed incinerator and wants the option of paying for an expansion to take up to 100,000 tonnes more, Curtis said. It still intends to pay its half of the project's environmental assessment costs.

The higher cost for Durham adds to residents' worries over a facility they say poses major health risks.

"You seem to be gung-ho on what will be a tragic mistake," Oshawa resident and scientist Paul-Andre Larose told the committee.

He said they should be looking at ways to decrease waste by addressing the "obscene level of consumption." Ontario generates the equivalent of 160 pounds of garbage per week per family of four, he said.

Health issues have never been addressed, charged Newcastle resident Wendy Bracken, citing a "catastrophic flaw" in the regional council's decision a year ago to choose thermal treatment.

"How can Durham Region even consider adding so dramatically to the air pollution we already suffer from?" she said.