

Ethanol plant yes, but not at the waterfront

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There has been a lot of interest in FarmTech Energy's plan to build an ethanol plant at the Oshawa waterfront.

Advocates on both sides of the issue -- those opposed to building at the waterfront and those who insist it's the right place and the right project at the right time -- have staked out their positions.

While the merits of producing ethanol and its utility as a fuel additive can be debated, the issue at this time isn't whether ethanol production makes sense. Upper levels of government have mandated that gasoline in Ontario must contain at least five per cent ethanol by 2010, so the demand will be there for it.

The issue right now is, where should such a plant be located?

Since Oshawa council must deal with a rezoning application from FarmTech in September, a decision on whether to approve or deny the application must be made.

Concerns about noise and smell have been adequately addressed. Those who have visited the St. Clair Ethanol plant, which uses a dry mill process -- the type of technology Farmtech would employ in Oshawa -- suggest odour and the low hum emitted by the plant are barely noticeable.

That's an important part of the equation because opponents have raised odour concerns as a major red flag to block building the plant here. It's not a significant problem, though plans by the City of Oshawa to build housing and other commercial and recreational developments in future near the harbour would probably not jibe with an ethanol plant.

However, the key problem with the Oshawa waterfront location is its close proximity to the Second Marsh, a protected wildlife oasis that is highly sensitive to the slightest changes to the environment.

Much thought and planning over many years has gone into maintaining the pristine conditions in the Second Marsh and it would be a tragedy if the building and operation of an ethanol plant radically altered the marsh's ecosystem.

For that reason alone, it would be wise to locate the plant elsewhere in Durham Region.

Officials from the Region of Durham and City of Oshawa should sit down with FarmTech's owners and see if a better site can be located that suits the needs of the ethanol maker and has less of an impact on our environment.