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Editorial

Clarington open for garbage

When Clarington councillors declared the municipality an "Unwilling Host" for the proposed York/Durham incinerator in January of last year, they did so with purpose and conviction, stemming from a sense of frustration.

Clarington's four local councillors were frustrated that resolutions passed on the council floor regarding the Region's proposed incinerator were not being communicated to the Regional level by our three Regional councillors. At one point, local councillor Adrian Foster had to register to speak at a Regional council meeting to convey Clarington's position, as the Regional Councillors failed to do so.

While Clarington's three Regional councillors are elected by constituents in Clarington, at the Regional level, they appear to be working for Regional Chairman Roger Anderson.

Clarington's Regional Councillors Mayor Jim Abernethy, Mary Novak and Charlie Trim, have always maintained they have not made a decision for or against the incinerator yet, and are voting to move the process forward. They have never once voted in opposition on matters related to the incinerator. The crucial question on everyone's mind, "Is it safe?" which will only be answered through the completion of the environmental assessment (EA) process, was the mantra. If through the EA process it is determined the proposed incinerator is not safe, it won't be built, the Mayor has said on numerous occasions.

The Region has scheduled June 24 as the date they will take their final vote for or against the incinerator. If the Region approves the incinerator, the EA report is sent to the Ministry of the Environment, and they will determine if the project can proceed.

Over the past weeks, the mantra of our Regional Councillors has changed to, "The Minister of the Environment will have the final say on whether or not the EFW facility is built or not." It's as if our locally elected representatives, our first line of defense, are now abdicating their responsibility to a higher authority.

The best information to date has determined there are risks associated with the incinerator, but they are, in the opinion of the regulating authorities, deemed to be "acceptable risks." What may be acceptable to someone working out of an office tower in Toronto may not be so acceptable to people living: near the emissions stack releasing pollutants into the air.

According to the recently negotiated host community agreement, Clarington had asked for a \$2 per ton royalty for garbage coming from outside of Durham Region. That \$2 per ton royalty was taken away from Clarington, and instead we were offered \$10 per ton for Toronto's garbage. Toronto's garbage is not included in the terms of reference for the EA, and isn't supposed to be burned in the York/Durham incinerator anyway. It's bad enough that Clarington's health and environment could be compromised by the burning of Durham Region's garbage, but when did we agree to be the dumping ground for garbage from other areas? Do we now need garbage from other regions to make the project viable?

The Region is also offering Clarington a minimum of \$650,000 per year in payments in lieu of taxes for their incinerator facility. The Region is obligated to pay Clarington an amount equivalent to property taxes on their facility; they just call it payments in lieu. It is for reasons such as these that Clarington needs some leverage in their dealings with the Region. The rules of engagement seem to be somewhat fluid, and never in Clarington's favour.

Clarington's ace in the hole was that our local councillors had the tenacity to declare Clarington an unwilling host community. They have maintained that the vast majority of correspondence they receive from their constituents is in opposition to the proposed incinerator. So, reflecting the views of their constituents, and in the absence of any conclusive data to date declaring the incinerator safe, the local councillors were protecting Clarington's interests with their stance.

On Friday, Gord Robinson changed his position and voted with the Regional councillors to give up Clarington's "Unwilling Host" status. Clarington "requested monthly air monitoring for at least the first five years of the incinerator's operation.

Thanks to Robinson's change of heart, Clarington has lost its bargaining chip, and- still the burning question: "Is it safe?" remains unanswered. We have just declared that Clarington is a willing host for all the garbage the Region can throw at us.