

## **Ajax council raises good questions on incinerator**

Sun Oct 28, 2007

It would be easy to dismiss Ajax council's rejection of an energy-from-waste incinerator, given the proposed facility would be many miles east of the Town by the lake.

But, in fact, councils in Pickering and the rest of the region, and of course Durham Regional Council as a whole, would do well to go beyond the headline and listen to what Mayor Steve Parish and council are saying.

"There's a lot of very, very important questions not answered yet," Mayor Parish said during a recent meeting of council's general government committee. They have to be "answered within the realm of certainty and it's not close to that," he added.

'Why should Ajax care; this is an issue for Clarington council', one might say.

Actually, it's an issue for every citizen of Durham Region, given that our garbage would be burned at the facility.

Among the important, unanswered questions Mayor Parish and councillors raised are: what would be the tax impact of such a facility on Ajax and, by extension, Pickering and other Durham residents? Is it environmentally sound to landfill the ash produced at the facility? And, in addition to York's garbage, would trash from other areas be trucked to Durham for incineration?

Speaking of York, it's gone from being an equal partner to having a much smaller stake in the amount of trash the facility would handle. York's stake is approximately 12 per cent, or about 20,000 tonnes of trash annually if it's a 150,000-tonne facility. The reason, according to York Councillor Mario Ferry, is York staff looked more closely at its diversion program, concluding that "our needs won't be much beyond 20,000 tonnes." York's looking at another option, a Plan B: selling its garbage to a company that turns it into pellets, which, in turn, are burned by other firms to produce energy. Does Durham have a Plan B? It seems staff and councillors have had blinders on from the get-go, all but making up their minds early in the process.

It brings us to a good point raised by Mayor Parish. He notes Durham's now on board with a composting program, and with that program doing well, and an overall diversion rate sitting at just more than 50 per cent and destined to go much higher in the coming years, the need for the proposed facility, not now but in the future, needs to be looked at. Would it become irrelevant? At the very least, it seems the long-term picture is one of trash from further afield coming to Durham — not a pretty picture.

We're not prepared to say no to an incinerator. And, clearly, timing is an issue as our current temporary solution, landfilling in Michigan, is a fading option. And, yes, as Clarington Mayor Jim Abernethy says, some of these answers are coming. But, in addition to Clarington residents, Ajax and Pickering residents need firm answers before they, and by extension their councils, can make an informed decision.