

Energy from trash brings big hopes, also some worries

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Clarington, the Greater Toronto Area's most eastern municipality – already home to a nuclear power plant – is set to consider the first incinerator to be built in the region in almost 15 years.

Four of the five sites shortlisted by a consultant for the energy-from-waste incinerator, a joint initiative between Durham and York regions for a \$250 million facility, are in Clarington.

All four, three of which are privately owned, are on properties bordering the Darlington nuclear plant, south of Highway 401 on the shore of Lake Ontario.

A fifth site, at a York Region waste-management facility on Garfield Wright Blvd. in East Gwillimbury, is not expected to be a serious contender.

The report detailing the sites will be released to the public Monday morning at www.durhamyorkwaste.ca, said York Region spokesperson Tracy Smith.

Durham Region council is expected to deal with the subject March 28, and York council the following day. A final site is to be chosen by September.

If, as hoped, an environmental assessment is completed by the end of next year, construction could begin in 2009 and be completed by 2011.

"The next step is community consultation, including public meetings that will provide an opportunity for people to understand what's being proposed and give input if they have concerns," said Vaughan regional councillor Mario Ferri, who chairs a joint committee heading up the project.

The decision by the two regions to use incineration as a means of diverting garbage from landfill sites, which also produce greenhouse gases, comes as Toronto has chosen to stick with landfill disposal of waste that can't be recycled. Toronto is expected to close its deal to buy the Green Lane landfill near London by month's end.

"I'm surprised that Clarington has been isolated as the only location in Durham," Clarington Mayor Jim Abernethy said yesterday.

Though he is on the record as favouring incineration, he said there will need to be "extensive public consultations" in the next while. "We have to really understand what is involved with being a host community," he said. "No one really wants this in their backyard."

A public meeting is set for April 12.

Regional councillor Charlie Trim, who also backs incineration, expressed similar surprise. "I just thought there would be three sites in each region," said Trim. "We haven't seen the detail. The detail is what is important."

Since Toronto's Commissioners St. incinerator was closed in 1988, the only such plant built in the GTA has been Brampton's, which burns about 150,000 tonnes annually, almost half of Peel Region's waste.

The York-Durham plant would dispose of about 35 per cent of the 250,000 tonnes of household garbage annually in the two regions. The rest would be diverted to recycling and composting.

Officials familiar with the technology chosen by York and Durham say it is more efficient and leaves less ash than the Brampton plant. It could produce enough power for 36,000 homes.