

East Gwillimbury says 'No' to incinerator

Four other possible sites reside in Clarington

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YORK REGION -- East Gwillimbury will not be a willing host for the proposed York-Durham incinerator.

Councillors voted unanimously Tuesday night to back a resolution opposing the site.

The document cites the property is within the provincially protected greenbelt and adjacent to the Black River and states it would have a negative impact on local air quality.

"I was one of the first to recognize this wasn't a good fit," Councillor Virginia Hackson said. "Wearing my hat as the chair of the (Lake Simcoe) Conservation Authority, I took a look at the fact that the Black River is there and it is in the greenbelt."

The East Gwillimbury site, on Garfield Wright Drive, is one of five pinpointed by the joint York-Durham study that recommends constructing a facility to burn garbage.

The remaining four sites are in Clarington, near Lake Ontario.

Council carefully considered what residents were saying and the information they were being given and found the incinerator didn't fit with the town's main goals and objectives, Ms. Hackson said.

The resolution also considered the negative experience Newmarket has had with Halton Recycling, particularly with odour and air quality.

Although the proposed facility is to deal with garbage, not organics as Halton does, Newmarket residents have had to endure a long battle with the firm.

Representatives of the group, Communities First, which is opposing the proposed incinerator, were at the East Gwillimbury meeting, ready to speak out against the plan.

But council passed the resolution at the beginning of the meeting to applause from the gallery.

Communities First spokesman Ed Candolini was elated, saying the next step is to get other municipalities to follow suit.

"Newmarket's next, then Georgina," he said, noting the group will address Newmarket council tonight.

Mr. Candolini is challenging all municipalities in York Region to oppose the incinerator.

The group has started a petition on its website, www.communitiesfirst.ca, which has been signed by 603 people.

Since East Gwillimbury has only one vote on regional council -- Mayor Jamie Young -- Tuesday's resolution is not enough to stop the incinerator from being built.

However, if East Gwillimbury is chosen as the site for the \$250-million facility, the land will have to be rezoned by the town.

Earlier this month, regional council met to discuss the progress being made by the incinerator study team.

Markham councillor Erin Shapero made a deputation against the proposed energy-from-waste facility, saying increased diversion will make it unnecessary.

She argued a "put or pay" clause in the contract for the proposed facility will discourage residents from diverting waste.

Put or pay means if the region doesn't produce a set amount of waste, it will pay fines to the operators of the incinerator.

"By making a commitment for 50,000 tonnes of waste a year, we'll be kissing diversion goodbye," Coun. Shapero said.

With Markham, Vaughan and Richmond Hill all using green box programs for organic waste and the northern six scheduled to implement a similar program in September, the region will be diverting more and, she argued, eliminating the need for the incinerator.

For more information on the proposed incinerator, go to www.durhamyorkwaste.ca

-- York Region Media Group