

Metroland

## York reduces commitment to incinerator

Thu Jun 14, 2007

By Jennifer Stone

DURHAM -- York Region is acting like a spouse who wants out of a marriage but doesn't want to be the one to leave, says a regional councillor.

York has backed down on its plan to be an equal partner with Durham -- in terms of providing waste and ownership -- on a proposed incinerator to deal with residual waste saying they will instead only be in for 12 per cent.

"It's almost as if York is setting itself up like a married couple who doesn't get along, but neither one wants to leave," said Oshawa councillor April Cullen.

The decision comes on the heels of East Gwillimbury, the only short-listed site of five not to be located in Clarington, having said it would not be a willing host to such a facility.

According to a report to Durham's joint Works and Finance committee, York will continue to be a full partner in the Environmental Assessment already underway, but will only commit to providing about 20,000 tonnes -- 12 per cent -- of the garbage to run the incinerator, at the minimum facility size of 150,000 tonnes.

Originally a 50-50 partner, York staff "did another analysis of our diversion program... and the residue after all the programs were underway and concluded that for the next 10 years or so, our needs won't be much beyond 20 tonnes," said Vaughn councillor Mario Ferry.

That's largely due to the fact York is looking at another type of diversion, whereby it will sell its garbage to a company that will make it into pellets which are in turn burned by other companies to produce energy. But York continues as a partner, said Coun. Ferry.

"We need to make sure there's a long-term solution, should come of these other solutions not work out," he said.

There is a clause in the Memorandum of Understanding that would allow York to increase its use of the facility. York would be responsible for dealing with any costs associated with that.

In other words, said Clarington councillor Charlie Trim, who chairs the Region's works committee, the pellet technology is "not proven, and that's why they want a fall-back position."

Not having a 50-50 partnership could be a problem, given the size of the project, said Coun. Cullen.

"As a councillor, being an ex-finance committee member, that raises huge red flags for me on the business side... Basically, you're assuming the entire risk," said Councillor Cullen.

That isn't necessarily a negative thing, said Coun. Trim.

"This would give Durham Region full control," said Coun. Trim. "When you're in business, if you have control, there really is a benefit."

But some feel York's decision to be much less involved with an incinerator makes it too financially risky for Durham.

"It raises the risk to Durham someplace into the stratosphere," said Oshawa's Brian Nicholson, who believes the process should stop now and the Region should explore different options for waste management.

According to the staff report, "total capital costs are estimated to be in the range of \$150 million to \$200 million; Durham's capital share is now estimated to be in the range of \$130 million to \$174 million, to be financed primarily through regional debentures."

By the time it's paid off, in 20 or 25 years, "you have an old facility that you have to pay to decommission and then, you have to build a new one," said Coun. Nicholson, who brought forward a motion, accepted by the committee, to have Durham's medical officer of health peer review all health-related documents on the matter.

Both human health and financial risk must be considered, said Coun. Cullen, who chairs the Region's health and social services committee.

"There seems to be a level of risk to public health" associated with incineration, she said. "Whether that risk is manageable is the question .. We've got to be careful that we're not taking risks that we can't mitigate."

Coun. Cullen said she's looking forward to hearing what the Medical Officer of Health has to say.

"I'm going to weigh very heavily my decisions and my arguments on what he says," she said.