

Metroland

Incineration issue heats up

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By Izabela Jaroszynski

CLARINGTON -- The integrity of a peer review process is being called into question by local residents who fear an independent consultant's report on a potential energy-from-waste facility will be tampered with before being released to the public.

"We have to question how independent those reports will be," said Linda Gasser, who organized a protest in front of the municipal building in Bowmanville on Wednesday morning.

The residents' concern rests on reports from two consultants that were meant to be discussed by Clarington council last week, but did not appear on the final agenda.

The reports are a review of the work done so far in the Region of Durham's Environmental Assessment process on a potential energy-from-waste (EFW) facility. The review was commissioned by Clarington when the municipality found itself on a short list of potential EFW host sites.

Clarington CAO Franklin Wu said the reports were taken off the July 30 agenda because there were some concerns expressed from the Region after a draft copy was given to councillors for preparatory reading.

"The report wasn't included, didn't find its way onto the agenda, because we received the call from the Region of Durham on Tuesday (that) they were requesting additional time be provided for the Region's consultant to talk to our peer review consultant to clarify several technical matters," Mr. Wu said.

The final report will be presented at a meeting on Sept. 4, he added.

Jim Richards, an organizer of the event, said his concern is what will happen to the report between now and September if the Region is allowed to give its input.

"It will end up being a revised report," he said. "That's a real concern for us. It begs the question: what are they trying to hide?"

More than a dozen residents turned up to the rally -- holding signs that read 'Say no to incineration' -- to demand that council make the peer review public immediately and not at the September meeting.

But Mr. Wu said the public shouldn't be concerned about the integrity of the process since discussions between consultants and peer reviewers are quite common in these types of proceedings.

Cliff Curtis, the Region's commissioner of works, said there was nothing untoward about the process.

"Basically it was becoming clear that everyone was having trouble getting their comments together, so we extended the deadline," he said, referring to a deadline set by the Region for comment from Clarington council and residents on the EA process.

Mr. Curtis said his staff had some concerns that there were inaccuracies with the peer review reports and it was his understanding that the reports needed more clarification.

"They are independent reports, but there is ongoing consultation," he said. "They (Clarington) need access to the people who did the reports."

Councillor Gord Robinson, who briefly attended the rally, said he had shared some of the residents' concerns about the process but is now satisfied that the review is transparent.

"Any changes made to the original report will be highlighted and marked as changes," he said, adding that the public will have access to both versions.

But Councillor Robinson said that he, along with Councillor Adrian Foster, will be asking for a public information forum to be held prior to the September meeting to help address some of the concerns about transparency and to properly explain the findings of the peer reviewers.

"Hopefully it will help to create an open dialogue," he said.

-- with files from Erin Hatfield and Jennifer Stone