

# Durham incinerator opponents furious

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by Carola Vyhnak, The Toronto Star

Durham Region's politicians are more interested in coffee and muffins during meetings than hearing the public's concerns over a proposed incinerator, angry residents charge.

"These people aren't listening to us. It's insulting and it's degrading," said Jim Richards who, along with another incineration opponent, Linda Gasser, led 15 protesters in front of Clarington's municipal offices in Bowmanville yesterday.

Local and regional councillors have already decided to build the incinerator and are just "going through the motions" of consultation, said Richards, who has attended every public meeting on the issue since last fall.

He said he's watched Clarington Mayor Jim Abernethy "fidgeting, making notes and playing with his BlackBerry" during presentations. Richards even knows what kind of muffins regional councillors prefer with their coffee.

The latest blow came last week when a staff report and independent studies slated for discussion at a Clarington council meeting were taken off the agenda, further shutting out citizens, said Gasser, an Orono resident.

"Clarington residents have been betrayed, Durham taxpayers have been burned, and I believe the credibility of our mayor and Clarington council has been fried. Their actions have made a sham of the EA (environmental assessment) process and gutted its integrity."

Gasser said no one has explained why the items were pulled or when the public will be able to express their views on the reports.

In a letter to Abernethy, which he read to reporters, Richards said: "It begs the question: what are you and/or the region trying to hide?"

Abernethy could not be reached for comment.

The independent peer reviews are in the region's hands and all the reports are scheduled for a Sept. 4 meeting of Clarington's general purpose and administration committee, Gasser said.

Council and the public will have to read quickly because that date is also the municipality's deadline to comment, she said.

A decision is expected this fall on the energy-from-waste facility proposed for a site in Clarington under a joint partnership between Durham and York Regions. Opponents are concerned about health and environmental risks.

"Who's going to want to buy our produce if an incinerator is contaminating the area?" said Bowmanville resident Jaison Gibson, whose family have been apple farmers for more than 140 years.

"Cancer rates are already going through the roof and it will be burning 24/7 for the next 30 years. That's just unacceptable," said Gibson who wants his daughters, aged 2 1/2 and 10 months, to grow up in the area.

"Power and money" are behind politicians' actions, Gasser said.

"It's a predetermined outcome. The process hasn't allowed any real options to be considered."