

Ajax has slow burn over incinerator

'Very, very important questions not answered yet'

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By Keith Gilligan

AJAX -- There are more questions than answers, so Ajax council isn't supporting an energy-from-waste facility proposed for Clarington.

"There's a lot of very, very important questions not answered yet," Mayor Steve Parish said during a meeting of council's general government committee last week.

The outstanding questions have to be "answered within the realm of certainty and it's not close to that. Until they're answered, I can't go forward with this," he added.

Councillors were discussing a staff report that dealt with a draft report from Durham Region on an incinerator in Clarington.

The staff report noted Durham's document doesn't include the possible costs for Ajax taxpayers, as well as the cost of such things as roads to the facility. There is also limited or no information on further diversion of waste and what will happen to the ash after the garbage is burned.

Wards 3 and 4 Regional Councillor Colleen Jordan noted the "cost per tonne for landfilling is cheaper than incineration.

"I've not heard much discussion about the ash," Coun. Jordan said, adding a British study found "there's no safe way to landfill ash from an incineration facility."

She also asked if there has been any discussion on where the ash would be landfilled.

Paul Allore, the director of planning and development, said the draft report "is silent on ash."

Wards 1 and 2 Regional Councillor Scott Crawford, a member of the Regional works committee, said, "From the onset, we've had Peterborough and Northumberland at the table. They're sitting on the perimeter with something Durham doesn't have and that's landfill capacity.

"They're the ones to take residual ash. We'll take their garbage and they'll take our ash," he stated.

He added, however, that an agreement hasn't been signed with either jurisdiction.

Coun. Jordan noted the "preferred site was selected without the preferred technology known. They should be looked at together."

"Before we make a decision, we have to know if this will add \$30 to our taxes or \$300 to our taxes. It's not known in any way at this time," noted mayor Parish.

He added waste from Peterborough and Northumberland could also be burned at the site.

There's no program in place for industrial, commercial or institutional waste. "Unless it's separated, it will be a mass burn and we won't know what's in it and we won't know what's in the char or the ash.

"This will do nothing to promote separation and recycling," the mayor added.

Attempts have to be made to increase waste diversion from the present 50 per cent to upwards of 80 per cent.

"I don't see anything here to encourage that," the mayor added.

Ward 4 local Councillor Pat Brown asked why other municipalities could be allowed to use the facility. "Every meeting I've been at, they said it wouldn't have capacity for that."

Councillors wanted the issue of the ash to be considered during the environmental assessment and that the incinerator only handle York and Durham trash.

***During the council meeting on Monday, Coun. Jordan again proposed that only residential and residual (trash left over after recyclables are removed) garbage from York and Durham regions be accepted at the facility.

She said having the incinerator "maybe attracting waste from other municipalities and that's raising considerable concern."

Coun. Crawford reiterated that Peterborough and Northumberland were needed because they have landfill capacity for the ash.

"The Region never said it would be only York and Durham waste only. We've said it wouldn't be Toronto," Coun. Crawford stated. "What they (Peterborough and Northumberland) bring to the table is landfill space. I hope council will rethink it."

The staff report, she added, "gives us information and highlights the lack of information coming forward. There's a lack of information on the financial impact and how it will affect Town of Ajax residents. There may be a significant impact on our taxpayers."***