

Clarington mayor 'puzzled' about Ajax' reaction to incineration

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By Jennifer Stone

CLARINGTON -- Mayor Jim Abernethy says he thinks Ajax is "absolutely right" to be seeking answers with regard to the proposed energy from waste facility which could be built in Courtice, but is still surprised at recent actions taken by the more westerly municipality.

His surprise stems from Ajax council's statement that it could not support an energy-from-waste facility in Clarington due to there being a number of unanswered questions on the matter.

"There's a lot of very, very important questions not answered yet," said Ajax Mayor Steve Parish, during a committee meeting there 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."

But those questions are in the midst of being answered through the environmental assessment process, said Mayor Abernethy.

"I'm surprised at their comments and surprised they'd make the motion that they have," he said, noting "... many of those questions their council has are going to be answered through the EA process."

Now that the consultant has named its preferred site -- near Courtice Road and Hwy. 401 -- more site-specific studies can be done, in terms of technology and potential human health and environmental effects. At the same time, Durham will work on the business case to determine whether building an incinerator here is a sound financial move.

Given the information still to come, Clarington hasn't taken a stand said Mayor Abernethy.

"I suppose we could, but I don't know if we would be doing the right thing," he said.

Not only is the EA ongoing, but Clarington staff has been given direction to look into the types of issues Ajax is questioning, noted Clarington's mayor.

Mayor Abernethy said, given the existence of a 1940s-style incinerator in Ajax and plans he's heard of allowing residential development nearby, he's "puzzled" by the stance of Ajax.

"I don't even know what he's talking about," said Mayor Parish when asked about that possibility. "We have a facility ... that burns wood and wood byproducts and creates steam."

Mayor Parish said he also doesn't buy the idea that Clarington's mayor hasn't come to a conclusion on where he stands.

"I think Mayor Abernethy seems to me to have given every indication he's made up his mind on this and just isn't prepared to say that," he said.

The problem is that soon, decisions will have to be made, said Mayor Parish. In December, Regional councillors are expected to decide whether to accept the preferred site recommendation.

"I'm a bit worried that a lot of regional councillors are saying to themselves, look, this thing's going to be in Clarington and I'm not a Clarington councillor and I don't care," he said. But regional councillors need to be concerned about matters of cost, health and safety and technology, he said.

Councillors should be presented with all the information, without separating site from technology or cost or anything else, before making any decisions, he said Thursday.

"We shouldn't have a process that has us make decisions in isolation from other relevant matters," he said.

Ajax concerns revolved around a number of issues, including potential cost to taxpayers, waste diversion and what types of waste the incinerator could accept and what will happen with the residual ash -- something Ajax councillor Colleen Jordan said a British study indicated there's "no safe way to landfill."

But Regional Councillor Scott Crawford, who sits on the committee currently studying the potential for an incinerator, said Durham's neighbours might be able to help with the ash.

"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 said.

Those questions do need to be answered, noted Clarington local councillor Adrian Foster. Local councillors in Clarington have spent the past several months seeking more information, via a number of means, including passing motions at council.

Cost should be considered carefully, he noted, especially given York Region's recent decision to go from being an equal partner to only taking on an approximately 12 per cent share of the project.

"My recollection is the reason they invited York in was because we couldn't afford to go it alone," said Coun. Foster. "Now, we are essentially going it alone."

He said he agrees with Ajax stance there are many questions to be answered. The Ajax stand on the matter "lends legitimacy to our questions," he said.

-- With files by Keith Gilligan