

Recycling plant opens, but cost overrun still casts a shadow

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By Erin Hatfield

DURHAM -- It's the "Cadillac" of recycling plants. While some officials say the Region of Durham's Material Recovery Facility (MRF) sets a standard in blue box recycling some are still questioning its cost.

The 68,600-square-foot facility is the fifth largest of its sort in Ontario. It's expected to process 50,000 tonnes of blue box material in 2007 and has the capacity to process 115,000 tonnes a year.

Located on Garrard Road in Whitby, the MRF's grand opening on Dec. 13 was attended by some Regional councillors and staff, representatives from Metro Municipal Recycling Services, who will operate the MRF, Gottardo Construction Ltd, involved in its construction, and waste directors from around the Greater Toronto Area.

The MRF is operational, but commissioner of works, Cliff Curtis, said early in the New Year trucks will begin to be diverted from the old recycling plant next door to the new MRF.

"We are very pleased with the product," Mr. Curtis said. "We got a good value for our money."

The facility cost just less than \$17 million to build, but was almost \$900,000 over budget and its construction was plagued with a high water table and inadequate soil conditions.

"After months of additional work we built a recycling facility on recycled land," said Al Metauro, the chief executive officer of Metro Municipal Recycling Services Inc. "The Region made use of what would have been a useless piece of property in lieu of valuable farmland."

However proud they are of this new facility, council has yet to approve the additional costs for its construction.

"The bottom line is the taxpayer," Pickering Councillor Rick Johnson said. "I wonder if in trying to build this Cadillac of a facility we went above and beyond what was required."

Even with its higher-than-expected price tag, Steve Whitter, a director with Toronto's solid waste management department, said it is an incredibly impressive facility.

"When you drive through the gate and look at the building it's awesome," Mr. Whitter said. "It is so big and state-of-the-art."

Toronto has space issues, so they don't have the option to build such a massive facility, but Durham's MRF will serve as an example for future projects, Mr. Whitter said.

"We have a need for two in the city of Toronto and will definitely be looking to this as a model," he said.

Peter Watson, Durham's manager of waste management, said the facility can handle all of the Region's blue box materials and will maximize revenue with dual-functioning optical sorters.

"Each of the machines has the ability to separate two types of materials," Mr. Watson said.

He explained each different type of material, from plastics to aluminum, will be sorted out, bailed and sold.

"It gives us high quality material," he said. "From the resident's point of view, they can continue to put out blue box material in exactly the same way, but when it comes here it is sorted in a highly efficient manner."

The facility was funded by the Region and monies from the federal Gas Tax Revenues. At the opening ceremony, Damian Bassett, the chief executive officer of Stewardship Ontario, presented the Region with a cheque for more than \$300,000 to fund one of the machines which can sort two types of materials