

Burning issue brings heated words

Clarington residents wait hours to have their say on region's proposal for trash incinerator in area

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The debate over building an incinerator 45 minutes east of Toronto turned into an endurance test for Clarington residents and councillors, who began a marathon meeting at 7 p.m. Tuesday.

The politicians stood their ground.

But the overflow crowd, who kicked off the event with a protest rally in front of Town Hall in Bowmanville, trickled out of council chambers over the next six hours. In the end, only a dozen speakers remained to voice their objections.

One person backed the incinerator.

Nine-year-old Hannah Hosein only got to watch 10 minutes of the meeting before heading home with dad for her younger brother's bedtime, "so he's not cranky in the morning."

But her mother, Wendy Bracken, hung in till the bitter end, finally having her say at 1 a.m. yesterday on the dangers of burning trash.

The site of the facility, a joint project of Durham and York regions, is to be decided this fall.

The short-listed sites are south of Highway 401 near Courtice and Bowmanville. East Gwillimbury in York has said it doesn't want the incinerator. Hannah made her pitch to a spectator outside at the rally, which was attended by more than 200 people. Incinerators, she said, are "bad for your health and the environment. We don't want it to be like Toronto, all dirty and smoggy."

Inside, the first three hours of the general purpose and administration committee meeting were taken up by experts hired by Clarington to

independently review health and environmental risk assessments done by the regions.

While they had some concerns – Durham still owes Clarington staff several reports, for example – overall they agreed the project should go ahead.

Since neither the builder nor the technology that will be used will be known until next year, further studies are needed to ensure the site is a good match, they said.

The public should also be given a chance to review all new information, advised environmental planner Steven Rowe.

Some residents are unhappy with the planning process. Linda Gasser, a driving force behind the opposition, berated councillors for creating a "credibility gap."

"Clarington council as a whole has not consistently supported a fair and transparent local consultation process, which you promised."

Bracken, Hannah's mom and a Newcastle scientist, said "hundreds of studies" on the health risks of nanoparticles from air emissions had been ignored.

And she found fault with calculations on the size of toxins that "get into the bloodstream and the brain."

Dr. Debra Jefferson presented a petition signed by 16 area physicians who are concerned deteriorating air quality will affect the health of their patients. She said the doctors want Clarington to declare itself an unwilling host.

But Councillor Adrian Foster said Durham regional council will likely push ahead even if Clarington says no. Water quality is a concern for Dave Renaud, a Courtice resident and president of the CAW Durham Regional Environment Council, which advocates that manufacturers take environmental responsibility for their products.

"I fish in Lake Ontario. I'm not eating that fish now and you want to put more (contaminants) in it? No, thank you."