

Clarington council disses regional chair

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By Jennifer Stone

CLARINGTON -- Local councillors' brushoff of Regional Chairman Roger Anderson, whose request to speak at Monday's Clarington council meeting was denied, was intended to send a message. But the message may have been lost in translation, say Clarington's Regional Councillors.

Mr. Anderson had asked to speak at Clarington council, but because he missed the deadline to sign on as a delegation, his request required support of council. But, in an almost unheard of move, Clarington's four local councillors voted together to deny the request.

The issue at hand was Clarington's plan to peer review the work done so far in the proposed Energy-from-Waste project and what costs would be up-fronted by the Region.

"It was nothing personal from the local councillors toward Roger Anderson. We respect the man," said Ward 4 Local Councillor Gord Robinson. "It was a message we had to send ... the Mayor and Regional councillors are not listening to us."

Clarington staff had recommended an extensive peer review of all materials on the proposed project so far. The Region had agreed to upfront all "reasonable costs," but last week had discussed a \$200,000 cap on how much would be provided. Anything beyond \$200,000 would be subject to Regional council approval.

Clarington staff has estimated the cost of the review at about half a million dollars.

Ward 1 Councillor Adrian Foster agreed with Coun. Robinson's assessment.

"No personal slight was intended to Roger whatsoever," he said. "But it is an expression of the frustration (felt by) the local councillors... We feel like we're being limited in the questions that can be asked."

But Regional councillors Charlie Trim, Mary Novak and Mayor Jim Abernethy expressed outrage at the rejection of the chairman's request to speak. All three Regional councillors said they wanted more information from Clarington staff about how much the review would cost and where the money would come from.

"The regional chair(man) did the right thing. He didn't just barge into our meeting, which he may have the authority to do. He went through the proper channels and what did we do? What did we do? We said, 'Get out of here,'" said a red-faced Coun. Trim, who chairs the Region's works department. "That's an insult to the chair of Durham Region. That is not how politics works. I am very, very concerned, very, very disappointed."

Council would have had an opportunity to put questions to the chairman, said Mayor Abernethy.

"There was nothing gained by turning the chairman away this evening," said the mayor, who said he was "disappointed" in the actions of the local councillors.

No decision has been made on where Clarington stands on whether it is a willing host to the proposed incinerator, said the mayor, who accused the local four of being "intimidated" by a few delegations who are vociferously against incineration.

"Prior to us jumping to a conclusion, we need to get the information and we could very well say, no, we're sorry, we don't think it's safe."

Mr. Anderson said he could never remember being turned away from a local council at which he wished to speak.

"I find it interesting that the rest of the public can put in a request to speak and be heard," said the chairman, who hastily exited Clarington council chambers after the decision was made.

"I came to Clarington, trying to offer them some understanding of the Region's position. It's clear they don't want to hear that," he said.

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