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Incinerator site approved by York, Durham politicians

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But full approval still months away, official confirms

By: Jessica Young

York trash is one step closer to getting burned, with incinerator plans passing another political hurdle.

York Region's waste management committee yesterday approved a consultants' report with a recommendation selecting a Clarington site as the best home for a proposed incinerator.

The committee's decision means the joint project of York and Durham regions moves forward, with a proposed 12-hectare site to be built at Courtice and Osbourne roads, when the environmental assessment is complete and the Environment Ministry reviews and gives its approval.

"We're still a year away from making the final submissions to the Ministry of Environment," said Andy Campbell, York Region's director of solid waste management. "We need to get this decision made this month so we can do a request for proposal."

York's political counterparts in Durham also passed the recommendations at a similar meeting in Whitby yesterday.

During the York committee meeting, Vaughan Regional Councillor Gino Rosati spoke against it.

"I'm not sure it's absolutely necessary if we proceed," he said. "If Durham wants it, they can do it. I don't agree with this. I'm not sold on this idea of energy from waste."

The idea of an incinerator as the primary solution to the region's waste problem doesn't fly with Richmond Hill Regional Councillor Vito Spatafora either. He doesn't like what he hears about incineration, but says it's important the region keep all options open.

"I don't want to pull the plug until I'm sure that option isn't doable for our community. Let's go through the process," Mr. Spatafora said.

To date, the environmental assessment has cost each region \$4 million, Mr. Campbell said.

Just a day earlier, the Joint Waste Management Group, made up of councillors from both regions, held a public meeting at York's headquarters in Newmarket. There, residents voiced concerns about the proposed incinerator's effects on the environment, specifically air pollution. However, site-specific health studies cannot be completed until a site is chosen, joint waste committee members said.

Five sites were offered as viable homes for the incinerator, one in East Gwillimbury and the remainder in various Clarington locations.

York Region began as an equal partner with Durham Region when talks about finding a waste solution began in 2005, Mr. Campbell said. York Region has 150,000 tonnes of waste per year, with Durham producing 140,000 tonnes of waste per year.

But York was able to nab a contract with the new Dongara Pellet Factory in Vaughan, which grinds and then compresses garbage into tiny pellets that are burned for an industrial energy source, Mr.

Campbell said. The plant is scheduled to begin operation in summer 2008. The partnership lasts until 2028 and will have 100,000 tonnes of York's garbage going to the Dongara facility each year.

If the incinerator is built, York will send 20,000 tonnes of garbage there per year, added Mr. Campbell. The remaining 30,000 tonnes would go to a landfill in London until 2022. In 2010, Michigan closes its borders to Ontario's garbage.