

Committee wants delay in site selection for incinerator

Says more information needed

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DURHAM -- The Region's health and social services committee wants council to hold off on adopting a Courtice site for a proposed incinerator until a technology and vendor has been selected.

Durham's works committee endorsed the Courtice site on Jan. 9, but the next day Ajax Councillor Colleen Jordan proposed delaying the site selection at the health and social services committee. Her suggestion was adopted by the committee.

A similar stance was also adopted by Clarington council and Oshawa's Strategic initiatives committee earlier this week.

A group of speakers who have addressed several committees on the topic had an impact on Coun. Jordan.

"The delegations came forward and showed information regarding air quality in Clarington compared to air quality in East Gwillimbury," she said.

The Ajax councillor said the peer review commissioned by Clarington identified deficiencies in the site selection process. It recommended two sites be carried forward.

"All I can say is it sends off a red flag," said Coun. Jordan.

The peer review report also raised the concerns for Health and Social Services chairwoman April Cullen of Oshawa. Though she voted against the Health and Social Services committee motion, she later supported a similar motion at Oshawa's Strategic Initiatives Committee, after receiving a hard copy of the Clarington report.

There are a few reasons for her change of heart, said Coun. Cullen. First, she had been led to believe the process couldn't be altered in such a way as would be required to delay the site selection. She has since found that is not the case.

"If this is the type of conflicting information I'm going to be dealing with ... I can't confidently tell the people of this Region or the City of Oshawa that I can say this is safe," she said.

It may well be incineration is perfectly safe, she said, but "in the face of something that potentially could be harmful, I can't in good conscience say, 'let's do it.'"

Once a technology is chosen a human health and ecological risk assessment could be used to determine which site is preferable with respect to public health and safety, Coun. Jordan said.

The works committee endorsed a shortlist of five companies as pre-qualified to build the incinerator, should it be approved. Four of the companies are proposing mass-burn technologies. The fifth combines mass burn and gasification.

The committee also said site selection should be delayed until a business case for the energy-from-waste facility clearly shows the potential financial impact on the taxpayer.

"I think certainly the public needs to know what the costs are and certainly the cost might be very different depending on the site," said Coun. Jordan.

As well, council should make a decision on where the bottom ash produced by incineration will be landfilled and its health effects should be determined. The committee also wants the amount of waste and the composition of the waste to be determined. Finally, the Region's works department should review alternatives to an energy-from-waste facility and present them to the health and social services committee.

Regional Chairman Roger Anderson said the current process is endorsed by council and vendors submitting a proposal need a preferred site when creating their submissions.

"They want to know what the site is, how it's laid out, how it's configured."

He sees the motion from the committee as an attempt to delay a process already endorsed by council.

"I think the issue really is most members of council want to get all the information before they make a decision. Unfortunately it appears some members have already made up their minds," said Mr. Anderson.