

Incineration debate heating up

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When it comes to the debate on incineration, the past couple of weeks have done nothing but add fuel to the fire.

As expected, on Jan. 8, the York-Durham Joint Waste Management Group announced that a Courtice site was the preferred site for an incinerator project.

That was the spark for a flurry of activity that will culminate Wednesday at the Region where council will vote on the site.

The councillors have a mixed bag of recommendations to work with.

The works committees in both regions endorsed the site. But, the next day, Durham's health and social services committee recommended council hold off on selecting a site until a preferred technology is chosen. So far, four of the five options on the table are mass burn technologies. The fifth combines mass burn and gasification.

Clarington's councillors are no barometer by which to measure support for the project either. At a recent meeting, the local councillors were at odds with the regional councillors when it comes to the site selection process. In a 4-3 vote, Clarington council passed a motion asking site selection be delayed. The three voting against the delay, however, are the same three that sit on regional council and the same three who will likely vote in favour of the Courtice site on Wednesday.

Oshawa's Strategic Initiatives Committee has taken the strongest stance so far with a motion that says Oshawa "is not a willing recipient of the wastes and poisons discharged into the air from a proposed incinerator potentially located in the Municipality of Clarington." Among those adopting that motion were four of eight councillors who will vote on the issue on Wednesday.

With all that, let's be clear. If the incinerator is built, it will be built in Clarington.

East Gwillimbury, identified as the second most likely site, doesn't want it.

York Region has reduced its stake in the project to 12 per cent. And, East Gwillimbury's council unanimously said in May that it would not be a willing host for such a facility.

Though still ostensibly a partnership, Durham is spearheading this project. If it happens, it will be Durham residents who pick up the majority of the tab. It will be located in Clarington, in Courtice, on a piece of property owned by the Region.

For those who support the project or are still considering its merits, by all means, vote for the site.

But, for those councillors who don't want an incinerator in Courtice, it's time to lay their cards on the table. Delaying site selection won't change anything.

And, finally, let's not delude ourselves into thinking this is an issue for just the people of Clarington. Regional Chairman Roger Anderson is adamant the facility would cost between \$150 and \$160 million. Opponents keep throwing out a figure of \$250 million. Either way, it's a costly project for the Region and regardless of where residents live -- Pickering or Cannington or Port Perry or anywhere else -- they'll be picking up the tab.

Heading into Wednesday's meeting, the only thing that's certain is the piles of reports, articles, petitions and press releases on this issue amount to a garbage crisis on their own. And, there's surely more to come.

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