

On curb for now; Cost is only one reason to delay joining incineration project

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The cost of trucking Peterborough's garbage down Highway 115 to an incinerator and then bringing ash back here to be landfilled isn't the only reason to back away from the project.

There are also signs that the partnership between Durham Region and York Region to develop an incinerator is fraying.

York initially committed to supplying 100,000 tonnes of garbage a year and paying half the estimated \$250 million cost of an incineration plant - also known as an energy from waste facility. Last summer York reduced that commitment to 12 per cent of costs and 20,000 tonnes of garbage.

York now hopes to turn some of its garbage into a commercial product: pellets which could be burned in stoves or furnaces.

Another concern is a growing revolt by municipal councils within the two regions against the chosen site in Clarington, south of Highway 401 and just west of the Darlington nuclear plant.

Clarington and Ajax have already passed motions asking that the process be delayed. On Monday, Oshawa city council went further. Oshawa councillors want a promise from York and Durham that only municipalities which have invited the regions to put an incinerator within their borders will be considered as hosts.

And that's only the opposition from within. Residents, public interest groups and the Canadian Auto Workers are also gearing up for a fight.

By stepping back from the project, Peterborough city and county will avoid being caught up in what looks to be a long and perhaps fruitless battle.

The city and county can afford to be choosy because they are not facing the same garbage pressures as Durham and York. Both those regions now truck almost all their waste to Michigan, which is threatening to close its border to out-of-state garbage.

In Peterborough, the Bensfort Road landfill site is projected to have room to take all city and county garbage for about another 20 years - longer or shorter depending on how quickly the area grows and the success of diversion programs like recycling, composting and re-use.

However Peterborough is not completely off the hook, and incineration should not be written off as something that will never be a viable option.