

Clarington declares unwillingness to host incinerator

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By Jennifer Stone

COURTICE -- Clarington will not be a willing host to an incinerator.

Council voted 4-3 Monday -- with councillors voting along local and regional lines -- to declare its unwillingness to play host to the proposed energy-from-waste facility after a number of local councillors and members of the public stated concern that Clarington's voice was not being heard at the Region.

Earlier this month, Clarington council had voted -- again 4-3, with the local councillors outvoting the Regional representatives -- to ask the Region to defer site selection for the proposed Energy-From-Waste facility. But despite that being Clarington's official position, when voting at the Region Jan. 23, Clarington's three Regional councillors voted to accept the Courtice site.

Under Clarington's procedural bylaw, the mayor is bound to represent and support the decisions of local council, said Ward 4 Councillor Gord Robinson.

"Mr. Mayor, you have not done this and I want an explanation," he said.

It was a situation noted by a number of local councillors, many of whom were in attendance at the Regional meeting where the Courtice site was accepted as the preferred location for the incinerator.

"I had heard conversations that Clarington's position was not being put forth and I didn't want to believe it," said Ward 1's Adrian Foster. But after attending the Region's meeting last week, he found Clarington's "duly arrived at position was ignored."

But Mayor Jim Abernethy defended his Regional position, saying the only way to get the answers both the anti-incineration side and the local councillors are looking for is to complete the environmental assessment -- something that can't be done without site selection. That's because in order to do site-specific risk assessments and the business plan, the site must be known.

"The decision has not been made to build anything," said the mayor. "There are many questions that need to be answered. In order to answer those questions, you are required to fulfill the EA process."

The EA will help answer two basic questions, said Mayor Abernethy: can Durham afford it and is it safe.

"If we can afford it, but it's also determined that it's not safe, then I will not support it, it's as simple as that," he said. "If it's deemed to be unsafe, there is not one regional councillor that will support it."

At Regional Council, Oshawa Councillor Brian Nicholson wanted the site-selection motion amended to not allow incineration in any community that was not a willing host by resolution of local council. That was defeated in an 18-8 vote with all three Clarington regional councillors voting against it.

Clarington Regional Councillor Mary Novak explained after the meeting that she feels she has two responsibilities, to the region and to the local council.

"This is a regional decision that affects the local council. I have to be able to separate the two," she said.

-- with files by Reka Szekely

What does it mean

Clarington's stated unwillingness to host the proposed incinerator does nothing to stop the Environmental Assessment process.

But that doesn't mean the objection won't be considered when the final decision is being made.

Ultimately, the Ministry of the Environment makes the final decision on whether to allow the incinerator to go ahead as proposed by the Regions of Durham and York.

Though he couldn't say what weight would be given to Clarington's declaration, "we would consider all comments that came in from both public agencies and members of the public," said Ministry spokesman John Steele.