

Clarington gets \$200,000 more for incineration review

Councillor cautions more may be required

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By Reka Szekely

DURHAM -- Clarington will get an additional \$200,000 to review Durham's incinerator project slated for a Courtice site, after Regional council approved the extra funds on Wednesday.

That's on top of the current \$300,000 already allotted to the municipality to perform its due diligence and review the process. So far, Clarington has spent \$379,318 on the process and the municipality's staff estimates another \$122,500 will be required.

Last week, finance and administration committee members requested more details about the lawyers' fees incurred so far, which account for about a quarter of the bill.

They were provided in a report circulated at a committee meeting before council. According to the report, Toronto lawyer Dennis Hefferon billed 206.7 hours between April and December 2007 at a cost of \$100,766.60, working out to \$487.50 per hour.

Clarington Mayor Jim Abernethy defended the bill.

"Mr. Hefferon is a very qualified lawyer and with qualification comes cost," he said.

Finance commissioner Jim Clapp said while councillors could argue about value for money, all the hours billed were accounted for.

But, Regional chairman Roger Anderson called the fees "absolutely atrocious.

"I tell you if our staff brought a bill like this to our table, they'd be in trouble," he said.

Oshawa Councillor John Henry said he still felt the bill was excessive for what amounts to just over five 40-hour weeks worth of work.

After being asked about the fees, the Region's solicitor, Brian Roy, said specialized lawyers often cost \$400 per hour and up.

"I can tell you this hourly rate is not out of the ordinary," he said.

Clarington Coun. Charlie Trim cautioned that the extra money for the review may still not be sufficient.

"My concern is I'm not convinced that \$500,000 is going to do the proper review because we've already spent \$380,000 and we really haven't gotten into the nuts and bolts and details."

He said he wanted Regional council to be flexible if Clarington came back asking for more money.

"I don't want the door closed on us."
