

April 23/08

Public information session on EFW one step closer

It appears Clarington residents might be getting a public information session on the pros and cons of energy from waste (EFW).

Ever since Mayor Abernethy held his first public information session on EFW as part of the February 11th council meeting, residents have asked for a public information session to be held out-side of the council meeting.

The February 11th meeting had to be stopped at the 11 p.m. curfew and resumed the following Wednesday at 5 p.m., and ended at 11 p.m. that night. Following this meeting, a number of concerned residents requested the municipality host a public information meeting outside the council chambers. They have asked that this meeting represent both sides of the incineration issue, where the public could ask questions of the presenters. Only councillors are permitted to ask questions of a delegate at council meetings.

At Monday's council meeting, Councillor Adrian Foster put forward a motion, asking the Chief Administrative Officer, Mr Frank Wu, to report back to council at the next meeting (on Monday) on the potential costs and logistics of holding a public information session, in order to provide expert opinion on both the 'pro' and 'con' side of having an EFW facility in Clarington.

York and Durham Region have partnered in an environ-mental assessment process for an EFW facility, to burn the residual waste from both communities. A Courtice site has been selected as the preferred site for the EFW.

Part of Foster's motion was to request the Region to allow the consultants they have hired for the EFW file to participate in the public information session.

Regional Councillor Mary Novak said she was all for getting more information to the public, but she could not see how the Region's consult-ants could participate in a `pro' and 'con' meeting when they were supposed to be neutral.

Residents pushing for a municipally sponsored public information session, claim the public meetings mandated through the environmental assessment process, which are hosted by the Region's consultants on the project, are slanted in favour of the EFW.

Regional Councillor Charlie Trim said he couldn't support the motion either. Public meetings are mandated through the environmental assessment process, and that is the system we should be following, according to Trim.

"We have other projects in Clarington, the 407 and OPG," Trim stated. "Are we going to do the same, and ask consultants to come in and be `pro' and 'con'?" he asked. The Highway 407 completion is a Provincially driven project, and the Ontario Power Generation expansion is a project proposed by that Crown Corporation.

Mayor Jim Abernethy, who had been adamant that his style of information sessions as part of council meetings was the best method of getting information to the public, stated, "It's not whether we should do it. The question is, who is going to pay for this?" According to the Mayor, Clarington should not carry the burden of public information session costs, which he estimated can run between \$30,000 and \$40,000. "I think having discussions on this is wonderful, that is why I'm inviting people here [to council meetings]," he stated.

"I think this is a good thing to do," stated Foster. "I think it will be of service to our residents. How can we sit here and say we're concerned for our residents and throw hurdles up? It defies logic."

The motion did pass with the four local councillors voting in favour of holding the public information sessions outside of council. Regional Councillors Trim and Novak voted against the motion and the Mayor abstained from voting.

An amendment to Foster's motion, requesting the Clerk send a letter to all Durham Region Municipalities asking them to consider partnering with Clarington in the public information sessions, also passed.