

Clarington's unwilling host status being used as a 'bargaining chip' say residents

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By Jennifer Stone

CLARINGTON -- The Municipality is inappropriately using its unwilling host position as a bargaining chip in negotiations aimed at putting together a host community agreement to become home to an incinerator, says a local resident.

Last week, after a lengthy, hastily-called closed-door meeting to discuss host community agreement negotiations, councillors voted 6-1 to accept a resolution that calls on the Region to improve its first offer for a host community agreement. If the local municipality gets everything it wants from the Region, says the resolution, Clarington would reconsider its unwilling host stance.

The meeting and resolution were both inappropriate, Orono resident Linda Gasser said.

"On May 21, with little notice to councillors that they would actually be voting on a formal council position because the agenda said "verbal report from the CAO", you approved that without having even once formally consulted with your residents on an agreement that could bind our Municipality for up to 50 years," Ms. Gasser said.

The meeting "was as close as you can get to a secret meeting and still be legal," Bowmanville resident Louis Bertrand said.

Offering up the unwilling host stance makes no sense, he said.

"There's a fine but important distinction between using the stance for a strong bargaining position versus using it as a bargaining chip, Mr. Bertrand said. "I don't recall saying it should be used as a bargaining chip to be bargained away for goodies."

According to the Region's business case, Clarington has been offered about \$10 million, as well as some infrastructure work within the proposed Energy Business Park which abuts the proposed incinerator at Courtice Road and Hwy. 401.

The lack of consultation is a problem, Ms. Gasser said.

"If you don't consult with us now, we will continue to wonder, do you know what you are doing?" she said. "Why and what are you hiding from us and what trade-offs affecting our health and welfare did this council make?"

Mayor Jim Abernethy said he recalled Ms. Gasser saying the Municipality's position could be used as a bargaining chip and quoted a December speech in which she said "declaring yourself an unwilling host will allow council to negotiate from a position of strength."

But there's a difference, she said.

"We're not talking about bargaining it away for site improvements and viewing galleries," Ms. Gasser said.

Council was to hold another hastily called meeting Tuesday, after This Week's deadline, for yet another verbal report from Clarington CAO Franklin Wu based on a proposal sent to him from the Region's CAO. Mr. Wu was to provide the document, which was sent to him confidentially, to council members after Monday night's council meeting but he warned them it would not make a great deal of sense without his explanation.

"Last week, I was very concerned and upset that we were expected to make a decision with no information provided beforehand," said Ward 1 Local Councillor Adrian Foster, the only councillor who voted against last week's motion. An advance copy was needed "so that if a decision is required we could have time to read and think about it."