

Incineration business case approved

Gas tax dollars to pay for facility

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DURHAM -- Regional councillors have voted to channel all of Durham's federal gas tax money into building an incineration facility.

Durham reached another milestone on the road to building an incinerator in Clarington when, after lengthy debate, councillors passed the project's business case at Wednesday's council meeting in a 17 to 8 vote.

The business case outlines a general budget for the energy-from-waste facility, totalling nearly \$200 million for the construction costs. Durham's share would be \$155 million. Of the \$17 million in annual operating costs, the Region would pay \$13 million.

Instead of a lengthy loan to pay for the facility, the business case calls on the Region to pump all of its federal gas tax dollars into the facility, paying off the construction costs roughly six years after it opens in 2013, including dollars received from 2008 on.

Councillors took different views of the business case and the plan to use the gas tax funds. Those who supported it said it was a solid plan that would see the Region through an upcoming garbage crisis.

"For most of us there are two questions: is this safe and can we afford it? This business case says we can afford it," said Clarington Mayor Jim Abernethy.

He said the health question would be answered later when a health assessment specific to the Hwy. 401 and Courtice Road site is completed in 2009.

Opponents of the project argued it would divert the gas tax revenue from other areas that needed it and that the case was inflated.

Oshawa Councillor Brian Nicholson was among those who took issue with the case, which lists an \$80-million value for the facility in 25 years.

"I don't believe there's any residual value to the building. I believe in 25 years it will be worthless to us," he said.

Now that the business case is approved, the Region can put out a request for proposals from the five vendors pre-qualified to build the facility. The whole process is part of an ongoing environmental assessment and must be approved by the Province before work can begin.