

Region to send 17 to visit Halifax landfill

Incineration opponents say stabilized landfill may be an alternative

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By Reka Szekely

DURHAM -- At least 17 Regional councillors and staff members will visit a stabilized landfill in Halifax later this month at a cost of approximately \$21,000 to Durham taxpayers.

The trip, slated for June 20, costs \$1,200 per person, including flight, meals and hotel. In addition to visiting the Otter Lake Stabilized Landfill, the group will also go to two composting facilities and a recycling facility. The Region would not release the names of councillors going because the list has not been finalized, however, staff confirmed the group consists of 12 councillors and five staff so far.

As well, works committee members directed staff to set up an alternative visit for councillors who cannot attend on June 20. This may include some Oshawa councillors who will be visiting an ethanol plant in Sarnia on the same day.

Some staff and council members have already visited stabilized landfills on their fact-finding trip to Europe last summer when they looked at energy-from-waste facilities.

Since then, however, stabilized landfill has been raised as an alternative to the incinerator proposed for Clarington.

"If this is the only one in North America and they're saying it works, we should look at it," said Regional Chairman Roger Anderson.

Given the Region has a no new landfill policy, Mr. Anderson said it's fair to say stabilized landfill is not an option on the table right now. He said, however, since the site-specific health assessment for the incinerator has not been completed yet, there's still a possibility the energy-from-waste facility won't be approved.

"Who knows, maybe the process they have in Halifax is something we can implement in Brock," he said, referring to the Brock Township Landfill, though he added that was unlikely. He cautioned that anyone advocating it in Durham should be prepared to build one in one of the Region's communities.

Stabilized landfills differ from traditional ones in that the waste is treated before it's landfilled.

After garbage bags arrive at the Otter Lake facility, they're broken open and inspected. Then, it's mechanically sorted to remove clean recyclables, metal and hazardous materials. According to the City of Halifax's website, however, the majority of the recyclables are landfilled because they're contaminated. Then, the waste is biologically treated and the organics, including kitchen waste, decomposes for 18 to 21 days. The remaining waste is dried out and landfilled. Of the 155,000 tonnes of waste accepted each year at the facility, 135,000 tonnes is landfilled.

In Durham, it's the residents that separate the recyclables and organics from the trash before it's collected.

Oshawa Coun. April Cullen said she's been asking for the trip for almost a year and plans to go.

"I wanted to go because I want to see some alternatives to incineration and traditional landfill," she said. "I know this particular landfill is probably not the most pleasant one and I want to ask them what they would have done differently."

Coun. Cullen said she'd like to know if there would be a problem with smell and methane if the food garbage was eliminated before it went to the landfill.

At this week's works committee meeting, Pickering Coun. Rick Johnson challenged the councillors visiting the Otter Lake facility to visit the Brampton incinerator as well.

"I'm having great frustration with members of council who are not supporting energy-from-waste that aren't doing their due diligence," he said.

Coun. Cullen said she'd visit the Brampton plant, but cautioned the visits should be fact-finding missions and not political games.

"I'm not interested in playing the political game, but I would be interested in learning anything I can," she said, adding councillors are doing their due diligence by visiting the Halifax facility.

At the works committee meeting, Clarington councillor and committee chairman Charlie Trim said all four Clarington local councillors had been invited to go on the trip, but they declined.