

Halifax stabilized landfill draws mixed reviews

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By Reka Szekely

DURHAM -- Councillors visiting a Halifax-area stabilized landfill came back with diverging views of the facility, with some seeing it as an alternative and others calling it no more than a dump.

The Durham group was made up of 11 councillors, four regional staff members including the Clarington Chief Administrative Officer and Regional Chairman Roger Anderson. They left Thursday evening and returned Saturday morning. In between, they visited the Otter Lake Stabilized Landfill, a composting facility and a recycling facility. The works department estimates the trip cost roughly \$20,000.

Clarington councillor and works committee chairman Charlie Trim visited the landfill on his own last summer and saw more of the facility, including the cells where the stabilized waste goes. Construction work at the site cut back on some areas the councillors could visit.

"They just said there was construction work there and it wasn't safe for the bus to go, so it was disappointing in that aspect," he said.

But Scugog Mayor Marilyn Pearce, who chairs the finance committee, said she'd never been on a council trip to investigate waste options and felt she got a good handle on the Halifax system.

"We didn't get up inside the cell, other than that we saw the full process," she said. That includes seeing what the trucks brought in and the bags torn open for the mechanical separation of the waste, the final product going into the landfill, the leachate being trucked out and methane being flared off.

"I came back realizing, we are doing, I believe a good job in Durham Region and Halifax still has room for improvement to get to where we are," said Mayor Pearce. She pointed to items such as TV sets, lumber and aerosol cans as examples of things landfilled in Halifax, but not in Durham. She found the facility to be similar to the rejected Adam's Mine proposal where the landfill was to be built on bedrock.

Both Mayor Pearce and Coun. Trim said they didn't think it was the best option for Durham.

"The fact is that it's no more than a dump site and the cost is very expensive to go through the process and at the end of the day it all comes back to making sure the material is sorted and the valuable material is brought out (before going to landfill)," Coun. Trim said.

"The other thing (that) really struck me is the cost to process a tonne of garbage is higher than it is here and it's higher than it would be with our energy-from-waste facility... and that's using employees that only make \$12 an hour," said Mayor Pearce.

But Pickering Coun. Bonnie Littley, one of two councillors on the trip that has been consistently opposed to incineration, said the trip, to her, established stabilized landfill as a true alternative.

"I just feel more confident in my concerns and that there is another option," said Coun. Littley after returning.

She's aware there are downsides to stabilized landfill, but when compared to her concerns about emissions from an incinerator, she prefers it, she said.

"I think the devil that you know is better than the devil that you don't," she said.

"I was very impressed by the whole system. The provincial government is much more involved and we've been lobbying to get the provinces more involved."

Works commissioner Cliff Curtis said he thought councillors saw what they needed to see on the trip. He was impressed with the HotRots composting system at the compost facility, which works faster than the Region's current system.

"It's basically about the size of a transport truck trailer, they put waste into one end and about 10 days later they get reasonably good compost out the other end," he said.

A report on the trip will be presented to council in September after the summer break.

Who went

1. Roger Anderson (Regional Chairman)
2. Scott Crawford (Ajax Councillor)
3. Garry Cubitt (Durham Chief Administrative Officer)
4. April Cullen (Oshawa Councillor)
5. Cliff Curtis (Durham Works Commissioner)
6. Gerry Emm (Whitby Councillor)
7. Rick Johnson (Pickering Councillor)
8. Joe Kolodzie (Oshawa Councillor)
9. Bonnie Littley (Pickering Councillor)
10. Sherri Munns-Audet (Durham Corporate Communications)
11. Mary Novak (Clarington Councillor)
12. Marilyn Pearce (Scugog Mayor)
13. Pat Perkins (Whitby Mayor)
14. Nester Pidwerbecki (Oshawa Councillor)
15. Charlie Trim (Clarington Councillor)
16. Frank Wu (Clarington Chief Administrative Officer)