

Council 'not the right venue' for information sessions: councillors

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By: By Jennifer Stone

CLARINGTON -- To debate or not to debate, that is the question.

At the end of a marathon council meeting that took 10 hours over the course of two evenings to complete, councillors and the mayor could not agree on whether council was the right venue for a series of speakers on options for dealing with waste.

"It's in the procedural bylaw to allow this," said Mayor Jim Abernethy, who came up with the idea for the series, the first edition of which was held this week.

It included a speaker from the Swedish embassy, a member of the committee that suggested Durham explore incineration and a consultant hired by the Region to help complete the environmental assessment on the proposed incinerator.

With a group viewed by many as being pro-incineration having been invited by the mayor to speak, the anti-incineration side signed up en masse to get their chance to speak to council as well. That added more than 20 delegations, and each was allotted five minutes to state its case, plus the time it took for councillors to ask questions.

It was simply a matter of bringing forward information, said Mayor Abernethy.

Plans are in the works to hold further sessions on landfill and Zero Waste.

The speakers "were available to answer questions of council and how many times have I heard council say we need answers to our questions," he said.

But several delegations said they'd prefer to see a different type of forum, outside a council meeting, where members of the public were able to ask questions.

"With all due respect, this is not the proper venue for these presentations," Bowmanville resident Kristen Robinson said. "Certainly, if someone has a question they want answered, they can contact their councillor, but how are we to formulate all our questions before hearing" what the presenters say.

Clarington's local councillors agreed.

"I do not believe that this is the proper venue for this sort of thing," Ward 1's Adrian Foster said. "I strongly believe an open forum with experts on both sides of the debate would be the best thing that we could do for our citizens."

But Mayor Abernethy said it was strictly information, not debate, that he was after.

"I was trying to eliminate the debate because it's a contentious issue," he said. "When you get into a situation where someone puts something forward and someone else tears it down, I don't think that's productive."