

The Orono Weekly Times
Thursday, July 2, 2009
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Editorial

Clarington three keep EFW on track

There was never any doubt that the proposed Durham Region garbage incinerator would receive final approval by Regional councillors. What wasn't apparent is that Clarington's three councillors could have swayed the vote.

Shortly after 2 a.m. after another marathon Regional council meeting, councillors voted 16 to 12 in favour of constructing an incinerator in Courtice to burn garbage. A "no" vote from the Clarington Three -- Mayor Jim Abernethy and Regional Councillors Charlie Trim and Mary Novak, would have stopped the incinerator plan in its tracks.

While it's no secret that the Clarington Three were supportive of the Region's plan to incinerate residual household waste, they maintained they would not make up their minds until all the reports and studies on the project had been completed.

Back in 2007, when Clarington's four local councillors stood united in their effort to look after the best interest of Clarington residents rather than promote the Region's agenda, Clarington Council adopted a strategy to peer review the key studies released by the Region on the proposed incinerator. They wanted a Clarington perspective on the incinerator, since Clarington was selected as the host community for the incinerator project - at that time an unwilling host. As the Region would not pay for the host community to review all the necessary reports, Clarington council opted to pay for some of the reviews themselves. As with every vote involving the incinerator, that position was adopted on the strength of the four local councillors out-voting the three regional councillors. That dynamic changed on May 15, when Councillor Gord Robinson changed his position, and voted to make Clarington a "Willing Host" for the incinerator.

The Region released its draft environmental assessment report on June 12th. Clarington staff comments and the peer review of that 751-page report will not be ready until July 3rd, and is on the agenda for the July 6th Clarington committee meeting and the July 13th council meeting. All the final reports have not been released, yet the Clarington Three have made up their minds to support the incinerator project. Apparently the Clarington Three don't care what Clarington staff have to say about this final, albeit very important, report. While they maintained they wouldn't make up their minds until all the reports were in, the Clarington Three boarded the incinerator train the minute it left the station and had no intention of getting off.

If the Clarington Three truly intended to keep an open mind on the incinerator project until they had read all the reports, they had a golden opportunity to do so. They had the chance at Wednesday's meeting to delay the Region's final vote on the issue. Oshawa Councillor Robert Lutczyk introduced a motion to table the incinerator project to give the Region the opportunity to explore stabilized landfill. That motion was defeated in a 16 to 12 vote. If the Clarington Three had voted in favour of tabling, the project would have been delayed, and they would have had the benefit of hearing what Clarington's staff had to say about the environmental assessment report before giving their final approval to the project. Instead, they again opted to promote the Regional agenda rather than represent their constituents.

The Clarington Three have now become the Clarington Four, with Robinson joining their team. The three remaining local councillors no longer have the numbers to pass motions at the local level to protect the interests of local residents.

Last week, Clarington councillors adopted a motion from Local Councillor Ron Hooper requesting Clarington's regional councillors convey concerns around the huge visual, social and economic impact the EFW will have on the current and future residents and business owners of Clarington. Granted, it was a bit late in the process to be bringing forward such a motion, but in reality, it wouldn't have mattered when this motion was raised. The Clarington Three have never brought forward resolutions passed by Clarington council regarding the incinerator that went contrary to their pro-incineration position. Clarington's local councillors had to resort to registering as delegates in order to speak at Regional Council meetings if they had any hope of voicing the official position of Clarington council on issues relating to the EFW.

By opting to push the incinerator train full steam ahead, the Clarington Three plus one, have given a clear signal to their constituents, that the unelected Regional chair, Roger Anderson, is conducting their train. A fact that should not be lost on voters next November when we mail in our municipal ballot.