

Port Perry retiree takes up fight against incinerator

Feb 05, 2010

-- by Keith Gilligan



SCUGOG -- Barry Bracken was enjoying himself, about a dozen years into his retirement, when he noticed a newspaper advertisement.

That was about three years ago and since then, he's been an active member of a group opposed to an incinerator being built in Durham Region.

"I saw the ad about a public information session for the site selection. They called it an energy-from-waste facility and that kind of caught my eye," he says. "There was a short list of sites and that caught my eye."

When Durham and York regions teamed up to find a solution to disposing of their trash, they first went through the process of deciding what method would be used -- landfill or incineration. Both Regions were shipping their garbage to a landfill in Michigan and are still doing so.

Once the decision was made to incinerate the garbage, next was where to put the facility, called energy-from-waste. The final five sites included four in Clarington and one in East Gwillimbury. The selected site was on Osbourne Road in Clarington.

Mr. Bracken went to the meeting with his daughter Wendy, expecting the people running it would show that incineration is a safe method of dealing with waste.

"Wendy is interested in the environment and she's very health conscious," the Port Perry resident states. "Wendy was asking questions and I wasn't happy with the answers by the consultants. They had picked the site even before they had got into it.

"This is our first foray into this sort of thing. It's consumed our life ever since," he notes.

He points out the consultants weren't calling the facility an incinerator, but an EFW.

"EFW is a euphemism that really caught my eye."

Mr. Bracken says his involvement in the fight "has been an interesting experience."

That involvement includes appearing at countless meetings as a delegation in front of Regional Council and its committees.

"I would say so," is how he answered a query as to whether he'd been to dozens of meetings. "It's getting up there."

His background includes accounting and academics, having been the director of the business administration program at Durham College when he retired in 1995.

"If not for a lot of work by people like us, if you're not involved, a lot of these things can happen. These councillors face so many issues. What we've done is play an education role. Documents from the project team were huge. They repeated themselves over and over again and again," Mr. Bracken says.

While the EFW has been approved by Regional Council (the provincial Environment Ministry is reviewing the proposal), he doesn't believe all the councillors have read all the material on the matter.

"How can they make a decision on an issue like this, a complicated issue?"

"The way the whole EA (environmental assessment) has gone through, I think they just rolled this through there. I think a lot of sloppy work was done here," he says.

He suspects the documentation was "too onerous" for most councillors to wade through.

"I think they (consultants) were paid by the amount of paper they produced."

-- by *Keith Gilligan*