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BC Local News

Metro aims to build new incinerator to burn more garbage



Burnaby's existing waste-to-energy plant. A second incinerator will be built if Metro's proposed solid waste management plan passes.

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Originally there were to be up to six new garbage-fired power stations scattered around the region.

Now Metro Vancouver intends to build just one big incinerator to burn up to 500,000 tonnes of waste per year if the region's proposed new solid waste management plan is approved.

The draft document, released Nov. 27 after months of public meetings, sheds little light on the proposed waste-to-energy

plant, which has an estimated price tag of \$440 million.

But it now formally puts Metro on a path to building a new waste-to-energy plant – and potentially on a collision course with air quality defenders, recycling advocates and the provincial government, not to mention residents living near whichever site is chosen.

Under the plan, Metro would ramp up the region's recycling rate from 55 per cent now to 70 per cent by 2015, making big gains by composting food waste and other organics.

The nearly full Cache Creek landfill would close and the new waste-to-energy plant, plus the existing one in Burnaby and the Vancouver Landfill at Burns Bog, would take what waste can't be recycled or composted.

The incinerator would be built in the region, according to the plan, in order to maximize the energy it can generate by piping heat to nearby buildings and industries.

That added potential to sell steam through a district heating network and not just electricity would mean extra revenue and the ability to offset local fuel use and carbon emissions that would otherwise occur.

It would also eliminate the need to truck or barge garbage somewhere else for disposal, eliminating more emissions.

"I believe we can make a case that in-region is a cleaner proposition than out-of-region and it's certainly more economically viable," said Surrey Coun. Marvin Hunt, who chairs Metro's waste management committee. "From what we see over in Europe, waste-to-energy is the way to go."

Not everyone on the Metro board is convinced.

That's why directors will meet this Friday (Dec. 4) to examine the draft plan in detail.

Hunt noted some mayors and councillors were elected just a year ago, after Metro made its original decision to abandon a decade-long drive to build a new Interior landfill in favour of waste-to-energy.

"These people need to figure out where we are and why we are where we are."

No location has been picked – that's to be determined later after a request for proposals is issued seeking private partners.

Heavily developed areas of Surrey, Burnaby, New Westminster, the Tri Cities or North Vancouver are

considered the likeliest sites because they'd be the best fit for district heating.



Waste is hoisted by crane into Metro Vancouver's existing waste-to-energy plant in Burnaby.

Evan Seal / Surrey Leader



The Cache Creek Regional Landfill is nearly full.

File

But first the plan has to get the final approval of Metro's

board, local city councils and – perhaps toughest of all – the provincial government.

Environment minister Barry Penner has said he has serious doubts about adding more pollutants to the Lower Mainland's airshed, and has suggested a harder look at out-of-region alternatives like a proposed waste incinerator at Gold River on Vancouver Island, or the still-advancing privately led proposal to expand the Cache Creek landfill.

Metro has imported European experts this year who have given assurances about the safety of incineration.

Hunt cites their findings and points to major European cities, where he says waste incinerators create energy smack amid densely populated neighbourhoods and scrubbers ensure the air coming out is cleaner than what goes in.

Fraser Valley Regional District board chair Patricia Ross says that gives her little comfort because Europe's incinerators aren't built anywhere like the Lower Mainland's mountainous topography, which traps and concentrates air contaminants.

She argues switching from relatively clean burning natural gas to garbage fuel to heat buildings could pump out toxins like mercury, dioxins and furans.

"They're underestimating both the financial costs of these facilities and the emissions that they expect," she said. "There are so many risks, so many unknowns here. Why would you take a risk like that in a constrained airshed like this?"

Richmond Coun. Harold Steves, who sits on the waste committee, is among the directors who takes the Fraser Valley concerns seriously.

Harnessing garbage for energy and carbon credits instead of entombing it in the landfill – each tonne of trash can generate the equivalent of a barrel of oil – is embraced by many on the board as the greenest solution.

Steves has his doubts.

Metro's experts estimate the incinerator would release slightly less carbon into the atmosphere than landfilling the waste, which festers and releases methane and which must be trucked there.

But Steves notes those estimates are based on the projected 70 per cent recycling rate.

He and others argue much more intensive recycling and composting would leave a smaller remainder to landfill, which

could then be the least carbon-emitting solution.

"When you get down to that last 20 per cent that's inert there's no reason to be burning it," Steves said.

That scenario – called mechanical-biological treatment – is much more expensive, however.

"I still have an open mind," said North Vancouver City Mayor Darrell Mussatto, adding there are pros and cons to both options.

If a waste-to-energy plant is built, he said he'd love to use the waste heat in the city's existing Lower Lonsdale district heating network.

The problem, he said, is there's no logical site nearby and it may make more sense to locate the incinerator somewhere more central, closer to other transfer stations and the bulk of the region's population, rather than trucking waste to the North Shore.

The plan doesn't spell out the full costs of the actions proposed.

But even with the much less costly solution of incineration, it is expected to drive steady increases in the region's garbage tipping fee, which translates into higher regional service fees tacked on to local property tax bills.

Hunt hopes the plan can be adopted by next spring or summer.

Video: June 2009 tour of Metro's Burnaby incinerator



WASTE STRATEGIES

Metro's new plan to handle the region's garbage is called the Integrated Solid Waste Management and Resource Management Plan.

It would commit the region to:

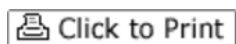
- Increase the recycling rate from 55 to 70 per cent by 2015.
- Compost organic food waste to remove a major portion of garbage from the waste stream.
- Push the province for more Extended Producer Responsibility programs to minimize packaging and add new refund/takeback programs.
- Build a new 500,000 tonne waste-to-energy incinerator that generates both electricity and heat for nearby users.
- Ban more materials from landfill disposal, including wood that would be diverted for incinerator fuel.
- Continued dumping at the Vancouver Landfill in Delta for waste that isn't burned as well as incinerator ash.
- Use the "best available" out-of-region landfill as a back-up if the waste that can't be burned or recycled exceeds the capacity at the Vancouver Landfill.
- Establish Eco-centres, new one-stop-drop centres for

recycling, with the first to go into Surrey.

- Consider a regionally run recycling service, rather than the city-by-city patchwork of how recyclables are handled.
- Establish a regional role in processing and marketing recycled materials and mechanisms to promote local manufacturing using locally collected recyclables.
- Work with business to reuse and recycle more waste from demolition, land clearing and construction.
- Seek to cut the 14 per cent of garbage consisting of paper and paperboard by increased recycling and seeking to reduce the flow of junk mail.

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