

There's CASH in that TRASH

While Metro officials grapple over what to do with the region's garbage, others see dollar signs

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Everyone wants to get their hands on the region's garbage, says Mayor Lois Jackson.

News that the Tsawwassen First Nation is the latest party to enter the increasingly murky picture of where the region's trash may be headed came as no surprise to Jackson, who's also chair of Metro Vancouver.

"Everybody wants it. Why? Because everybody wants to make some money out of our garbage," Jackson said in a recent interview following the TFN confirming it has been approached about having a trash incinerator built on its land.

Aquilini Renewable Energy, owned by Vancouver Canucks owner Francesco Aquilini, is interested in building a waste-to-energy facility on the reserve.

Regional waste currently ends up at three locations -- the Cache Creek Landfill, the Vancouver Landfill at Burns Bog and the waste-to-energy facility in Burnaby.

Cache Creek receives about one-third of Metro Vancouver's waste in addition to waste from the Powell River and Thompson Nicola regional districts.

Because the Cache Creek site is reaching capacity, Metro Vancouver had been seeking an amendment to its solid waste plan to allow for the annual export of up to 600,000 tonnes of municipal solid waste to the U.S. for up to five years, beginning this year.

Metro Vancouver had given up trying to open a landfill in Ashcroft due to native objections and wanted to export the garbage that would have gone to Cache Creek.

The plan was to have that garbage eventually remain here and go to waste-to-energy plants that would be built around the Lower Mainland. It's not clear if there would be just one or several plants.

Last summer, however, the provincial government announced it "will act to outlaw the international export of British Columbia's garbage and landfill waste."

The Ministry of Environment then approved an expansion for Cache Creek that will extend its lifespan by approximately 18 months.

Meanwhile, an application was submitted and an environmental assessment process is now underway for a much larger expansion in order to extend its life for over 15 years.

Environment Minister Barry Penner told the media last year there are other solutions to incinerators, including the expansion of Cache Creek.



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Metro Vancouver is working on a solution for the region's garbage situation.

Meanwhile, a proposal has also been submitted to build a waste-to-energy incinerator at Gold River, on Vancouver Island, to handle the Lower Mainland's waste.

Asked just where the region's garbage could end up and whether the landfill at Burns Bog could end up shutting down sooner as a result, Jackson said the regional district is doing its due diligence now.

"(We're) deciding what science will be used and if waste-to-energy is going to be the best and what will it look like. Then we have to decide if we are going to have one or five and where would they be located. Obviously there would be some criteria attached to that," she explained. "I would hope we can do that much more quickly because I don't think we can wait any longer and I've been saying that for probably four years since I've been chair. I'm very frustrated because I don't see us as close as we should be to the overall approval of the solid waste management plan."

Jonn Braman, a regional environmental protection manager with the Ministry of Environment, told the Optimist he's been informed the new Metro solid waste plan will likely be submitted to the ministry by the end of July.

He noted applications to handle municipal solid waste, including building waste-to-energy plants, would have to be part of the regional district's solid waste plan. The plan itself would require ministerial approval, while an incinerator plant would also require an environmental certificate through the Environmental Assessment Office. The facility would also require an operations permit from the ministry.

Meanwhile, the City of Vancouver has already indicated it isn't supportive of diverting garbage from the landfill at Burns Bog to new waste-to-energy incinerators.

In 2008, a staff report to Vancouver council was highly critical of Metro Vancouver's plan, pointing out it would be much costlier than using the landfill. Under the existing Vancouver Landfill agreement signed by the regional district, Vancouver and the Corporation of Delta, the site is to operate until 2037, at which time it's expected to reach capacity and close.