

Community gearing up to fight possible generating facility in King

By Bill Rea

A gas-powered hydro generating plant might be in the works for King Township, or it might not.

But residents are not delaying when it comes to voicing their opposition.

Close to 200 of them showed up Sunday at what was billed as an "emergency public meeting," at Waterstone on Dufferin Street.

Hydro One has announced that new transmission and distribution stations are being planned for the Holland Marsh area of King.

"We have done our part," declared Debbie Schaefer, chair of Concerned Citizens of King Township (CCKT).

She told the audience the distribution station will enhance the load servicing Schomberg and benefit the northern areas of the township. The transmission station, she said, is being built in response to the growth in Newmarket, East Gwillimbury and Bradford - West Gwillimbury. There were several possible sites being considered, but the utility chose this one, and the request for an environmental assessment bump up, which was issued by Mayor Margaret Black, council and CCKT, was refused by the Ministry of the Environment.

But the residents are determined to stop this generator, she said.

The generating station

will be powered by natural gas to produce electricity. It will also create heat and emissions, which she said will require smoke stacks from 50 to 200 feet in height.

She also pointed out the Ontario Power Authority (OPA) wants this plant so it can run at peak times, meaning it will be operating less than 10 per cent of the time, Schaefer observed. She added it's slated to cost between \$300-and-\$500 million.

Schaefer said OPA released requests for qualifications (RFQ) from companies interested in building and running such a facility. The RFQs also include picking a location, and she added that would explain a lot of helicopter activity that's been noticed in the area lately. She said OPA is slated to come up with a short list of proposals by the end of April, with a final selection expected by the end of the year. She understood the plan is to have the generator up and running by the end of 2011.

"We can influence this," Schaefer declared.

She observed that in the case of the transmission station, the only hope local opponents had was through rejection of the site through the environmental assessment process. But she added OPA has been clear that municipalities have direct clout in this process.

The deadline for RFQs

was late last week, and Schaefer said one possible bidder has an option on a site in the Holland Marsh area. The Township has hired a consultant to help with any possible negotiations, and a survey is being circulated to help understand the position of the public on this.

Schaefer also said the chosen company will talk a lot about mitigation and landscaping measures, with assurances that everything will be clean and safe.

She also stressed the need not to wait for OPA to announce its decision. "We want to be ahead of it," she declared.

King resident Harvey Tenenbaum offered some scientific information on the issue, stating he's been on a number of environmental commissions over the years and has heard all the arguments from all sides.

He said a lot has been learned in recent years about natural gas, which is thought to be cleaner than other energy sources. "But cleaner, of course, doesn't mean clean," he observed, adding it's been concluded that facilities operating on natural gas should go in industrial areas.

Tenenbaum added that of all the proposals he's heard over the years, putting a generator like this in the area of the Holland Marsh would be the "most absurd, incompatible, ill-conceived location."

He added there are serious environmental concerns, dealing with the fact it's an undisturbed area, near agricultural land that inspired the saying "Good things grow in Ontario."

He said a site like this would be rejected, if not for political and economic factors.

"Why damage a pristine area that is the garden basket of Ontario?" he wondered.

"This will be an unmitigated disaster located in this area," he declared.

No matter how clean natural gas is, Tenenbaum said it's a fossil fuel, meaning there will be serious emissions. He added a gas-fired turbine plant, producing 350 megawatts of power, requires about 40,000 gallons of water per day. He wondered where that water is likely to come from, and what the possible impact will be on the water table or ecosystem. He added feeder lines would be needed to get the natural gas to the plant, meaning excavation and installation.

One woman suggested if the plant is going to run only at peak times, the harmful impacts would be reduced.

"It's harmful running for any period of time," Tenenbaum responded. "The more it runs, the more harmful it is."

Jack Gibbons, chair of the Clean Air Alliance, stated a plant like this would be too big, too costly and too polluting. Added to that, he said, is the fact it's not needed.

He also cited comments from Ontario Energy

Minister Gerry Phillips that the demand for electricity in northern York Region will increase by about three per cent every year. Because of conservation efforts and other measures, Gibbons questioned those projections, and he added if Phillips is right, a plant like the one being discussed would be needed around 2031.

He added demand in northern York Region actually fell last year.

He also said there's a better option available, that is of a smaller scale and more efficient. A simple-cycle power plant, capped at 30 megawatts could meet the peak day demands.

Gibbons couldn't really explain why this technology isn't being looked at by OPA, calling the procedure they're following "very

short sighted."

"The senior management of the Ontario Power Authority is stuck in the 1950s," he added.

He stressed the need to make greater use of renewable sources of fuel, although he admitted that will take time, meaning there will still be a need for natural gas. But he said it's use should be as efficient as possible.

"We've got to be realistic," he said. "We can't get there overnight."

Waterstone owner Deborah Weiss, who represented King on an OPA working group in 2005, told the audience about the option on the property near her site, adding there are three to five potential sites

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Community Partnerships Program



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Peaking your interest in northern York Region's electricity needs

Residents and businesses are encouraged to visit the "What's New!" section of the King Township Web site (www.king.ca)

King's Economic Development Officer Jamie Smyth reports they will find information about the Township's process and response to the Ontario Power Authority's (OPA) plan to develop and build a new natural gas-fired generating facility in northern York Region.

Once they have reviewed the "Peaking Your Interest - Frequently Asked Questions" they are also encouraged to fill out the Peaking Your Interest Survey, intended to gather ideas, opinions and concerns about the OPA's planned solutions for northern York Region. Responses will be used to help guide the Township's ongoing discussions with energy company applicants.

Residents without access to a computer and the internet can contact the Township municipal offices at (905) 833-5321, or visit 2075 King Rd. in King City to obtain copies of the FAQ and survey.

The families of Chantelle Stamcos of Colgan & Kirk Dove of Schomberg are very pleased to announce their engagement!



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