

Metro waste-to-energy facility in doubt after government rejects regional bylaw

High-profile lobbyists blamed for convincing Victoria to block Bylaw 280

BY LARRY PYNN, VANCOUVER SUN OCTOBER 17, 2014



Ralph McRae, chair of NorthWest Waste Solutions, opposed Bylaw 280 and seeks to open a 'mixed-waste-material recovery facility' — known as MRF — to process waste from multi-family residential buildings and the industrial/commercial/institutional sector.

Photograph by: Arlen Redekop, Vancouver Sun

The future of a \$470-million waste-to-energy project is in doubt after the B.C. government Friday rejected a Metro Vancouver bylaw that would have prohibited waste generated within the region from being transported outside to Abbotsford and beyond to Washington state.

Metro Vancouver chair Greg Moore said regional officials must now meet to determine the future of regional waste management and the prospects for meeting aggressive diversion targets.

"Disappointment is an understatement," the Port Coquitlam mayor said in an interview. "We will need to review all elements of the plan from disposal bans to recycling, to landfilling, to transfer stations and waste to energy."

Moore fingered two companies — Belcorp, operator of the Cache Creek landfill, and hauler BFI Canada/Progressive Waste, which also operates an Abbotsford transfer station — for a high-profile lobbying campaign that persuaded the government.

Belcorp hired lobbyist John Les, the former solicitor general and Chilliwack MLA, as well as former Metro Vancouver chief financial officer Jim Rusnak.

BFI/Progressive hired Dimitri Pantazopoulos, who served as Premier Christy Clark's principal secretary and assistant deputy minister of intergovernmental relations, and also as the Liberals' chief pollster during the 2013 provincial election.

BFI/Progressive executive vice-president Dan Pio praised Environment Minister Mary Polak for "taking the time to carefully consider the consequences of the proposed bylaw on taxpayers and businesses. There is no room for a monopoly in the management of waste."

He added that the province's decision paves the way for the private sector to make greater investments in waste-handling facilities that can more efficiently remove recyclables.

Belcorp vice-president Russ Black called Moore's response a case of "sour grapes" and the province's decision balanced. "The principle of increased taxation in building a \$500-million incinerator hasn't resonated with ... business groups who have to pay for it."

Polak said in a letter to Moore she rejected Bylaw 280 because:

- It "stifles competition," limits options potentially at taxpayers' expense, may result in increased dumping due to increased tipping fees, and might not stop the flow of waste outside the region.
- A recently launched recycling program for packaging and printed paper funded by producers "stands to eliminate the need for flow controls."
- It could have a "destabilizing" effect on the "established waste management system," particularly private companies in the multi-family and industrial-commercial-institutional sectors.
- It might fail to "withstand a trade challenge."

Polak also announced that Marvin Hunt — Liberal MLA for Surrey-Panorama, former Surrey councillor, and former chair of Metro Vancouver's waste committee — will conduct a three-month review of Metro Vancouver's solid waste management plan "focusing on the multi-family and industrial-commercial-institutional waste streams."

The review will also address "the role local government and the private sector play in maximizing diversion from landfills."

Sharon Gaetz, chair of the Fraser Valley Regional District, applauded the province's decision, saying she hopes that Metro Vancouver now abandons any plans for an incinerator that would add emissions to the airshed.

Bylaw 280, approved by Metro Vancouver one year ago, sought to ensure that garbage generated in the region is processed at regional facilities — not transported to areas such as Abbotsford to avoid waste prohibitions and exploit lower dumping charges, and to ultimately be shipped south to a private landfill in the arid Columbia River region of Washington state.

Metro Vancouver vice-chair Raymond Louie criticized the province for ignoring the wishes of 23 communities within the regional district.

"I find it unfortunate that it has taken a year to arrive at a decision that simply avoids the realities of maintaining and enhancing an effective recycling system in favour of the interests of a few big haulers and landfill owners," the Vancouver councillor said.

Metro Vancouver estimates about 160,000 tonnes of waste will be shipped south through Abbotsford into Washington in 2014 — about 100,000 tonnes of that, or 10,000 truck loads, from Metro Vancouver, up from 50,000 tonnes in 2012.

This represents about 20 per cent of the commercial trash collected in the region this year and a loss of about \$11 million in tipping fees, the region estimates.

Moore argued that by diverting garbage away from Metro Vancouver, private companies are undercutting the region's waste-diversion targets of 70 per cent by 2015 and 80 per cent by 2020.

Ralph McRae, chair of NorthWest Waste Solutions, also opposed Bylaw 280 and seeks to open a "mixed-waste-material recovery facility" — known as MRF — to process waste from multi-family residential buildings as well as the industrial/commercial/institutional sector.

McRae has visited MRFs in the San Jose, Calif., area and is confident that modern technology is capable of extracting 80 per cent of garbage in the form of compostable/recyclables.

Moore said he's not convinced MRFs have proven they can effectively handle the region's waste.

McRae noted that Hunt was "instrumental in crafting" Metro Vancouver's Integrated Solid Waste and Resource Management Plan. He criticized Metro for losing its way in its "dogged efforts to increase its annual revenues and build an incinerator that no one wants or needs.

"The private sector is ready, willing and able to deliver the diversion targets the plan demands."

Black said that Belcorp already has a Coquitlam site where it proposes to build a facility to take a "last pass" at waste to remove recyclables such as organics, paper, plastics and metals, a move that would ultimately rob the region of enough material to fuel another waste-to-energy facility.

"Bylaw 280 was always about protecting the volume and fuel value for an incinerator," he argued, adding the bylaw would have created a "police state around waste."

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