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Decision Time [part 6 in waste series]



Garbage is harnessed to become electricity and heat at the Burnaby Waste-To-Energy Facility. More incinerators could be coming to Metro Vancouver.

Mario Bartel / Burnaby News Leader

By [Jeff Nagel - BC Local News](#)

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Burning more garbage to generate energy is Metro Vancouver's preferred strategy to dispose of 1.2 million tonnes of waste per year it says cannot be recycled or diverted.

The region's draft solid waste management plan would allow construction of a new garbage incinerator taking up to 500,000 tonnes per year – the rest would go to the existing Burnaby incinerator or be dumped at the Vancouver Landfill in Delta.

The second choice is to send the waste to an out-of-region incinerator, such as one proposed on Vancouver

Island.

The fallback option is to keep sending garbage to a distant dump, likely the Cache Creek landfill.

The divisive debate has split the Lower Mainland, with competing claims and philosophies of what's best for the environment.

Metro directors must soon weigh the evidence – on everything from incinerator air emissions to toxic dump leachate, from effects on climate change to the implications for recycling.

Written submissions to Metro so far have lined up heavily against a new local incinerator – mirroring much of the opposition at public meetings in the Fraser Valley.

The 90-day consultation period ends July 14. (Although the final two public meetings on the plan are June 16 in Chilliwack and June 17 in New Westminster, there will be another four weeks to submit written comments).

Directors who sit on the Metro waste management committee meet in the second half of July to debate possible amendments to the plan.

Recommendations from there would go to a vote of the full Metro board, likely at the end of July.

Vancouver directors are demanding major changes to the plan.

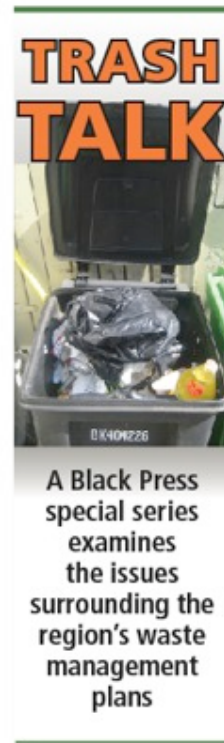
One of their proposed amendments would block "combustion" of more garbage – no new incinerator could be built but other waste-to-energy technologies such as gasification, pyrolysis and anaerobic digestion would be allowed.

The author of the amendment, Vancouver Coun. Heather Deal, said she isn't personally worried about health hazards from a new garbage incinerator.

"I don't have the fear of the technology that some people do," Deal said, adding she was impressed by the pollution controls on modern incinerators she toured in Sweden.

"My concerns are less to do with the health issues, they're more to do with the scale issue."

Deal believes mass-burn incineration, if kept in the mix of waste-to-energy options, will ultimately win because it will be much cheaper to build one big conventional burner. That would shut out the potential for a number of smaller scale waste-to-energy plants using the alternative technologies that Deal argues may make better use of garbage as a resource.



Metro Vancouver politicians decide this summer whether to increase waste-to-energy incineration, landfill garbage, or commit to increased recycling and waste reduction.

This final story in a six-part Black Press series on waste management examines how the decision will be made.

PREVIOUSLY IN THIS SERIES:

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Vancouver directors also want to ban wood waste and kitchen organics from either landfills or incinerators, and to set a new goal to sharply reduce the amount of waste generated per person.

Deal said Vancouver directors haven't made a final decision on what amendments they'll seek – or whether they'll be able to vote for a plan if the rest of the board rejects changes.

Doubts grow

Vancouver's reticence to rubber stamp the draft plan isn't the only crack in what had been a near-united front to pursue waste-to-energy.

City of Coquitlam officials have also tabled a report critical of Metro's process, questioning the focus on incineration and casting doubt on estimates of much lower costs.

Coquitlam Mayor Richard Stewart says he may vote against the current draft plan.

"I've got some real difficulty with the way we seem to be approaching this really significant issue," he said.

One of the frustrations is Metro's plan doesn't specify exactly what waste-to-energy technology would be used or where a new plant would be built – both critical to determining local impacts.

Instead, those are to be determined after the plan is approved in a later competitive bidding process.

Stewart argues such a call for bids should have been done first.

"That's among the flaws of this process," Stewart said. "You have to submit a plan and only then can you begin to figure out what the plan really is."

He won't support Vancouver's anti-combustion amendment because he says incineration should be among the technologies weighed – but without bias.

Waste management committee chair Greg Moore, the mayor of Port Coquitlam, denies Metro's consultations favour incineration.

He maintains Metro's presentations at public meetings focused on that option because officials knew it was intensely controversial and wanted to ensure questions were answered efficiently.

Moore predicts some changes will be

Vancouver Landfill

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MORE RESOURCES

For the public meeting schedule, reports, feedback received so far and the plan itself, see Metro Vancouver's [Draft Integrated Solid Waste and Resource Management Plan page](#)



made to the plan.

If the committee wants to eliminate incineration as an option, he said, it will have to decide whether it's feasible to rely on alternative waste-to-energy options, some of which claim big advantages but with little to no track record.

"If you're going to eliminate incineration, do the other technologies have the capability of taking on the amount of garbage we need to get rid of?"

He said the public has been "very passionate" about reducing garbage, and the committee might well recommend a more aggressive diversion target.



An operator at the Burnaby incinerator raises another load of garbage to be deposited into the combustion chamber. More than 280,000 tonnes of trash is burned there each year. Photo: Mario Bartel / Burnaby News Leader

The draft plan commits the region to raise the recycling rate from 55 to 70 per cent by 2015, when the plan is to be reviewed.

Most of the gains are to come from diverting more wood and organics from the garbage.

Metro's calculations do not provide for improvements such as from new industry-led takeback programs expected to come on stream. Officials say they cannot count on those programs diverting more material because they do not exist yet and depend on action by Victoria.

Senior engineer Dennis Ranahan notes the solid waste management plan is a regulatory document to which Metro will be legally bound.

"It can't be an idealistic or inspirational target," he said. "It's a real target we have to meet."

Over to Victoria

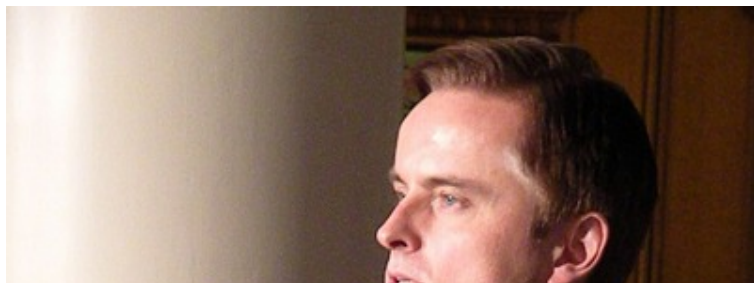
Once passed by Metro's board, the document goes to environment minister Barry Penner – likely by August or early September.

Penner could do one of three things:

- Approve the plan as presented by Metro without changes.
- Make changes himself and then approve the amended plan.
- Flag deficiencies in the plan and send it back for Metro to amend and resubmit.

Potential changes – if Penner feels air quality concerns in the Fraser Valley are paramount – could include eliminating in-region waste-to-energy as an option or just stroking out mass-burn incineration.

Even if the minister approves a Metro plan allowing a new incinerator with in-region waste-to-energy as the preferred disposal



solution, a new burner is no slam dunk.

Metro would first call for proposals and evaluate bids from proponents of various technologies.

If the board then sought to build a new incinerator, Penner could still block that option by refusing to issue an environmental certificate.

Moore doubts that would happen.

"If he believes in-region incineration is not a viable option, I would think that he would take it out," Moore said.

Much money will be spent by bidding companies, he said, and it wouldn't be fair to them if Penner had no intention to approve any incinerator at the environmental assessment stage.

Penner would not discuss such a scenario.

"I'll be giving specific attention to issues related to air quality," he said. "That's just one component, but it's one I'll be looking at very closely."

Penner will be getting advice from ministry staff and could also choose to order further independent research.

The National Collaborating Centre on Health and Environment, based at the B.C. Centre for Disease Control, has also been asked to review the potential health risks from waste-to-energy emissions.

It is expected to report by the end of August, and Penner said he will consider those findings as well.

Once the minister approves a plan it must then be ratified by individual city councils, which are responsible for waste collection and commit under the plan to deliver key initiatives such as organic food waste pickup.



Environment minister Barry Penner (top), Coquitlam Mayor Richard Stewart (above left) and Port Coquitlam Mayor Greg Moore (above right), chair of Metro's waste committee.



Aerial view of the Cache Creek Regional Landfill. About a third of Metro Vancouver's garbage is trucked 350 kilometres east to the site, which accepts up to 500,000 tonnes per year and is slated for expansion. Photo: Arnaldo Rodriguez

Well-connected lobbyists grapple for Metro garbage

Since environment minister Barry Penner has the final say on where Metro Vancouver's garbage goes, several firms hope to influence his decision so they can profit from what will be a lucrative waste-handling contract.

Belcorp Environmental Services, which got the green light from Penner to expand the Cache Creek landfill, could be a virtual shoo-in if the minister strikes waste-to-energy options from Metro's solid waste management plan.

Belcorp employs two men who had Premier Gordon Campbell's trust for years on critical decisions.

Ken Dobell, who was once the premier's deputy minister and special adviser, is registered as an active lobbyist for Belcorp to plead the case for continued use of Cache Creek regional landfill with both Penner and the premier.

Gary Collins, the province's finance minister for the B.C. Liberals' first three years in power, is Belcorp's senior vice-president.

Belcorp has also contributed more than \$100,000 to the B.C. Liberals over the past five years, Elections BC records show.

An even bigger donor is Vancouver Canucks owner Francesco Aquilini, whose firm Aquilini Renewable Energy is behind a proposal to build a waste incinerator on Tsawwassen First Nation land.

Individually or via his companies, Aquilini has contributed \$432,000 since 2005 to the Liberals.

The most advanced proposal for a new incinerator is one Covanta Energy hopes to build at the site of a former pulp mill at Gold River on Vancouver Island.

The New Jersey-based firm had a former B.C. Liberal party president lobbying Penner on its behalf up until last year.

Covanta already has all environmental permits in place and only requires a deal with Metro. It would be a likely frontrunner if Metro is barred from building an in-region waste-to-energy plant but is permitted to send waste to an out-of-region facility.

The Cement Association of Canada is also lobbying Penner.

Local cement plants have a stake in whether Metro's plan allows them to continue burning wood waste or potentially to begin burning refuse-derived fuel. Switching from coal allows them to save money and claim big greenhouse gas reductions.

Rabanco, the U.S. operator of a landfill in Washington State that wants Metro waste, also has a registered lobbyist pressing the province to relax its stance against garbage exports.

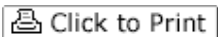
Other firms with registered lobbyists include one that wants to build an anaerobic digester to process food waste.

Penner said his decision won't be influenced by lobbying or corporate donations.

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