

CLIMATE LEADERS TAKE ON ENERGY EAST

Mon evening May 29th, I watched the spectacle of our city council struggle with the decision of whether or not to oppose Energy East Pipeline. There were six presenters - each, including questions from council, taking about 30 minutes. TransCanada Pipelines explained how good they were and that re-purposing 60-year-old gas pipe was a good idea. Next came the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) which explained the types of oil that would go through the pipe: primarily Tar Sands bitumen, thinned 25% with naphtha, benzene and other light hydrocarbons to make it flow, and the regular (explosive) Bakken crude from Saskatchewan and Manitoba. He also explained that until the pipeline is built they would have to continue to ship this oil by rail tanker car, up to around 1600 cars a day. The local pipeline repair company Summit Pipelines, explained what they did, that they had about 150 employees and that the conversion of the pipeline would add about 100 more employees. The Labourers Union presented and explained how they were looking forward to additional construction work on pumping stations. Common Voice Northwest next presented findings of a 13-community consultation about significant waterways, special sensitive areas that needed attention and made some recommendations for areas that needed further studies. They were quite critical of the lack of thoroughness of the TransCanada's proposal to build Energy East. The last deputation was from a coalition of local environmental and social justice groups. Their thrust was on Climate Change, the need for reduction not expansion of tar sands development and how our City and Council have been proactive leaders in this field. They were asking Council to lead the way forward to a low fossil fuel economy. Council's response was as follows: Councillor Foulds struggled with jobs vs climate change but settled on rejection of Energy East as the most responsible choice. Mayor Keith Hobbs was quite indignant that the Energy East proposal did not consider the Lake Superior basin, the Kam River, Dog River and English River systems to be significant. Water is life. He was also very upset at the evidence of the lack of appropriate consultation by Trans Canada with local indigenous populations. He voted to oppose the Energy East pipeline. Councillor Paul Pugh voted against Energy East. His constituents have suffered directly from Climate Change-caused flooding. He spoke passionately about the need to transition away from fossil fuels. Councillor Shelby Ch'ng voted to oppose the Energy East Pipeline, but did not speak during the discussion. Iain Angus lead the charge to support Energy East. He delivered a 5-minute monologue describing his fear of a Lac Megantic-type explosion in Neebing, Westfort or Simpson Street rail yards, the rail lines through Marina Park all the way to Current River. According to Mr. Angus, this was a safety issue; he depicted the petroleum producers and shippers as a threat to our city, and we need to approve Energy East so they won't have to send up to 1500 tanker cars each and every day through our city. Apparently Councillor Angus prefers to feed peoples' fears rather than lead on improving rail safety. Westfort Councillor Virdiramo quickly jumped on the same bandwagon to protect Westfort residents from annihilation. He voted to approve Energy East. Next, Neebing Ward. Councillor Rydholm was glad to approve a pipeline 60 kilometres away from the City to protect Neebing residents from oil-by-rail. Councillor Hebert apologized to all those people who contacted him to oppose Energy East because he also felt he had to support the pipeline. So much for Climate Leaders! Most of our City Council pooped out and chose to live in fear of the future.

Tom Cook