

Answers to Scugog's burning incinerator questions

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Following up on a series of questions raised at last week's committees meeting about the lavish August event, Mayor Mercier told his council colleagues on Nov. 14 that he had e-mailed Regional Chairman Roger Anderson about their concerns.

In response, Mr. Anderson said the summer gala came with a price tag of \$72,000, with the cost shared evenly between Durham, York Region and Covanta, the firm that will build and operate the energy-from-waste facility.

Durham Region's share, about \$24,000, will come out of taxpayers' wallets via the gas-tax funds which are distributed to municipalities, said Mayor Mercier.

That expenditure was endorsed as "a line item in the budget" when Durham approved the incinerator in 2009, he added.

Regional staff was not given "a blank cheque" when it came to planning the extravagant affair, but they were directed to "make it a class event" due to the European visitors and other high-ranking officials and politicians invited to the ceremony, said Mayor Mercier.

He did, however, acknowledge that perhaps the Region could have been more open about the party price-tag and maybe even rein in the costs a bit.

"It would have had a lot more scrutiny attached to it," said Mayor Mercier. "If we did it again, I think we'd take a different tact and be more open to the existing councillors so we could have comment."

However, even with the party tab finally unveiled, the regional chairman's answers didn't sit well with Ward 5 Councillor Howard Danson.

"It's absolutely outrageous and I'd tell that to Roger Anderson's face if I had a chance," he said.

Coun. Danson said he remained confused by conflicting reports over who would pay what for the groundbreaking ceremony and questioned whether the cost of the heavy Durham police presence and the use of the force's helicopter were included in that tally.

"This money that was spent, whether it was directly from the taxpayers or the gas tax, should have gone to the benefit of the community," he said.

Given the 200 guests and the confirmed price of the party, "it cost me and everyone

else in this room about \$400 per person," added the Ward 5 councillor.

He also noted that reports suggested the Region spent \$30 apiece on mini-shovel souvenirs, a tad less than how much municipal taxes were hiked on the average Scugog home in 2010.

"We raised property taxes \$34 ... and (taxpayers) see \$30 spent on a memento like this, I don't know how they'd feel about that," said Coun. Danson.

"They don't get it," he continued. "(Roger Anderson) doesn't get it and (the York Region chairman) doesn't get it. This is taxpayers' money and I'm absolutely outraged."

Scugog's mayor pledged that he's awaiting "further answers, this is not over yet. I don't disagree with anything you've said."