

# Johnston backs new look at regional composting

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By ANGELA BLACKBURN  
The Champion

A Halton Hills councillor believes Halton Region should go into the composting business to make money. That was Halton Hills regional

Councillor Pam Johnston's advice at Wednesday's regional planning and public works committee.

"Does it stink?" asked Milton councillor and regional waste management committee chair Barry Lee, after the committee heard Ms

Johnston's review of an \$8 million Vancouver area composting plant.

Ms Johnston said she began investigating composting and has visited seven plants since early 1994, after Equity Waste Management applied to build a composting facility in

Halton Hills. The Equity application is currently on hold, but Halton Region is reviewing composting.

"We're well positioned with our new landfill facility and the property that we do have there, to look at making money with compost," said Ms Johnston. The councillor also made three other reports on landfill-related issues. The committee steered her composting report to the Region's composting sub-committee for review.

"We do have a committee which is reviewing this. What more do you want us to do?" asked Oakville Councillor Stephen Sparling, noting the Region has been investigating composting for two years.

Currently, the Region is observing a Peel composting pilot project, is looking at Energy-from-Waste (EFW) operations in Brampton and Hamilton (established prior to the NDP government EFW ban in recognition the policy could change) and is studying organic waste collection systems, including a proposal for single tier garbage pick-up in Halton.

Ms Johnston said while composting operations aren't profitable, the one in Aldergrove, B.C., which is owned by Consolidated Envirowaste Industries, is, as well as being well-managed.

Mr. Lee also had questions about securing government approvals for the operation, which led Oakville Councillor Fred Oliver to suggest the plant wasn't feasible in Ontario. Ontario has environmental standards which make it difficult, and expensive, to secure approvals for landfill-related operations.

Ms Johnston said the Vancouver composting operation uses technology similar to that proposed by Equity Waste Management for its Hornby plant. However, while some outdoors

mixing of materials is done at the B.C. plant, Ms. Johnston recommended all work in an urban environment be done indoors.

"The Vancouver operation processes waste for the local area municipalities and receives revenue for tipping fees as well as sale of its products to mass merchandisers.

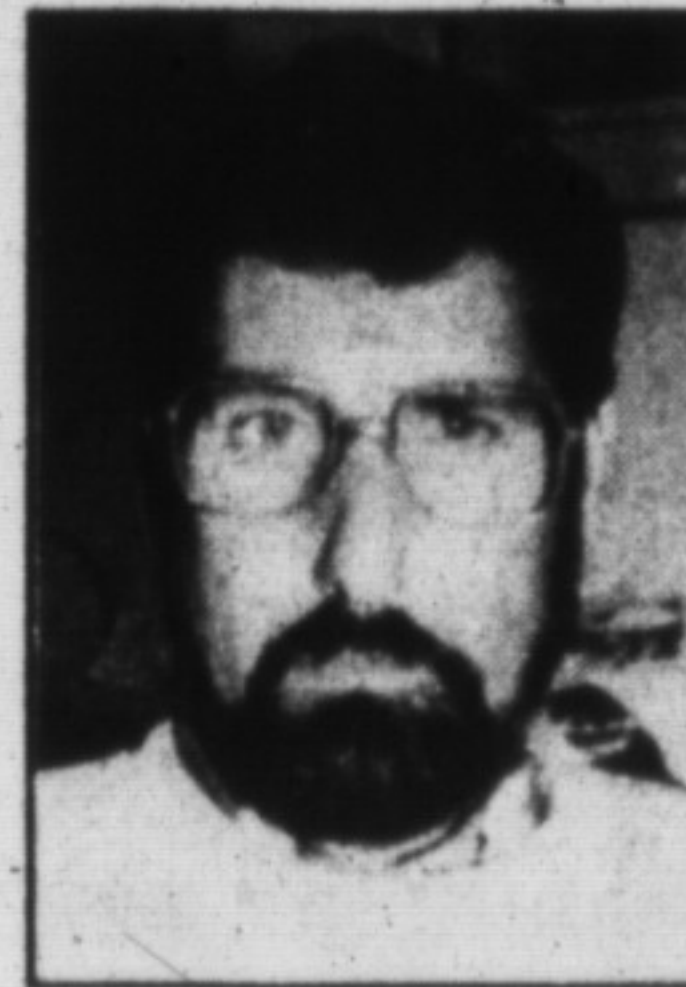
"I believe Halton could successfully and competitively market their compost products to the community," said Ms. Johnston.

Mr. Lee said the Vancouver site appeared to be "in the boonies and sort of isolated from conflicting users." The Town of Milton has in the past dealt with residents' odor complaints about an open-air composting facility run in Milton, Scott's Composting.

During a related report by Ms Johnston on improving regional sludge operations, public works commissioner Art Leitch said, "It's always been a dream-of-mine to make sludge a revenue generator but farmers are so reluctant to spend money on it, we haven't been able to crack that market."

Mr. Lee, himself a farmer, has similarly questioned the compost market. The province has directed municipalities to reduce waste by 50 per cent and Halton has already cut its by 35 per cent, however Mr. Leitch said the remaining 15 per cent will have to come out of diversion of organic waste from the landfill.

Mr. Leitch favors looking at integrated garbage and blue box collection on alternate weeks with weekly organic garbage pick-up. Up to 40 per cent of Halton's waste is organic — papers, meat, food scraps, grass, etc. It's those organics that cause problems at a landfill site with gases, leachate and seagulls.



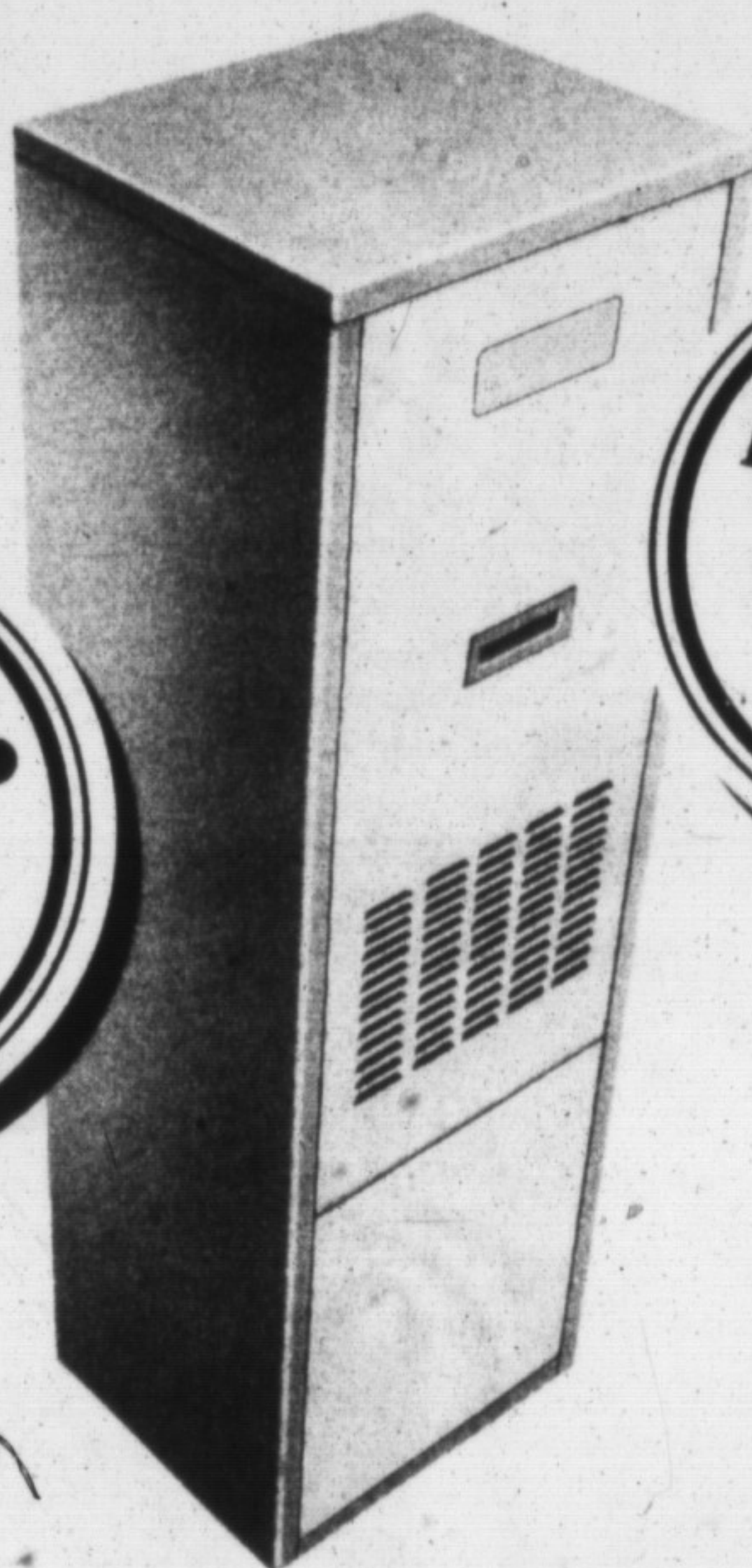
**'Does it stink?'**

Milton Councillor Barry Lee on a Vancouver compost business.



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