

City Councillor Paul Ainslie says long lines at the microphone at a consultation Nov. 24, 2008 left some constituents exhausted

Councillor enters fray between locals, activists over energy proposal off Scarborough Bluffs

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IAIN MARLOW

STAFF REPORTER

City Councillor Paul Ainslie has demanded another public meeting on a controversial wind turbine project, after complaining that bused-in activists made him wait more than 2 1/2 hours to ask a question on Monday night.

Many of his constituents from the Scarborough Bluffs area left that public consultation early – some elderly and exhausted, others simply fed up, Ainslie said.

"It was frustrating," he said. "It was about 40 minutes before someone from the affected area actually got to a microphone."

The meeting was Toronto Hydro's second attempt to hold a public consultation after an earlier event in a small church hall left about 200 people outside.

But Ainslie says his constituents deserve yet another meeting because they were denied a voice by the sheer number of environmentalists, students and union members who turned up to support the proposed offshore power project.

David O'Brien, chief executive of Toronto Hydro, promised Monday a meeting for those who lived near the bluffs would be arranged.

Roughly 1,000 people overflowed Sir Wilfrid Laurier Collegiate's auditorium. Attendance swelled under efforts by environmental groups and unions to bus in people favouring the project.

"Some of my residents ended up in the overflow room," Ainslie complained, noting that many of his senior residents could not physically stay for the entire meeting, which began at 7:30 p.m. and ended at roughly 11:20 p.m.

The project, which involves testing wind off the Scarborough Bluffs to determine feasibility of a wind farm over a potential 26-kilometre span 2 to 4 kilometres offshore, has crystallized into a case of local residents pitted against a broader coalition of progressive activists.

Some residents fear soiled natural beauty, lowered property values and outsiders lecturing them on sacrificing for the greater good. Activists view the entire affair as another example of the NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) principle wrecking sound environmental policies.

Brenda Sun, 51, arrived here 21 years ago from China, with only \$90 U.S., and vowed to buy a home in Guildwood. In July 2008, "I realized my dream," she said.

She walks along the lake every morning and greets her neighbours. "You need to live there. You love the area and then you can say something from the bottom of your heart. It's not politics," she said. "I think, Canadian people – you're born here, you live here, you see this every day – get used to the beauty and you even take it for granted ... We shouldn't damage this beauty."

Carolyn Egan, president of the United Steelworkers Toronto Area Council, attended the meeting and told the *Star* yesterday many of her members live nearby.

She stressed that building green technology, such as wind turbines, could offset the immense job loss in North America's manufacturing sector.

"Obviously, the residents have a right to their perspective, certainly," Egan said. "But I think a lot of other people came out to the meeting because they're concerned about the future of the Toronto area, the future of the country – the environmental future, the economic future."

Toronto Hydro and Ainslie's office have discussed another meeting, but no date has been set.

The plan has the backing of other politicians, including Premier Dalton McGuinty, who, speaking to reporters yesterday, said the province needs to be more accepting when it comes to the future of power generation.

"We have wind and sun. We have to raise our level of acceptance for those kinds of structures, which are harnessing clean sources of renewable energy," he said.

McGuinty acknowledged that residents are concerned. "I understand that. But we have some tough choices to make. We need to open up our minds to these possibilities."

With files from Tanya Talaga