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DEEP-SET DIFFERENCES

Public hearings begins Monday on a proposal to construct an underground nuclear dump site near Lake Huron



ERIKA SIMPSON

Four weeks of public hearings will begin Monday in Kincardine and Port Elgin, Ont., on a proposal by Ontario Power Generation (OPG) to design, construct, operate and eventually abandon underground storage for nuclear waste on the Bruce nuclear site near Kincardine.

This Deep Geologic Repository, or DGR, would be the only one of its kind in Canada. It would handle low- and intermediate-level nuclear waste from OPG nuclear generators at Bruce, Pickering and Darlington. It would be located within 1.6 kilometres of the Lake Huron shore in caverns dug in sedimentary rock.

Because the intention to bury nuclear waste is precedent-setting and the repository is close to a valuable water resource, the proposal is subject to considerable federal and provincial input and opposition from communities and organizations across North America.

If approved, the DGR would be designed to store a minimum of 200,000 cubic metres of radioactive waste permanently. It would not accept high-level waste — that is, irradiated nuclear fuel — but it would receive filters, equipment, tools, workers’ outfits, materials used to clean up radioactive spills, reactor core pipes and tubes removed during refurbishment, and steam generators.

The waste would be shipped to Kincardine, packed in containers, and stored in limestone caverns. OPG seems confident the limestone would be sufficient to contain the waste as it is very thick and stable, and has lain undisturbed by environmental or geological changes for more than 450 million years. While OPG recognizes that limestone is water soluble, it claims that the rock is of such low permeability at the proposed depths that it is unlikely the waste will leak into the water table.

Opponents’ predominant concern is that nuclear waste has never been successfully disposed of. Proposals to dispose nuclear waste at the Asse Mine in Germany and Yucca Mountain in the U.S. have been embarrassing and costly failures. We have no experience to determine what might go wrong. There are many risks in transportation and storage plus questions about the limestone’s stability if it is affected by construction of the caverns, or even targeted by terrorists.

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Paul Lachine illustration



Arts centre must be inclusive

Near the end of Wednesday’s public consultation on the options for a new performing arts centre in London, London Fringe executive director Kathy Navackas took to an open mic to gently chide presenters from the Grand Theatre and Orchestra London.



LARRY CORNIES

As diplomatically as she could, she put forth that the two major proponents of ambitious plans for new performance venues hadn’t bothered to consult with smaller arts groups and independent artists in the city, and that any new facility would ultimately miss the mark if it didn’t take that full cultural sector into consideration.

It was only a short exchange in an efficiently moderated two-hour discussion about the orchestra’s proposal for a “celebration centre” and the theatre’s hope’s for a new “community arts centre.”

But to the author of a new report on the interplay between music and innovation, Navackas was pointing to an important link: that between the music venues of today’s most innovative cities and their ability to attract innovative talent and the creative class.

Jeff Leiper, vice-president for strategic communications, research and policy with the Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC) in Ottawa, is the lead author of a report released last month on how a city’s music scene can act as a catalyst for the development of technology hubs and innovation.

In an interview Thursday, Leiper said “the more a city can do to make a new venue amenable, not just to symphonic music, but also to rock, hip-hop, jazz and the blues,” the more successful it will be at attracting and retaining creative individuals, from technology workers to bureaucrats.

The ICTC study is clear about the extent to which municipal governments shape their own destinies when it comes to establishing themselves as centres of creativity: “The promotion of music scenes in municipalities is a conscious choice that can be made by city councils.”

What, exactly is a music scene? The ICTC report defines it as “the presence of a community of musicians and bands that support each other” alongside recording studios, radio stations and venues, both permanent and temporary, that provide outlets for expression.

“There are places to play music, including both permanent venues and music festivals. There is usually a forward thinking municipal government that makes it easy for venues, festivals and bands to thrive. It is also important to have access to capital and loans or grants for emerging music businesses,”

the study notes.

The report also sweeps aside any doubt about the relationship between the creative arts and economic development. “Creative industries, music included, now represent a significant proportion of many countries’ GDPs. Supporting the development of creative industries at the local, provincial/ regional and national levels is therefore part of many government’s economic growth strategies.

“Given the impact that music scenes have on the attraction and retention of top-notch talent and quality ICT employers, governments are well-advised to focus on the quality and diversity of their cultural industries as a tool for economic development. This requires support at all levels of government.”

The report offers a case study of Austin, Texas — the southern U.S. city of 820,000 with which former London mayor Dianne Haskett arranged an exchange of high-profile trade missions in 1994-95. There, city officials have found that quality of life is a major factor in the decision of new, innovative enterprises about locating in the city. “Always, without exception, quality of life comes up — and music is often a part of that discussion,” one senior city administrator said.

Since its focus on music and its associated activities began in the late 1980s, Austin has become home to more than 21 annual music festivals.

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