

June 3, 2008

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

City Council on May 26 and 27, 2008, referred the following Motion to the Executive Committee:

MM21.2 Request Federal and Provincial Governments to Abandon Food-Based Biofuel Policy

Moved by Councillor Walker, seconded by Councillor Jenkins

SUMMARY:

Biofuels are renewable liquid fuels made from plant matter rather than fossil fuels. Today's primary biofuels are ethanol and biodiesel. Biofuels, being derived from plant life, are generated by solar energy and photosynthesis, either on an annual basis (crops, grasses, etc.) or over a period of a number of years (trees). A drawback for biodiesel is diesel engines are prematurely damaged by the composition of biodiesel to such an extent that our industrial and service sectors would not be able to use it on a sustained basis.

Biofuels do work as a supplement or replacement for fossil fuels, but the scale of use is the main issue with them, since our over consumption of energy, particularly energy for transportation (over 50% of our total consumption), cannot be met with biofuels alone. Also, there is not enough agricultural land to replace our current use of oil so we are not going to be flying biofuel 747s.

Biofuels can help reduce toxic air emissions, greenhouse gas build-up, and dependence on imported oil, while supporting Canadian agriculture. But it's not that simple because much of our agriculture production is already needed to feed people.

Not all biofuels are created equal. Some are more energy intensive in their production than others; some, like corn-based ethanol, upset our food chain by using a food crop already in great demand by people across the world, especially for those in developing countries. Corn for fuel is particularly problematic because it uses great amounts of fuel to farm; as well corn is a staple food and an ingredient in many non-food products (i.e. cornstarch in toothpaste). Since the demand for corn for-food cannot be met, there will not be a time when corn can be reasonably used for fuel. Therefore, it should not be used for fuel.

For the “bottom billion”, the people who subsist on less than \$1 a day, who are going hungry due to North America and Europe’s shortsighted switch to corn-based ethanol biofuels production, the created worldwide shortage in corn for food simply cannot continue. Canada and the rest of the world cannot continue to use a food crop to produce biofuels to replace our dependence upon oil or the problems of the developing world will continue to grow exponentially.

To continue our fostering of biofuels, we can use a plant that is not a crop right now. “Switchgrass” is a plant which can be used to create biofuels. Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*) is a tall grass that once covered the North American prairies so it is definitely native to our growing cycles. Furthermore, one can harvest Switchgrass with common baling equipment used for wheat. There is no conflicting use for this plant and it is not labour nor resource intensive to grow for harvest. In fact, Switchgrass yields three times the energy output compared to corn.

The Provincial and Federal governments should not continue to encourage corn-based biofuel production and should revisit their biofuel energy policies altogether. Their respective biofuel policies need to ensure that our national fuel production does not exacerbate the world food crisis, upset the food chain, and our Canadian economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That City Council request the Federal and Provincial governments to cease their policies and incentive programs for food-based biofuel production (particularly from corn), and invest in alternative sources that do not conflict with Canada’s or the world’s consumer food-chain, such as the plant Switchgrass or other renewable resources such as hydrogen fuel cells, wind turbines, photovoltaic solar cells, geothermal wells, et cetera.
2. That City Council forward this resolution to the Prime Minister of Canada, the Premier of Ontario and the respective Leaders of the Opposition at the Provincial and Federal levels.
3. That City Council direct the City Manager and Deputy City Manager, Mr. Richard Butts, to report to the September 2008 meeting of Executive Committee regarding strategies and opportunities for fostering alternative sources of energy generation suitable in urban environment such as Toronto’s.

for City Clerk

M. Toft/cd