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## Tire waste plants deserve independent evaluations

"Refuse-to-energy" has a nice ring to it. Throw the old tires on the pile and dump your trash here, and everybody will live happily ever after.

The problem is real; in fact, it's huge. The disposal of solid waste may soon dwarf all other municipal service problems if the recent thrusts towards a solution don't bear fruit pretty soon. Imagine what life would be like if Derry lost its disposal outlet, as towns in the Durham refuse-to-energy plant area did recently.

Londonderry's plan to ship its solid waste to a new plant in Manchester may have just gone up in smoke when Vicon withdrew its application for a plant. Derry has signed an agreement with a Massachusetts firm, Power Resources Systems (PRS), to locate a prototype plant here, but no state permits have been obtained and its technology seems to raise more questions than answers.

Plants of this type require huge amounts of trash to be profitable. PRS apparently plans to ship into Derry a major share of the waste it needs from Massachusetts. Where the tires will come from for the Oxford plant no one has yet answered in specifics; that plant also awaits state approval.

We commend the mayor and council for exploring the prospects, but it seems to us that promises about "tax windfalls" and electricity sales fall more into the category of pie-in-the-sky than good, hard cash and acceptable solutions for the town. Oxford says it has an electricity sales agreement with UNITIL (a power utility in New Hampshire); but UNITIL tells us it does not. PRS says it has state permits already; but the state tells us it does not.

Who to believe? There isn't a municipality in the country

that has solved its solid waste needs cheaply and safely and still meets EPA standards. It's not that solutions come easily, nor that Derry area towns shouldn't be searching for answers, for they must. In fact, the transfer site in Derry, only a few hundred yards off Interstate 93, would seem to be the perfect site for both plants. But where is the feeder road system going to go? Why aren't all area towns working with Derry on this as a joint regional project?

Why are the leading candidates to build the projects not being totally forthright about permits, "tax windfalls", daily volumes and from where cometh the waste? And what environmental consequences must we expect?, etc.... We suggest that these questions raise issues of far greater consequence to the future of the area than roads, "municipal complexes" or even schools.

The pursuit of solutions to our mounting solid waste problems seems to be driven by the public works director, who as a competent bureaucrat, says the technology will work. Mayor Paul Collette is doing his best to understand, while the six councilors seem to be along for the ride. No criticism intended here, just a nagging fear that we may be led into something the town will always regret.

It might comfort such fears if the mayor were to appoint a "blue ribbon commission" of competent local citizens with appropriate backgrounds to evaluate both the tire and refuse-to-energy plants and offer the rest of us some balanced evaluations. This isn't like building a bypass and only some people get hurt; these twin projects could hurt, or benefit, all people living in and around Derry for miles to come.

C. Q.