

## **Bid to burn more trash near ballpark turned down**

The Minneapolis Planning Commission, citing health effects, rejected Hennepin County's bid to allow more garbage to be burned daily.

By **STEVE BRANDT**, *Star Tribune*

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Hennepin County's bid to burn more garbage next to the new Minnesota Twins stadium crumpled Monday in the face of skepticism from Minneapolis planning commissioners over the potential health effects. The county had sought approval of a 21 percent increase in the daily average tonnage of garbage burned at the downtown facility. But on Monday evening, the Planning Commission voted 6-2 to deny an amendment to the facility's zoning permit that would have allowed the burning of more than 1,200 tons of trash daily.

A majority of commissioners said they're not convinced that increasing the plant's burning of trash is consistent with a required finding that such an action isn't detrimental to public health.

But the debate may not be over. The commission's decision can be appealed to the City Council within 10 days, and it runs counter to the advice of the city attorney's office. The county and incinerator operator Covanta Energy referred a reporter to each other on the question of an appeal.

Carl Michaud, the county's environmental services director, said he needed to "go back and talk to a few folks" before commenting on an appeal. He disputed the assertion of planning commissioners that there was insufficient analysis of the plant's environmental effects. "We're well within our authority to say no," Commissioner Carla Bates argued before the vote. Commissioners cited the admission of Covanta's environmental director, Jeffrey Hahn, that burning more trash will result in a small amount of additional plant emissions, but he said that pollutants will remain far below limits set by the state. Hahn said the plant has already added some equipment and would add more to reduce nitrogen oxide emissions that are closest to the current limit.

An opinion by the city attorney's office warned that "anecdotal testimony that more throughput equates to more pollution which equates to bad health effects is not a sufficient basis to deny." But commissioners also found that burning more trash runs counter to city sustainability and

growth policies.

The burner was constructed in the 1980s with a state limit that it could burn an average of 1,000 tons of trash per day incorporated into its city zoning permit. The state cap was increased to the plant's 1,212-ton-per-day design capacity in 2000. One of the legislators involved, Sen. Linda Higgins, DFL-Minneapolis, said that the intent was to make use of unused capacity, and that the plant burns cleaner than in its early days. But the North Loop Neighborhood Association, which reviewed the proposal, said it would favor a 10 percent increase in the plant's processing only if there was no increase in pollutants released. The plant generates enough electricity to power the equivalent of 25,000 homes and also supplies steam for downtown heat.

The county and Covanta relied heavily on a finding in ballpark environmental studies that the incinerator's health effects are below levels at which concern for ballpark users would be triggered under federal standards. But opponents argued that health effects on a broader area of emission dispersion need to be measured and considered.

The Minneapolis City Council hasn't weighed in on incinerator capacity issues for more than 20 years.

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