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Nuclear expansion expected in Ontario: Report may recommend more electric generation to serve future demand

TORONTO - Initial groundwork for a multibillion-dollar expansion of Ontario's Darlington nuclear site could start "within a month" of the release next week of a key report on the province's energy future, sources said Thursday.

The Ontario government is to announce shortly after receiving the report that it is seeking **environmental assessments** to increase the capacity at the nuclear station by 50 per cent, sources told The Canadian Press.

The report from the Ontario Power Authority, originally scheduled to be delivered to the government on Thursday, is now expected to be received Dec. 9.

The report is widely expected to support expanding Ontario's nuclear generating capacity to ensure the province has enough power in coming decades. Ontario needs to refurbish, rebuild or replace 25,000 megawatts of supply over the next 15 years.

While the report won't specify where nuclear expansion projects should take place, sources say it will act as a catalyst for the government to announce an expansion at Darlington, located 80 kilometres east of Toronto in the town of Clarington.

"There is going to be some action, very quickly after" receiving the report, a source said.

Environmental assessments over several years need to be completed before the project can proceed.

"There's great urgency to do the **environmental assessments**," the source said.

The province is said to be considering construction of two 900-megawatt Candu reactor units at Darlington, which would generate enough power for more than one million homes. It would take up to a decade to complete the project.

The province recently approved a deal allowing Bruce Power to refurbish four units at its nuclear generating station on the shore of Lake Huron.

Energy Minister Donna Cansfield maintains no further decisions on nuclear expansion have been made.

But public support increased Wednesday night when the council of Durham Region, a broader jurisdiction that includes Clarington, unanimously endorsed support for a nuclear expansion at Darlington.

Community commitment

"Obviously, it's nice to have the community make their commitments," Cansfield said Thursday.

"But for us, we're going to wait until the Ontario Power Authority brings out its report."

But there's plenty of activity regarding a Darlington expansion already taking place.

Sources say Jim Hankinson, president of Ontario Power Generation, which operates the Darlington facility, is privately urging Premier Dalton McGuinty to move ahead on an expansion project soon.

Clarington Mayor John Mutton also met last month with Ontario's deputy minister of energy, James Gillis, to discuss plans for Darlington.

"There's just such a silent campaign going on -- everyone is gearing up for the **environmental assessments**," a source said.
