



April 2021 news brief

A recent proposal by HRM and MIRROR, operators of the Otter Lake Landfill in Timberlea has once again come under scrutiny. This proposal would see the removal of two critical processes at the Otter Lake Landfill in Timberlea, according to Reg Rankin, Executive Director of the Otter Lake Community Monitoring Committee. This is the third attempt by HRM since 2013 to remove these processes critical to the effective operation of the landfill.

In 2017, Community Monitoring Chair Scott Guthrie explained in a letter to HRM Mayor Mike Savage “Another review would be unproductive and risk eroding public’s trust in your government’s ability to stand by its decisions.”

The letter went on to say “Nova Scotia’s Environment Department has steadfastly supported the Otter Lake communities and we see no reason why it would not stand by the Community should there be another effort by HRM to alter the landfill operating permit and Halifax Waste Resource Society’s contract with HRM”.

According to Mr. Rankin, “The matter goes back to 2013 when one of the most pointed responses to HRM’s attempt to remove these processes came from former Mayor Walter Fitzgerald who, on behalf of the Halifax Regional Council, signed the enduring agreement with the affected communities surrounding the landfill. Mayor Fitzgerald said “I am in favour of cost savings like everyone else, but not at the expense of a community. We agreed to give environmental and community safeguards to those residents who generously allowed a regional landfill to be located in their community. All other communities refused.”

The two processes HRM seeks to remove (called the Front End Processing and Waste Stabilization Process) are critical in achieving the delivery of acceptable waste to the landfill. Acceptable waste is waste that is sorted and processed to the point where it does not release odours that attract rodents, birds and other scavenging animals to the landfill site.

These two processes are unique to the Otter Lake facility and, according to Mr. Rankin, is what makes the Otter Lake Facility special when comparing it to two other landfills used in the HRM/MIRROR Report, namely the Colchester Balefill and Composting Facility and the Guysborough Waste Management Facility. The latter two sites do attract birds, animals and other rodents says Mr. Rankin as shown in the photos on this page.

The CMC representative was denied access to the West Hants Landfill, the third site compared with Otter Lake.

Mr. Guthrie went into greater detail on the situation offering the following comments.

It is very unfortunate that we find ourselves in this repeated discussion every four years shortly after a municipal election. Many “promises” were made to the communities directly adjacent to this facility that enabled it to be sited in our communities. Sadly, there is a persistent

attempt to erode and erase these promises potentially leaving the neighbouring communities within Districts 11, 12 and 13 to deal with negative environmental, odour and rodent impacts commonly associated with a typical landfill operation. The community has spoken loud and clear each and every time, be it at a community town hall, municipal survey, letters to past councilors and a variety of other means, and the message is clear, “Leave Otter Lake Alone”. Stop asking for what has been denied so many times.”

The municipality of HRM would argue that these two processes are redundant and no longer necessary. We do a great job as citizen’s source separating our residential waste at curbside. Residential waste makes up 33% of the total waste generated within the boundaries of HRM. This is a good news story and our accomplishments should be celebrated, not punished with the removal of these protective measures.

The critical issue is the other 67% of unsorted and contaminate waste that is currently being exported outside HRM to other landfills. This is industrial, commercial and institutional waste. This waste includes waste from restaurants, hospitals, commercial operations, high rise apartments, schools, grocery stores, etc. This waste stream includes dumpster locations that are cross contaminated with all the waste that is banned from the Otter Lake facility by the protective measures currently in place. This waste is now trucked outside HRM to be dumped in other landfill sites that have less processing and protective measures in place.

The primary concern in removing the protections currently provided by the Front End Processing and Waste Stabilization is that, once gone, we will not get it back. Then what happens when HRM no longer desires or is able to export its industrial, commercial and institutional waste and it returns to Otter Lake? The return of this waste could happen either because it is now cheaper, offers a reduced carbon footprint or the other municipalities simply refuse to take our waste. We would then have no choice and no other place to put it. It would be deposited into Otter Lake landfill without the protections that have served our communities well for the past 22 + years.

It is important to understand we are not against changes that are more efficient and cost effective so long as they maintain, or better yet, exceed the protections we have today, which protections were originally agreed upon in 1997 by all stakeholders, knowingly, including the operator and HRM.

Chairman Scott Guthrie went on to say “There is another option to consider. If we can export 67% of our unsorted waste to other municipalities for disposal at a very significant savings, well let’s also export the remaining 33% of our source separated residential waste and close the Otter Lake Solid Waste Facility entirely. After all, the original contract between the Operator and HRM was for 25 years. We are almost at that time now. We could begin the remediation process to return the site and

surrounding lands back to nature and the Western Common Wilderness Protected Area. Just close the facility. I am pretty sure the majority of the residents in the neighbouring communities would support this action.”

More details and further formal responses to HRM can be found on the Otter Lake Community Monitoring website www.otterlakecmc.ca under the heading CMC News.



Colchester Balefill & Composting Facility



Guysborough Waste Management Facility



Otter Lake Landfill Facility

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Otter Lake Community Monitoring Committee Members

HRM Council Representatives (4)

Mayor Mike Savage
 District 11 Councillor Patty Cuttel
 District 12 Councillor Iona Stoddart
 District 13 Councillor Pamela Lovelace

Volunteer Members-at-Large , Appointed by HRM Council (2)

Jamil Sinno
 Daniel McNamara

Volunteer Directors from the Halifax Waste-Resource Society (9)

Scott Guthrie, Chair , Halifax
 Tom Robertson, Vice-Chair, Hubley
 Maureen Yeadon, Secretary, Prospect
 Andrew Giles, Treasurer, Dartmouth
 Peter Lund, Dartmouth
 Raïssa Musial, Hubley
 Ali Duale, Beechville
 Murray Power, Hubley
 Frank Johnston, Prospect