

Briefing from the CMC Chair on Proposed Changes to the Otter Lake Landfill

The Issue

Changes proposed to the **Otter Lake Landfill** operations in Timberlea, which handle the Halifax Regional Municipality's solid waste, have the potential to create environmental problems for the surrounding communities in Beechville, Timberlea, Lakeside and others in the vicinity, as well as a string of communities in the Prospect and Hubley areas. Also, at risk is the international reputation of the Otter Lake Landfill facility as a beacon of innovation for waste managers around the world.

The Otter Lake Community Monitoring Committee (CMC), set up in 1999 by agreement of HRM and the Halifax Waste-Resource Society to represent the interests of the landfill's surrounding residents, has reached these conclusions, based on recent events. As Chair of the Board of Directors, I am outlining our concerns, here, mindful of our duty to the communities we serve.

What's Happened

July 20, HRM decided to ask the Nova Scotia Department of Environment and Climate Change to end the use of Otter Lake's front-end processor and waste stabilization facility, principally to save an estimated \$2 million, but also in the belief that sufficient advancement has been made in residential garbage sorting that the effects on the landfill would be negligible.

The Department of Environment and Climate Change received the application, dated Aug. 26, from HRM and from Mirror Nova Scotia, the company managing the Otter Lake Landfill, asking permission to discontinue the front-end processor and to stop using the waste stabilization facility.

In response, the Department of Environment and Climate Change has asked HRM and Mirror Nova Scotia to hold public consultations to complete its application.

When the consultation process is completed, the Department of Environment and Climate Change will have 60 days to accept or reject the application.



A conveyor moving garbage in the front-end processor, Otter Lake Landfill.

Why it Matters

Otter Lake's front-end processor and waste stabilizer are the innovative features of the Otter Lake Landfill that, as HRM initially promised, have protected surrounding residents from pervasive bad odours and vectors, such as rats and flies that can spread disease. This was the basis of the social contract between HRM and the surrounding communities that has made the Otter Lake Landfill acceptable for the last 20 years. The two garbage processing features, now proposed for the chopping block, ensure hazardous material is taken out of waste headed for the landfill, recyclable contents are recovered, and any organic waste is stabilized by aerobic decomposition before being buried. Every curbside collected garbage bag is opened for these purposes. As a result, substantial reductions in landfill material are made. Removal of these safeguards could turn Otter Lake Landfill into another standard landfill operation with all the negative consequences that go with it.

The CMC is convinced the removal of the front-end processor and waste stabilizer will introduce raw organics and paper products to the landfill. The organics will attract large numbers of birds, rodents and other unwanted animals, while the paper will create an unsightly litter problem for the adjacent highway, homes and businesses.

The action by HRM and Mirror Nova Scotia, in the CMC's view, amounts to a major modification of both the conditions of the operating permit and the terms of the 1999 contractual agreement between HRM and the Halifax Wastewater Resource Society, in which only "acceptable waste" is to be permitted in the landfill during its lifetime. Under current operations, the front-end processor and waste stabilizer essentially define what is "acceptable waste" for the landfill. While the Department of Environment and Climate Change can instruct how "acceptable waste" can be achieved for the landfill, the CMC is unaware of other methods that produce the same beneficial result.

As a backstop, HRM has recommended in its application that the front-end processor and waste stabilizer be maintained on standby in case they have to be put back into service. However, there is no estimate of maintenance or reactivation costs, leaving the possibility they could ultimately exceed the estimated \$2 million savings from shutting them down. There is no indication either of how long these processes would be kept on standby.

The front-end processor and waste stabilizer have made the Otter Lake Landfill facility unique. Their ability to provide rigorous protection to the local environment and surrounding communities has attracted visits from waste managers from around the world.

What You Can Do

Let **HRM** and **Mirror Nova Scotia** know where you stand on their application.

Participate in the consultation process and be sure to fill out the **HRM questionnaire** being sent out, Nov.3.

Inform your friends and neighbours, and ask them to get involved.

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