

OTTER LAKE NEWS

HRM Wants Landfill Open For Decades Longer | Plans to Build 15 Metres Higher

Consultation Results Rejected

During the 2013 waste management consultations conducted by HRM, people who attended public meetings were asked to vote on several suggested changes to the Otter Lake landfill. Over 80% said no to building the landfill higher, and 80% said the landfill should be closed when originally planned. HRM is rejecting that community input and pushing forward with applications to Nova Scotia Environment for both an increase in landfill height and to operate the landfill for decades past its closing date.

About Us

The Halifax Waste-Resource Society is a registered Society comprising residents of HRM. In 1999, HRM and Halifax Waste-Resource Society entered into an agreement which established the Community Monitoring Committee, which is tasked with overseeing the landfill operations.



Landfill Could be Open For 70 More Years

Since August 4, HRM has been meeting behind closed doors to discuss the future of the Otter Lake landfill. These discussions have been about increasing the height of the landfill, keeping it open beyond the expected closure date of 2023, and potential changes to the contract with Mirror Nova Scotia, the landfill operator.

How much do we know? Not much, as discussions have been in camera and Council has voted to keep them and the relevant reports secret. But we do know the City intends to apply to the Department of Environment to have the landfill built 15 meters higher than originally planned, and to have it operate for much longer, perhaps 70 more years. As well, HRM intends to establish a transfer station at the landfill so that waste from business can be loaded onto larger trucks and taken to other landfills in other municipalities.



What is the Province's Role?

Nova Scotia Environment (NSE) has the authority to approve, or not approve, any proposed changes at the Otter Lake landfill.

Upon receiving an application, NSE staff have 60 days to review the application and either approve or reject it.

Premier Stated Caucus Opposition to Changing Otter Lake Permit

On May 1, 2013, Premier Stephen McNeil, (then Leader of the Opposition), wrote to Community Monitoring Committee Chair Jack Mitchell: "it is the position of the Nova Scotia Liberal Caucus that we will not entertain amending the Industrial Permit, nor relaxing provincial legislation or regulations that impact the operation of the Otter Lake Landfill. The Nova Scotia Liberal Caucus will honour past commitments to the community of Otter Lake."

What about the 25-year promise?

Many members of the local affected communities will recall the landfill was supposed to operate for 25 years, closing December 31, 2023. That was what people were told in 1995 when the Otter Lake site was chosen.

The approval of the landfill also stated that the landfill would operate until it was full. Due to successful waste diversion efforts, the landfill has received less waste than planned, so as originally designed, it likely would have still been operational for a few short years after 2023.

However through a plan to build the landfill 15 metres higher and to have business waste shipped elsewhere, Halifax is hoping the Province will allow them to operate the facility for several more decades.

HRM Planning Otter Lake Changes in Secret Meetings

As HRM Council has prepared applications for changes to the Otter Lake landfill, it has done so in secrecy not seen since the the Metropolitan Authority attempted to build an incinerator 25 years ago.

Since August 4, 2015, Council has discussed changes to the Otter Lake landfill four times, and each time it has done so behind closed doors. In those in camera meetings, Council has voted to keep the associated reports from the public.

Additionally, staff have been keeping documents from the Community Monitoring Committee, documents that the Committee's lawyer says they are entitled to have and review. Councillors Adams and Rankin have even resorted to filing requests under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Action, but HRM staff have continued to deny them even to these members of Council.

This level of secrecy is striking when compared to the openness of the planning process that originally sited the Otter Lake landfill.

Quotable

“My experience is quite often, the information people want is the information you tell them they can't have and once you make it available, some people can use it,” says Savage, adding that governments need to trust people with information.” - *Halifax Magazine, August 28, 2015*

Concerned?

Tell your local Councillor what you think about the proposed changes to the Otter Lake landfill. <http://www.halifax.ca/councillors/index.php>

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HRM Applies for Contingency Expansion Approval

HRM has applied for a 7.1 metre height increase to the current landfill cell. This is part of a contingency plan in case the municipality does not have approval by December 31st to increase the height of the entire landfill by 15 metres.

That is right. HRM's contingency plan for not getting timely approval from the Department of Environment for a height increase is... approval from Nova Scotia Environment for a height increase.

Because HRM has yet to build the next cell at the landfill, as was expected last year, it finds itself without enough room now to accommodate all of next year's waste.

Business Waste Could be Banned

HRM is also changing its by-law to give itself the power to ban non-residential waste from the landfill. This is also part of the contingency plan. Larger waste hauling companies can readily take waste to other landfills in the Province. However, this may not be viable for smaller independent waste haulers who typically operate with smaller vehicles.

A letter sent by HRM to haulers has created concern from representatives from this group who are worried that a ban on disposal could put them out of business. Some have expressed concern that they are being used as a pawn, in an attempt by HRM to pressure Nova Scotia Environment to provide quick approval to the application for a landfill height increase.

At the October 27th meeting of Council, Councillor Walker gave notice that he would introduce a motion on November both that could allow business waste to be banned from the Otter Lake landfill as early as January 1, 2016.