

HRM Solid Waste Strategy Review

In 2012, Regional Council directed staff to review the efficiency of the current solid waste system - without compromising environmental or community protections.

As part of this review, Regional Council approved the staff recommendation to hire Stantec Consulting to evaluate the operation and viability of the Otter Lake Landfill and other aspects of the system. To verify the science behind the Stantec report, SNC Lavalin conducted a peer review. The consultant's recommendations outline an evolution of HRM's solid waste system that enhances environmental stewardship through increased diversion and reduced negative environmental impacts.

Council will not make any decisions until undertaking a careful and fair analysis of all the facts from the review and including information provided to citizens and they have the opportunity to give their feedback through an extensive consultation process. The public feedback will then be taken back to Council for their further review and consideration.

Currently, HRM is in the consultation process of the Solid Waste Strategy Review. In the interest of building Council's collective solid waste knowledge, on May 14th 2013, Council passed a motion to hold two separate Committee of the Whole sessions. This was to allow Council the opportunity to thoroughly discuss the Stantec Waste Resource Strategy Report and the declassified Staff Report dated Feb. 5, 2013, as well as see a presentation from Stantec.

The intent of the motion was to give Council a chance to understand the Stantec Waste Resource Strategy Report in its entirety, as Council would benefit by having the authors of the report to come and answer the questions about the report.

On June 18th, during two separate Committee of the Whole sessions, both Stantec, and the Community Monitoring Committee presented to Council. The CMC is group founded for the specific purpose of providing citizen monitoring of the Otter Lake facility through an agreement between HRM and the Halifax Waste Resource Society. It was an excellent opportunity to hear from both groups, and get clarification on numerous issues.

Further on June 24th the Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee reviewed the NS Solid Waste-Resource Management Regulations.

Over the past few months, I've received many emails and letters and had conversations regarding the HRM Solid Waste Strategy Review. Given the nature of the topic, media, and various positions by all involved, I fully appreciate citizens' and groups' thoughts and comments on this issue. I will keep an open mind and apply critical thought before making any decision on the Solid Waste Management Strategy.

As a bit of background, the Sackville dump was in my "backyard". Years before being elected to Halifax Regional Council, I served on the provincial Environmental Control Council, lived through the siting, operations and extension of the Sackville landfill as a resident, and was Chair of the Highway 101 (Sackville) Landfill Closeout Committee. I've walked many times through the "dump" and experienced many of the negative consequences first hand. In deed the siting at Otter Lake and the infrastructure around it, and community monitoring were direct outcomes of the Sackville site experiences. I know the impacts of a "dump" both during operation and now after many years of closure.

Until the release of the Stantec report, there was little discussion on the future of solid waste management in HRM. People throughout all of HRM are now engaging in that discussion as you are now. This is a good thing. Some say that HRM has a world class system. In order to ensure that remains the case, it must be reviewed from various perspectives over time. Now is that time.

Regional Council has not made any decision on the Stantec report or the recommendations. Again, recommendations have not been accepted, debated nor voted on.

On April 24th, a subsequent motion of HRM Council was for staff to start the public consultation process and release more documents. It is important to provide information to and hear from all HRM citizens on such an important topic. I voted for that. There is no decision to change the Otter Lake operations. Public engagement is the next step, and of course with that comes dialogue and understanding.

The Stantec report (not recommendations) is only one piece that I would use to make any informed decision about future waste management that Regional Council may consider. The results of the public consultation process will form a very important part of any future decision I make about solid waste management in HRM.

My openness on the topic is clear. I took an oath that talks to representing all of HRM - not a particular area including my own- to do the best within my knowledge and ability. I wear that commitment seriously.

For more information on the Solid Waste Review Strategy, please visit www.halifax.ca/wrms/WasteStrategy/index.html

Best Regards Always,

Steve