

Citizens react to renewed talk of landfill expansion

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The idea of expanding Richmond Landfill, which many thought was put to rest after a 2006 Environment Ministry decision, may soon be revived by Waste Management (WM) of Canada, and local citizens' groups are gearing up, once again, to do battle.

"We are looking at it, of course," said Randy Harris, manager of Richmond Landfill, when asked whether WM was planning to apply for an expansion of landfill's capacity.

Neither Harris, nor Wes Muir, communications director with Waste Management of Canada would say whether the company had made a final decision on an expansion proposal.

Craig Dobiech, senior environment officer in Kingston with the Ontario Ministry of the Environment said the Ministry had not received an expansion proposal for the Richmond Landfill site.

The Concerned Citizens of Tyendinaga and Environs launched its campaign to close the Richmond Landfill at a public meeting on Sept. 21 at the Empey Hill United Church on Deseronto Road, close to the landfill site.

At the meeting, a number of area residents and community leaders expressed frustration that there is renewed talk of expansion and that the site has not yet been closed.

"I've been going to meetings to close this...since before I could drive. Here are my kids...We've had enough. It's time to close this," said Iain Gardiner, a Callaghan Road resident.

In 1999, WM announced its proposal to expand the landfill. After years of community opposition, legal challenges and the submission of an environmental assessment, the Ministry of the Environment recommended against the expansion in 2006, and that recommendation was accepted by Laurel Broten, the minister at the time.

At the request of the Ministry, WM has since submitted a closure plan for the site, which says it will close when it reaches capacity. Site manager Harris says there is approximately 35,000 tons of remaining capacity and, given that the site is currently accepting 10,000 tons of waste per year, capacity will be reached within four years at current levels.

Dobiech says WM has the right to reapply to the ministry, even though its last application was rejected.

"Anybody can submit an application to us. It doesn't mean it is going to be accepted...They can reapply as many times as they like," he explains.

Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte (MBQ) Chief R. Donald Maracle, Tyendinga Reeve Margaret Walsh and environment lawyer Rick Lindgren also addressed the crowd of approximately 40 at the Sept. 21 meeting.

Lindgren called for immediate closure of the site. "Anything less than that is unacceptable and contrary to the interest of the public."

"A lot of people in Napanee think it is already closed. That's part of the battle we've been fighting," stated Larry Davy, who lives on Palace Road in Napanee.

"It's about the protection of the ground water, the surface water and the air quality," said Chief Maracle at the meeting. He later said there was a high rate of cancer in the area and that "there needs to be a health study done."

Doug and Betty Cranston, who have lived close to the site since 1973, said (after the meeting) that they and their livestock have been experiencing respiratory problems which they began noticing 15 years ago, but which they report have gotten worse in the last 10 years. Doug reports that the odour from the site was so bad one day, "I was on my hands and knees, crawling to the barn."

"If these people are concerned, they should talk to the Ministry of Environment...We are highly monitored...we have over 70 wells that we monitor. There has never been any evidence of off-site leachate contamination," says Harris.

In an email to the Napanee Guide, WM's Wes Muir writes, 'It is important to note that that we conduct regular testing of the groundwater and surface water by an independent consultant who provides their analysis and report to the Ministry of Environment.'

Dobiech says both WM and the Ministry of the Environment are responsible for testing. He visits the site "a couple of times a month," sometimes unannounced.

"Our results indicate there are no offsite impacts to surface and ground water," reports Doliech. He adds that air testing done in 2009 found "compounds [at levels] below Ministry air standard guidelines."

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