

Residents afraid plant expansion will cause harm to environment

By **JASON MISNER**
The Champion

Shirley Baylis fears a proposal to expand the mid-Halton sewage treatment plant risks destroying Lake Ontario, which is already suffering from a bad algae problem gripping part of its shoreline.

"Lake Ontario is now reeking of algae, the water is receding and yet we continue to take advantage of lake water," Ms Baylis told regional councillors Wednesday.

Treated effluent from the plant, located on North Service Road in Oakville, is released into the lake.

"There's no guarantee the filth that now flows into our lake will be somewhat eliminated."

A steady stream of residents approached councillors and said that expansion of the mid-Halton sewage treatment plant could have a severe impact on the environment.

Others felt the Region is simply expanding too quickly.

"I believe the apparently headlong dash to grow and develop is shortsighted, reck-

less, selfish and not in the best interests of the existing population," Russell Kemp of Oakville, told council.

Nearly four hours were spent debating the issue and the process is far from complete. Regional council was updated on the proposal to expand the sewage treatment plant.

The \$25 to \$30 million project is needed to meet the massive servicing needs of the west side Oakville, north of the QEW, new growth areas in south Milton and the Hwy. 401 industrial corridor in Halton Hills. The 'Big Pipe' will service these parts in Milton and Halton Hills and connect to the plant.

The expansion is slated to be completed by 2006.

The plant is currently servicing 25,000 people. It has room to service 50,000 people and that will be fully utilized in the next three years.

The expansion will have the capacity to service a total of about 75,000 people.

The plan doesn't require buying new land and additional infrastructure will be added onto the existing site. Construction costs will be covered by development charges that are paid by new businesses for growth-related infrastructure, like sewers.

The sewage plant expansion has turned into a battle of environmental protection versus growth.

The region raised red flags last week that if the plant isn't expanded on time – the proposal still requires official regional council approval – industrial and residential growth in parts of Halton will freeze. That would mean lost tax money and potential new jobs.

Regional councillors assured residents their concerns will be addressed by a citizens' advisory committee, expected to start by late March, which will deal with environmental and technological issues during the design stage of the plant's expansion.

Residents will help regional staff in developing the terms of reference for an environmental assessment. That includes looking at odour and algae problems, and determining the best available technology to minimize any possible impacts.

The advisory committee, as passed by regional council, will consist of two mem-

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Region to start plant reports

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Halton Region will begin compiling for the first time yearly reports on how its seven sewage treatment plants are operating. The first report will come out early next year showing 2003 results.

These will be similar to the water quality reports the Region posts every three months.

It's all part of a major communications program the Region is undertaking in a concerted effort to ensure the public has every opportunity to see how expansion of the mid-Halton sewage treatment is proceeding, and ultimately performing.

The program was unanimously passed by regional council Wednesday.

The communications program includes a number of initiatives, such as:

- A citizen's hotline – (905) 825-6000, ext. 7354 – set-up to log comments. It's an answering service that will allow you to leave comments or messages for a staff person to call back to answer questions.

- A citizen-friendly chart posted on the Region's Web site – www.region.halton.on.ca – to help people clarify the environmental assessment process and opportunities for participation.

- Updates in newspaper advertisements paid for by the Region.

- Plant tours for the media.
- Regular updates on the citizens' advisory committee through the media and regional council.

Planning and public works commissioner Patrick Murphy wouldn't go as far as to say these are the most elaborate steps the Region has taken to keep the public informed of an issue, but said it's one the Region is taking "very seriously."

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