

Halton sewage treatment plants have saved millions in infrastructure costs, says Region

By JASON MISNER
The Champion

Halton's detailed review of how its seven sewage treatment plants operate has saved millions of taxpayers' dollars in infrastructure costs and is a big reason why the Region is committed to it.

An information report released to the Region's planning and public works committee recently shows the optimization review that started a decade ago is paying off in fewer dollars needed to build more plant capacity while producing all-important clean effluent — clean water flowing out of the plant.

"We've found fantastic results from that," said Patrick Murphy, Halton's commissioner of planning and public works.

The report noted Halton has received some awards and recognition for its sewage review program.

What the optimization review does is study various steps along the treatment process, from the time sewage enters the plant to the treated effluent that leaves, to see how they're all operating.

It helps determine if the existing plant can be improved in some form to handle additional human waste without having to expand it, which typically is an expensive venture.

Burlington Skyway and Milton's wastewater treatment plants are the best examples that didn't need massive physical upgrades, the report points out.

Huge savings

The Region saved \$17 million in Burlington and \$6 million in Milton.

At Burlington's Skyway, for example, the Region maximized the existing plant capabilities by reducing the amount of phosphorus and ammonia outfall.

The report states that a reduced amount of phosphorous concentrations in the Hamilton Harbour has been "noticeable."

The Region sets aside an average of about \$700,000 a year to make any changes through the review process.

Regional Chair Joyce Savoline took the opportunity to pat the Region on the back for the program, which she said Halton was one of the first municipalities to start.

"We've been incrementally working on the program and it has shown incredible results," she said. "What we know is we've got some incredible staff with an incredible passion for this program."

Despite the success of the review program, sewage plant expansion is still necessary at times.

The Region earlier approved expanding the mid-Halton sewage treatment plant, on North Service Road, by tens of thousands of cubic metres a day, at a cost of \$25 million.

It will service massive growth needs in north Oakville, as well as south Milton and part of Halton Hills along the Hwy. 401 corridor.

The expansion caused consternation among residents living near the plant who felt increased flows could harm the environment.

Oakville Regional Councillor Allan Elgar was among the opposed.

He said while the optimization report "sounds good," he's concerned by the continued formation of smelly algae along Lake Ontario's south shoreline, and he feels the mid-Halton plant is a culprit.

Mr. Elgar said the total phosphorous coming from the mid-Halton is double what's coming out of the Skyway. (The outflow from both plants exceeds the provincial requirements).

Mr. Elgar said it's imperative the sewage review program cure what he perceives as phosphorus concerns.

"The optimization program overall had better address the phosphorous levels and the odours emanating from the plant."

Mr. Murphy said other municipalities are looking at making sewage treatment plants more efficient through a similar optimization program.

For a long time engineers relied on plant expansion to handle more sewage waste or

to create a higher quality effluent, he said, but there's been a shift.

"It's a change in mind-set," he said.

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