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## Residents cry foul over sewage

Want Oakville to stall plant expansion But town says plans misunderstood

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PEEL/HALTON BUREAU

It stinks.

That's what some Oakville residents and politicians are saying about Halton Region's plan to dramatically increase capacity at its central sewage treatment plant, which opened in 1991.

Odour, truck traffic and algae growth in Lake Ontario will result from the expansion, designed to handle new development, say critics such as resident Paul DeCarlo.

With today being the deadline for public comment, they're demanding the region put the proposal on hold until a thorough impact study has been done.

But Halton's public works commissioner, Patrick Murphy, counters that nothing is rotten in Oakville.

A final staff report is expected to go to Halton council on March 26.

"It makes eminent good sense to me to wait at least two years while research is completed into what's causing the algae problem, to study alternative technologies for waste treatment and to allow the public to make a much more informed decision,"

DeCarlo said.

He helped organize an informal coalition of ratepayer groups to express their concerns about the plan, which would increase the plant's capacity by 25,000 cubic metres a day by 2006, and by 166,000 cubic metres a day over 20 years to service future development in north Oakville, Milton and the Highway 401 corridor.

The plant is located on North Service Rd., west of Third Line in the Glen Abbey area.

It currently processes about 21,500 cubic metres of sewage a day and now has an approved capacity of 50,000 cubic metres a day.

DeCarlo lives near the town's waterfront, which has been plagued by major odour problems in recent summers from rotting algae. Next door, Mississauga is also experiencing the problem.

Waste from sewage plants contains phosphorous, which sparks algae growth. With up to eight times the current level of effluent being discharged after final expansion, the algae problem can only grow much worse, DeCarlo said.

Deborah Frame, who lives a kilometre north of the plant, said there are times when she can smell the sewage. If such a major expansion is approved, it will only make things worse for more residents from a wider area, she said.

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Frame said the region should explore more up-to-date and effective sewage treatment methods now used in parts of North America and Europe — a kind of filtration technology that can dramatically reduce odour and phosphorous.

The present plant treats waste with aeration and chlorine. The effluent is then dechlorinated and returned to the lake via pipeline, while the sewage sludge is further treated for use as farm fertilizer.

"It absolutely astounds me they want to use this obsolete technology when there's so much better out there," Frame said. "Something about this smells." Oakville councillors Allan Elgar and Kevin Flynn recently attracted more than 200 residents to a public forum that they organized to make citizens aware of the proposal.

"I'd like to see this put on hold until we have all the data on the impact and to see what we can do to find better technologies," Elgar said.

He also wants the project delayed because he believes not enough people are aware of the plan. Halton advertised a public meeting last June, but it was poorly attended because the proposal was billed as a "waste-water master plan review and nobody knew what they were talking about," Elgar said.

"The perception out there is that this is being rushed through because people are only just starting to find out about it."

But the region's Murphy said there are some misunderstandings about what Halton is doing.

The current proposal is to choose and confirm the site for future expansion to accommodate development, he said.

Once this receives environmental assessment approval, further study and approval will be required for the specific design and technology to be used for the expansion.

The initial expansion of the plant will be for an extra 25,000 cubic metres of capacity. Future expansions, of 25,000 cubic metres at a time, will be considered about every five years, Murphy said.

"This incremental approach is environmentally responsible and allows us to incorporate the latest available technology. We're looking at expansion with an open mind as to the technology we use."

He added: "In any class environmental assessment, you have to look at the best available technology that meets (environment ministry) objectives.

"The criticism that we are not doing that or rushing into it is not valid."

He noted that Halton extended the deadline for public comment on the plan by 90 days.