

Municipal Competence and Government Assistance

With all the information that has been assembled during the BAPE questions and presentations, I think that it is important to ask ourselves what caused the flawed process of the Danford Lake proposal and how such deficiencies and their negative side-effects could have been avoided. If we do not, similar situations are likely to occur, causing unnecessary expenditures, unnecessarily painful divisions within communities and, perhaps most important, raising the risk of major projects being approved that should not be.

It is in this context that the following thoughts are put forward. It is hoped that they will be seen as a constructive contribution to the deliberations of the Commissioners.

The present division of responsibilities that the Government of Quebec has established between itself and municipalities is probably well-designed for the cities and more populous regional councils. However, there are enormous differences between the competence of the City of Gatineau with its annual budget of \$350 million and that of the municipality of Allevyn and Cawood with its budget of \$500 thousand – differences in

- Staff numbers
- Quality of staff as influenced by dissimilar pay scales
- Degree of specialization
- Ability to research and plan
- Funding that can be used for special projects or the hiring of consultants.

Despite these differences, Quebec public servants seem determined to treat all municipalities with a firm hands-off attitude, letting them find their own solutions and make their own decisions. This even-handedness may be consistent with the lack of distinction made in the legislation between large and small municipalities but such a passive approach fails to recognize the differing needs for assistance.

While I do not favour decisions currently under the authority of municipal level of government being recentralized to Quebec City, I believe that the Danford story amply proves that smaller municipalities and MRCs need help and assistance in a number of specific areas falling under the Ministries of Municipal Affairs and Sustainable Development:

Ministry of Municipal Affairs

1. A fuller explanation as to what would constitute good public consultation – perhaps a clear statement of philosophy illuminated by real cases of best practice.

Neither Alleyn & Cawood nor MRC Pontiac had any idea of what was expected of them. As a result, they failed to consult effectively with their electorate thereby increasing opposition; equally they failed to consult their neighboring municipalities on whom much of the transportation burden would fall and whose residual waste they needed to make the project successful. Both MRCs along the 105 and several of their mayors spoke out against the project – not one spoke in favour.

2. A willingness by local ministry staff to offer frank advice if a municipality is acting in such a perverse manner as to cause major downstream costs to Quebec taxpayers.

Had there been effective consultations, the course the Danford case took might have been dramatically different. If it turned out that the community could not coalesce around an alternative to the landfill and that the many times promised referendum had taken place, the community would not have become so divided, the impact study and its review might not have been required nor perhaps the BAPE process.

3. In reviewing the consultation process described in an impact study, ministry staff should verify what other possibly conflicting information has already been received by the minister or the ministry.

It seems odd that the LDC account was not challenged in the governmental review despite ample information being available to the ministry that a large proportion of citizens were angry at the absence of real consultations.

Ministry of Sustainable Development

1. Ongoing evaluation of alternative technologies and publicizing of the results.

It is unrealistic to expect small municipalities and MRCs to do research into state-of-the-art technologies (and, more generally, to avoid duplication of effort by cities and towns across Quebec). In the Danford case, this role had to be largely assumed by the opponents of the dump which was not fully appropriate.

2. More guidance on the selection of waste disposal sites, perhaps through the sharing of experience elsewhere in Quebec (or elsewhere).

In the current absence of such guidance, a promoter can select the criteria to fit his site preference. Few of the government reviewers of the impact study in this particular appeared to take a hard look at the criteria (though some did question the transportation implications).

3. Provision of some realistic guidance on how the Government expects municipalities to fund new obligations it imposes on them.

It is easy to issue a decree requiring that trench dumps be replaced with more expensive dumps or incinerators by a certain date. But from what source was the money to come? Many continue to be highly critical of the actions of both Alleyn & Cawood and the MRC Pontiac but, in part through the BAPE hearings, most do recognize the tough bind in which they found themselves and the seeming salvation presented to them by LDC.

Merci de m'avoir donne l'occasion de faire cet addendum.

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