



Municipalité de Low
Municipality of Low

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Projet d'établissement d'un lieu d'enfouissement technique
à Danford Lake
Alleyn-et-Cawood 6212-03-112

**PROJET D'ÉTABLISSEMENT D'UN
LIEU D'ENFOUISSEMENT TECHNIQUE
DANS LA MUNICIPALITÉ D'ALLEYNE-ET-CAWOOD**

MÉMOIRE DE LA MUNICIPALITÉ DE LOW

**PRÉSENTÉ AU
BUREAU D'AUDIENCES PUBLIQUES SUR
L'ENVIRONNEMENT**

**PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A TECHNICAL LANDFILL
IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF ALLEYNE & CAWOOD**

**BRIEF PRESENTED BY
THE MUNICIPALITY OF LOW
TO THE
BUREAU D'AUDIENCES PUBLIQUES SUR
L'ENVIRONNEMENT**

Préparé par / prepared by

Michael Francis
maire
Municipalité de Low

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Introduction

Low is situated at the heart of the Gatineau Valley, some 15 minutes by road north of Wakefield, about 40 minutes from the urban agglomeration of Gatineau-Ottawa, and about half way between the urban agglomeration and the town of Maniwaki.

With an area of 259 square kilometres, the township includes four villages and hamlets – Brennan’s Hill, Fieldville, Low, and Venosta – as well as several cottage communities. The village of Low is located close to the Paugan Dam, an key power generating facility of Hydro Quebec on the Gatineau River. Immediately north of the dam is the first point of public access to the Gatineau River allowing boaters to experience more than fifty kilometres of this important heritage waterway.

Low is adjacent to the Municipality of Alleyne and Cawood in the west, as well as with LaPêche (to the west and the south) and Kazabazua (to the north). The Gatineau River forms our boundary in the east. Low is the southern-most municipality in the MRC de la Vallée-de-la-Gatineau.

Our permanent population is about 900 persons, and some 1250 seasonal residents also live in the township.

Our two primary industries, agriculture and forestry, are in difficulty. A study completed by an external consultant for the municipality in 2003 concluded that certain forms of tourism offered interesting potentials for economic diversification. Agrotourism, promotion of our Irish heritage, and the sustainable use and development of the Gatineau River were targeted in the firm’s report.

In February 2006 the Council of the Municipality of Low adopted unanimously, a resolution opposing the establishment of a technical landfill in Alleyne and Cawood. Our opposition to this project is based on environmental, public safety, economic development, and policy development concerns. Members of Council and residents of this community have become aware of the significant advances in a variety of waste management technologies that offer the promise of ending the practice of depositing waste in the ground.

Environmental Concerns - WATER

It is clear that landfill as practiced in the past is not appropriate for today's population densities or for the nature of products and personal practices in 2007. Indeed, the MDDEP has ordered all local "trench" landfills in the province to close.

The proponents of the Alleyne & Cawood LET suggest they will use state-of-the-art membrane technology to line the cavities they will excavate to receive the region's waste, yet studies on membrane technologies in other recent landfill projects in North America suggest that mechanical manipulation and certain products will certainly cause the membranes to rupture, with resulting leakage of raw liquids and seasoned leachate from decomposition. Reports of failure of such membranes within a thirty-year horizon are common.

Because society's evolution in waste management is only beginning, one can easily imagine the variety of waste products that will not today — and may not for many years — have a convenient and safe disposal solution: unused medicines, liquid and solid battery residues, paints, household cleaning residues, insect sprays, varieties of heavy metals such as mercury and lead that are used in household and light industrial or commercial products are but a few. The list of such products is very long and a very high percentage of them will certainly end up seeking ultimate disposal during the life of the proposed LET. It is difficult to imagine heavy machinery managing the LET without accidentally breaking open something containing a product that is capable of breaching the membrane, and finding its way into the water table. It also opens a door for all other leachates to follow.

The topography in the area where the LET is proposed promotes greater amounts of seasonal and rain-induced run-off to flow to the site and this excess water will saturate the area proposed for the LET itself, compounding the flow of leachate through the inevitable breaches in the membrane.

There are certainly many environmental concerns related to management of a landfill, no matter what technology is used, but none has the impact of contamination of the water table. The ramifications on public health, wildlife, and economic health and development are so extreme one would not wish to even calculate the financial cost to society.

Environmental Concerns - TRANSPORTATION

The principle of disposing of waste as close as possible to the source of the waste is one that reflects concern for the environmental impact of vehicle emissions and consumption of fuel, both of which are significant contributors to our global greenhouse gas problem. Simply stated, a single ultimate disposal site that requires 60% of the market's waste to be transported more than 75 kilometres (and the vehicles must return — empty!) will add thousands of tonnes of greenhouse gases (CO₂ + CO + NO_x) to our atmosphere annually.

This environmental burden can be significantly reduced with a better-organized system of disposal facilities that meets the requirement of "close-to-home" waste treatment and disposal.

Environmental Concerns – AIR QUALITY

Landfill generates important quantities of methane, a gas that has an impact some thirty times greater than CO₂ on greenhouse gas effects. Other technologies do not generate such quantities of methane. Mitigation measures may lessen or control methane emissions from the site — if the technology works. If it does not, then the immediate area's air quality and that in the area downwind from the site will certainly suffer and there will be unnecessary additional greenhouse gas emissions.

Even should the methane emissions be controlled flawlessly, the cost of doing so is an additional and unnecessary cost to taxpayers, who ultimately must pay.

Environmental Concerns – THE LEGACY

Six million tonnes of waste accumulating over a thirty-year period and only partially decomposing over that time represents an unacceptable risk and burden on the environment and on future generations. It seems logical that better technologies should be chosen now, rather than simply demanding that an amount of money be reserved for anticipated future mitigation — especially where the cost of that mitigation thirty years into the future may be seriously underestimated today and is another unnecessary burden on taxpayers.

Public Safety - TRANSPORTATION

More than ninety percent of all Outaouais waste will, if this project is approved, use highway 105 to access the site. This highway is already notorious for its poor alignment and surface condition over most of its length. It has an accident and death rate that is among the highest in Quebec; more truck traffic will not improve this situation.

An ultimate disposal solution that is located closer to the major generator of waste in the region will reduce the additional burden on this already dangerous highway segment by more than eighty percent.

Economic development

The economy of our region is based largely on forestry and agriculture. Both are in serious difficulty because of global economics. Throughout the region, and especially in the area within a 30-50 km radius of the proposed site for this LET, the economy is strengthening with increased emphasis on the service industry related to tourism and seasonal residences.

Approval of this LET, with the attendant risks to water and air quality as well as to transportation safety, will have a dramatic and negative effect on the expansion of this growing economic opportunity and upon existing property values. The impact will be greatest in the immediate area of the proposed site and will be significant within the 30-50 km radius surrounding the site.

Rural municipalities in this region are already feeling cost pressures (related primarily to energy costs) in delivering basic services. More cost pressures are felt by rural taxpayers in delivering an expanded range of environmental and public safety services mandated and downloaded by the provincial government. Decreasing property values will force increases in individual municipal tax rates, a phenomenon that will force a cascade of distress property sales and subsequent further increases in tax rates as the spiral of decreasing property values and population takes its toll. Municipal administrations will be challenged to deal with this impact by cutting back in essential services. The impact of this will be to return the region — and its remaining residents — to a state of development and economic health not seen in fifty years. The notable problem is that forestry and agriculture cannot provide the economic benefits they once did.

The scenario that will play out of an approval of this project will cause a vast increase the numbers of social aid recipients, and this at significant cost to governments. More and more, the provincial government is relying on local funds to contribute to social programs, and these funds must, by definition, come from property taxes under current regimes.

Many believe that government is not sensitive to the real situation that rural Quebecers are living with today. Greater burdens are being placed on property taxes to fund programs that the provincial government feels are important — new programs or those begun by government and transferred to municipalities. The government's priorities are not fully shared by rural residents; moreover, the

government is not effectively coordinating the timing of the imposition of these cost burdens, allowing them to land on the property tax burden almost simultaneously.

That the government would approve such an economically damning project for this region is consistent with both its apparent disregard for rural residents and with its poor understanding of the impact of its initiatives on rural municipal administrations. Strangely, however, it would be completely **inconsistent** with its stated environmental policies.

Policy development

The government of Quebec has set some lofty goals in the area of environmental protection and waste management. These include rigid requirements for pumping of septic waste and ambitious targets for domestic waste diversion through recycling and composting, and these policies are being embraced by many Quebecers even if such targets are costly to taxpayers and the systems in place to support these policies are far from ideal.

It is contradictory that government can establish environmental goals and enshrine them in policy and regulation and yet approve, in the twenty-first century, a landfill that will operate for some thirty years into the future and which will leave an environmental time bomb as a legacy. It suggests a serious gap in the coordination and application of environmental policy objectives. Citizens are incurring important costs and responsibilities to do their part, while government, through irresponsible actions and lack of action, is not doing its part to support and enhance the actions of citizens.

The government has required MRCs to produce waste management plans to address the problems posed by the growth in domestic and industrial waste. Environmental specialists in MRCs across the province have done good work. The waste management plan developed by MRC de la Vallée-de-la-Gatineau has been approved by the Minister responsible, and, among other things, it does not support the establishing of landfills in the territory of the MRC or indeed the entire region of the Outaouais and seeks to promote more environmentally sensitive alternatives for ultimate waste disposal. Can the Minister approve this plan and yet approve a landfill that is not supported by the plan?

A working group consisting of the environmental specialists in the four MRCs in the Outaouais studied and evaluated several methods of ultimate waste disposal. LET landfills were determined to be the least effective method. Newer technologies such as tri-compostage and plasma gasification were shown to be significantly more effective solutions to ultimate waste disposal. MDDEP officials have confirmed they have no data on these technologies, have done no work to evaluate or promote new technologies, and have legislation in place that "privileges" only landfill and incineration. Will the minister, in the absence of adequate support for better technology and better solutions within the ministry rely on the glaring weak link in otherwise strong and demanding environmental legislation to approve a waste

management solution that is clearly inferior? And will the minister do this despite the huge public opposition this solution?

The risk to government in this decision is significant: it risks environmental degradation and it risks losing public support for other environmental initiatives imposed through inconsistent legislation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The council of the Municipality of Low recommends

- that the proposal for an LET in the Municipality of Alleynes and Cawood be rejected;
- that a moratorium be placed on the planned closure of existing local dumps for a period of time during which the ministry works to fully and publicly evaluate all options available to best accomplish ultimate waste disposal;
- that the government conduct a complete review of existing environmental legislation, regulation, and policies with a view to ensuring a consistent approach and a fair and balanced sharing of responsibilities and costs; and
- that the government conduct province-wide public hearings on environmental policy that will direct and inform future environmental management policy and law including that related to ultimate waste disposal.