

1

Subject: Project to establish a technical landfill site at Danford Lake in the Municipality of Alleyn-et-Cawood

Date: June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007

Number of pages: 3

My name is Seaton Findlay. My wife and I have been cottage-owners on Danford Lake since 1969.

In this presentation I am going to focus on three areas: 1) public consultation, 2) the ethics of the proposed landfill, and 3) accountability

My wife and I joined the Coalition Against the Megadump, not because we were against the proposal in the beginning, but because the coalition offered the only alternative source of information we could find that counterbalanced the presentations of the proponent.

We understand that the purpose of the BAPE hearings is to offer the public a chance to state their opinions. But it seems to us that many important decisions have already been taken before the BAPE process even began. And that these decisions have been made without meaningful consultation on the most important issue of all, which is whether the people in the area of Danford Lake, not just people in the Pontiac, want a project of this size and nature. We would liked to have seen a debate on what the project might bring to the community in terms of jobs and other benefits, and we would liked to have heard a discussion on the environmental impacts, the social impacts, the safety impacts, and the impacts on the area's tourist potential *before* attitudes became set and battle was joined, say, when the proponent first submitted his proposal to the Alleyn and Cawood council. But the possibility of meaningful consultation was effectively shut off when council decided to ask MRC Pontiac to include Danford Lake in its list of possible waste disposal sites.

The council may have been within its legal rights in terms of the process, but in our view this was a disastrous mistake that forced people to take sides before they had a chance to understand the project and its implications for the local area.

My wife and I attended every meeting of the Alleyn and Cawood council from April to October in 2006. We also attended MRC meetings in Shawville.

At meeting after meeting at the Danford Lake Municipal hall we listened to the non-answers, half-answers and plain incomprehensible answers to reasonable questions put on behalf of the coalition by Andre Carriere and Michele Borgers during the ten minutes that were assigned at the end of each meeting to the landfill proposal.

After each of these meetings we came away more and more confused. We found it more and more difficult to follow the course of events. We were continually baffled by the process that seemed to discourage public input. It was not until we attended a BAPE meeting and read the transcripts of all six BAPE sessions, that we came to see the process

as one of administrative convenience which, among other things, gave the Alleyn and Caywood council a way of avoiding meaningful public participation in the form of a binding referendum.

Municipalities obviously can't obtain approval from their electorates for their every decision, but surely common sense dictates that on a matter of such importance to the community as this that the Alleyn-Cawood council would have done everything in its power to encourage public input. Instead it appears that they did everything possible to avoid it. (ref BAPE session 2, p22 Eng vers)

It now seems that we are past the point where a referendum could be held unless, as a result of these hearings, the Quebec cabinet recognizes the serious flaw with the process and directs the MRC and / or the municipality to hold a referendum in the area that stands to be affected by the project.

(Transcript references of interest: BAPE SESSION 1, p22 Eng vers for the rights of citizens in relation to site choice, rights of citizens at monthly council meetings; p36 Eng vers for the council's take on informing citizens on major issues; p50 Eng vers for the proponent's take on consultation; BAPE SESSION 2, p12 Eng Version for the different kinds of referenda, consultative and binding; p45 Eng vers for the transfer of the site decision from the municipality to the MRC and the application of the temporary control legislation; BAPE SESSION 2 p64 eng vers for Ministry of Environment's obligations concerning social acceptability of projects)

## **2 - Ethics**

The second point I would like to address is the ethics of situating such a large landfill not just in my back yard, but in anybody's back yard.

The spokesperson for the Ministry of Sustainable Development, the Environment, and Parks, M Jean Mbaraga, admitted in Session 4 of the BAPE hearings: "Nobody likes these projects, no matter where we try to set them up." And in another place, "The farther the TLS is from a residential area the better it is." In BAPE Session 5, in response to the question, "Why would anyone choose a site in the middle of lakes and rivers," Mr. Andre Poulin speaking on behalf of the proponent said, "In actual fact, it all has to do with the need for us to go ahead with this project." This was in reference, if I'm right, to the fact that no landfills had been established since 1991 and also to the government's closing of the province's slit trench dumps.

Mr Poulin returned to this urgency in BAPE SESSION 5, "There will always be a township that will have to live with the consequences," and a little later, "We have our backs to the wall."

These are just some of the things in the BAPE hearings that suggest to us that the Danford Lake TLS is an opportunistic taking advantage of a desperate situation rather than the result of a well thought-out overall approach to waste management in Quebec. And it troubles us that there appears to be a lack of equality when push comes to shove in respect to people's rights to a clean environment. Such sites with their potential risks are no longer sellable to large population centres, so they are shipped off to rural areas where there isn't the population clout to resist them. The carrot and stick approach: if the municipality doesn't take our carrot (some 500 thousand dollars a year in this case) then beat them with our stick in form of byzantine regulations. (ref: BAPE SESSION 2, p61 Eng vers)

### **3 – Accountability**

My final point concerns accountability. Accountability is always a problem but with a project of this size and time frame, who knows how many escape hatches can suddenly 'turn up' if things go wrong. Environmental cause and effect is imperfectly understood, and the larger the project the larger the difficulty in pinning down what went wrong and how it went wrong and who is responsible. Even Walkerton, environmentally a rather simple case, took years to unravel and when the truth finally did come out it had little to do with technology but a lot to do with human nature.

The proposed watchdog committee may be effective at the beginning, 'may be', there's no assurance of that, it depends on its make-up, but in ten years? In twenty? In thirty? And then what? When the thirty year operational period is over the emergency fund is closed, although the operator retains responsibility for another five years. If a problem reveals itself after that? Neither the proponent nor the government has any back-up plan to protect our children or our children's children from potential long term environmental damage that results from the project.

If the landfill is given a green light now it will be difficult to impossible to close it down if something goes wrong down the road because all our eggs will be in this one basket. The communities of four MRCs and possibly more will be totally dependent on this one site.

We hope the government will take a long deep breath and think this all out again. The deadlines on the present landfill are moveable, they are political decisions. Surely it would be better get the waste solution right than get it by some arbitrary deadline. Maybe the right solution is to be found in other technologies as suggested by the coalition, or maybe the techniques proposed for the Danford landfill can be applied to much smaller community facilities where the risks would be more manageable.

Thank you.