

August 20, 2024

To:

Tim Halman, Minister of Environment and Climate Change

Christopher MacDonald, Director Landfill and Environmental Compliance, GFL Environmental

Mayor Abraham Zebian

Councilor Jeff Hartt

Councilor Rupert Jannasch

Re: the proposed West Hants (Cogmagun) Landfill expansion and consultation process

After a recent Community Liaison Committee (CLC) meeting for the Landfill on June 26, I decided to write to convey my concerns about the lack of impartiality by the Chairperson, Shirley Pineo; make some suggestions regarding how this committee could be changed to improve the consultation process; and ask a few questions regarding the proposed expansion that I would like to have answered.

Just before the end of a polite and respectful meeting, I was reprimanded by Shirley for asking questions at the two public consultation meetings in April. I was told that I was restricted to asking questions during CLC meetings, and that I needed to show solidarity with GFL in public meetings. These comments were directed towards both myself and Debbie McLaughlin, the community rep filling in for Luke McGuire, who was absent because of the change in date. Both Debbie and I responded that we believed my first responsibility was to our community, to ensure that they had access to accurate information. Councilor Hartt was present for this exchange of comments.

I still had not received answers to some of my questions during our CLC meetings (especially those dealing with issues affecting greenhouse gases, PFAS, and expansion), and I also was tasked with asking questions for individuals who couldn't be present.

When introduced by Shirley as a member of the Landfill CLC at the Centre Burlington Hall, I responded that I hadn't seen 'this' presentation by Dillon and probably would have questions. There had been an initial brief power point presentation on May 9/23 about a proposed expansion. Since this was prior to the devastating rainfall in July/23, I wanted to be clear about adjustments/adaptations to accommodate future incidents, and protections proposed to ensure safety of our water.

It would be easy to infer that efforts were made to impede the consultative process. During the previous CLC meeting, the Chair had provided no opportunity for input from community reps about the format of the community consultation meetings. Shirley just stated that it would be an 'Open House' format. A Speaker to Audience format, and a larger venue with decent mics would have allowed for more of the public/residents to hear the questions of others as well as answers (especially for the Scotch Village meeting).

Noticing a delay in informing the public of the planned community consultation dates, I had contacted members of the CLC in late March. Knowing that few Shore residents check the Municipal website for dates, I arranged to have these dates included in the HSCHC newsletter. This was not my responsibility but poor attendance at these meetings could have been mistaken as lack of interest or concern.

It was readily apparent at these two public consultation meetings that residents did not have up-to-date info re many aspects of waste disposal at the landfill, nor knowledge of protocol for reporting concerns. There were numerous questions and concerns that a member of Dillon Consulting offered to record.

Our scheduled CLC meeting for May 1/24 was delayed almost 2 months until June 26 -to give GFL additional time "to prepare information with our partners to present during the next CLC meeting." When 'Public Consultation process to support future expansion' was on the agenda, I had expected to learn how community concerns about expansion would be addressed. Rather than a summary of questions with plans outlined, we received a verbal overview of the actions by Dillon Consulting re gathering info, and what was still pending.

It was unsettling to learn that the information recorded by Dillon Consulting, from the public, with responses, would not be available for the residents to view until the application from GFL for the expansion is/was submitted sometime in August. This makes it extremely difficult for the public to check if their questions/comments were accurately presented.

In addition to the lack of a neutral Chairperson/Facilitator, I believe other aspects of the CLC Description and Mandate need attention:

- The current composition of the Community Liaison Committee -The Mandate recommends 2 members from the vicinity of the landfill, as well as 2 from the broader community (currently there is 1 for each). With only one rep from the local Cogmagun area, if the meeting date is changed unexpectedly from the original meeting date, as was the case for Dec. 6/23, it can (and did) result in over a year with no representation.

- There is currently no requirement for a quorum. In the original CLC Mandate, it required all groups to be represented at a meeting. This is much easier to achieve if there are multiple community reps.

- Lack of access to the NS Dept of Environment and Climate Change (D of Env & CC)- Although I have specifically requested info, that I was told would have to be answered by someone from the NS D of Env&CC, a representative from the Dept was not invited to attend a meeting (and point 3 under the Membership section of the Mandate states "shall be invited"). If members of the CLC committee can't have access to info, how can it be shared with the community?

It was clearly evident from the community consultation meetings that communication regarding the sharing of information is a problem. It would certainly be an improvement if the minutes of the CLC Committee meetings could be posted on a website that is readily accessible to the public. But there was no discussion at the June 26th meeting of how to speed up the process of approving these minutes prior to posting. (To this date, I still have not seen a draft of the June 26th minutes). Also, if reports are going to be posted, it would be good, going forward, if more detail could be included. There has been a noticeable decrease in the specific information included in the Site Operations, and Site Initiative Reports since Scott Ogilvie was replaced as Manager. It is important to remember that a certain amount of context is necessary for specific details to have relevance. Representatives from GFL readily provide verbal answers when questioned, but when sharing info with members of the community, it is far better to have the info in print. For example, when questioning the amount of septage from West Hants, was it really just 25%?

GFL has demonstrated that they can make improvements when they are aware of a problem. This past winter, having prior notification that certain pick-ups were going to be delayed, was a tremendous help.

One objective of a CLC Committee is the timely and on-going exchange of information with the local community and I believe this is an integral component for a successful landfill operation. From my perspective there are immediate changes necessary for our committee to ensure compliance with the intent and spirit of the Mandate. Maybe more frequent meetings of the CLC need to be considered, as well as action on informing the public about where/how to access info.

Firstly, I believe the questions and concerns expressed by the community during the consultation meetings about current operations must be adequately acknowledged, addressed, and mitigated.

Minister Halman,

Before the additional challenges presented with an expansion are approved, I'm asking that the community have answers to these 3 concerns:

1. With rumours that only 3 approved landfills will be operating in mainland NS, does it mean that Cogmagun will be receiving most of the industrial waste from Halifax County? With significant growth projected for Halifax, will there be limits on the volume of waste transported here each year? How much deviation will be allowed for damage from flooding, fires, and other unexpected events?

2. The damage to land and water near landfills from per-and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) has been well-documented. Knowing that waste containing PFAS, or 'forever chemicals' is in industrial waste, and other waste from institutions, will testing and specific treatment (e.g. carbon filters) for PFAS be required for the leachate?

3. The greatest fear that was evident from questions asked during the meetings was unpredictable and unprecedented rainfalls that could cause leachate overflows and contamination of land, wells and the river; and who would assume liability. Most opposed the suggestion of an increase in height of 5 meters or 16.4 feet. I realize that a plan to expand is necessary. We all benefit from continued service to deal with waste, but only if we ensure that the nearby environment is respected and protected. While this proposal is for a 20-year period, I seriously question anyone's ability to plan appropriately for downpours in even 10 years' time. Given the accelerated risk conditions in Hants County from the effects of climate change, I believe we will need a more robust and accurate assessment of the projections and impacts of incidents of severe downpours in just 5 years. Will a partial approval for a shortened period of time, with specific conditions be considered?

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Gallagher

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