

Landfill Operation

East Ferris

Comments submitted to Council by: Philip Koning

For Consideration by Public Works Committee

Background

I wrote a column on my experience in trying to get information on the East Ferris Landfill and it does a good job of providing background for how this process has unfolded over the years

<https://smalltowntimes.ca/2021/11/11/actions-speak-louder-than-words/>

Further to the publication of that article, I received a call from Antoine Boucher, who was generous with his time as we engaged in a discussion about the landfill and the various aspects of its operation. During that discussion, Antoine suggested the best way to further the points I felt worthy of discussion would be to put them in front of the Public Works Committee and let them evaluate them. Since my path to the Director of Public Works is through the Council, I will submit to Council and be governed by their decision as to whether it is appropriate to refer this submission to the Public Works Committee.

Communication

One of the main points we discussed was the amount of communication about how our landfill operates and what the plan is, regarding future improvements or capacity. When the landfill lifespan was increased from 6 years to 70 years in 2013, there was no announcement that I could find about the enormous financial impact that had on the municipal budget by reducing the period over which closure and post closure costs would need to be financed. That amount was \$1,681K in 2012 and was knocked down to \$205K in 2013 and that fact, along with the assurance there was a plan to minimize the environmental impact of a prolonged operation, in my opinion, was worthy of a media release to inform residents.

The required strategic plan, developed by council, lists the following guiding principles:



The plan also includes many action items, one of which was to develop a communications policy with the following desired outcomes

3.3 Desired Outcomes

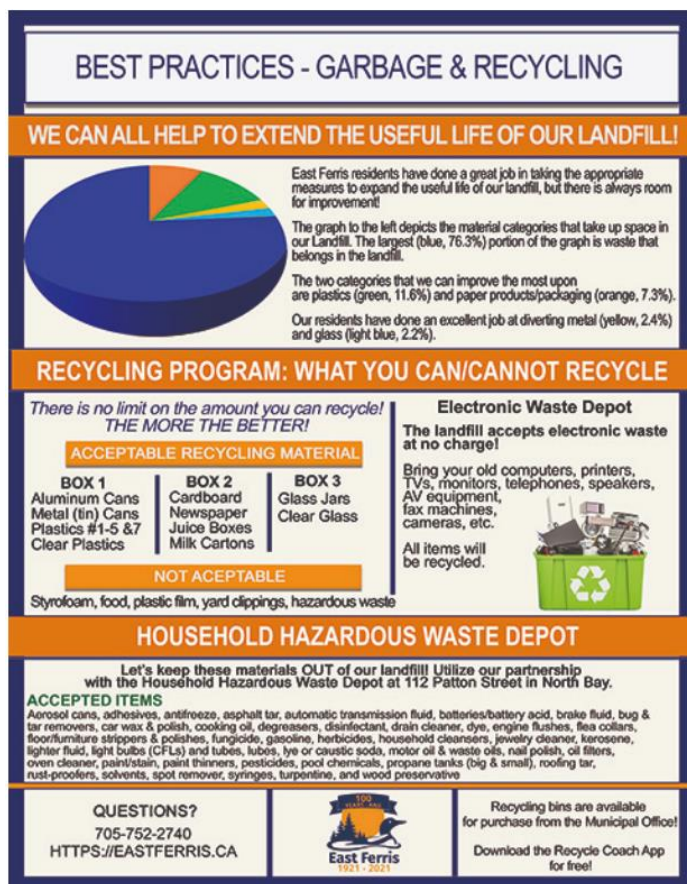
The main goal of the Corporate Communications Policy is to improve public communications and access to municipal information and aims to achieve several desired outcomes:

- Provide stakeholders with consistent, appropriate, efficient, effective, and timely information about its policies, programs, services and initiatives;
- Employ a variety of ways and means to communicate information;
- Improve access to information;
- Encourage citizens to attend and participate in public meetings; and
- Provide direction to staff and Council on how to disseminate information of interest to citizens and other parties, and how communications received from the public are handled.

By the direction provided by council, it is safe to say more communication about landfill operations to our residents, up to the limit prescribed by resources available, would be looked upon favourably.

This is not to say the Municipality has ignored the landfill in their communications to the residents. In the summer snapshot, produced in July 2021 the following graphic was included and also published on the Municipal Facebook page

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A Waste Management Bylaw Flyer was published and distributed, and landfill hours were included in each of the four snapshots published in 2021. There have been numerous references to the fact that the Waste Management Bylaw is available on the website, but I have not been able to locate the actual bylaw.

There have been great initiatives undertaken such as the Clean Up Days, Free Dump Day and the “Beat the Isolation Blues” Community Challenge. These events and publications continue to keep the landfill operation top of mind for residents, and we are fortunate to have an asset with so much capacity left in it.

East Ferris does not operate in a vacuum however, there are news items about various aspects of landfills that could impact ours and without information made easily available, residents are left to wonder how efficient and effective our operation really is.

In November of 2021, the Auditor General of Ontario released an [environmental report](#) that showed Ontario landfills were diverting approximately 50% of residential waste and only 15% of commercial waste. Based on the performance of the residential sector, Ontario came close to their target of diverting 30% of all landfill waste. The numbers from the 2020 East Ferris Financial Information Return (FIR) indicate the community diverted 25% of landfill waste in 2020, although we have no information as to the breakdown of commercial versus residential. What is also concerning is the fact that 2019 FIR indicates we diverted 27% of landfill waste. This fact is reflected in the finances also. The average amount spent on waste diversion in the five years prior to 2020 was \$114K and the amount spent in 2020 was \$110K.

I am hopeful however that the Report PLAN 2022-01, reviewed and forwarded to department heads by Council on Feb 8th 2022, will result in concrete actions supported by the appropriate budgetary resources. All the action items identified by Mr. Kirton are worthy of council support and I hope as many of them as are financially feasible are implemented. The idea of diverting and composting food waste has been mentioned to me by other residents.

Leachate

One of my concerns of the extension of landfill life was the resulting delay in treating leachate until after the closing of the site. After reading the 2013 Design and Operations Report which contained the recommendation to add additional monitoring wells, I was glad to hear that those wells have been drilled and are being monitored with results being sent to the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. I am less enamoured with the concept of “no news is good news” and believe a report from MECP would reassure residents, particularly regarding the presence of lead in the monitoring wells.

In the interests of transparency, I believe a summary of the results from the monitoring wells should be published, showing the trends in lead levels and the E-coli and coliform levels that exist in the wells closer to the lagoons, which are not municipality owned, nor operated.

If there were measures that could be taken to reduce the leachate emissions that are inherent in a landfill operation prior to the projected closing in 61 years, I believe they would be worth investing in.

Lagoons

I suspect the private sector operation of sewage lagoons on crown land adjacent to the landfill is not a well known fact. There has been much attention paid to the idea of curbing development in the villages before the increased density makes a wastewater collection system necessary. Residential septic systems have been identified as a concern for phosphorus concentrations but there is little known about the commercial lagoons and how they affect water quality. While the operation is outside municipal responsibility, the current lagoons, which serve as an alternative to the more expensive option of a municipal sewage system, are of interest to residents who assume they are properly run.

The MECP could be encouraged to provide reports to the municipality for publication on the East Ferris website as to the levels of E-coli and coliform in monitoring wells and the measures taken to control or reduce them.

Innovation

The landfill operation has seen innovation brought into it, with the addition of hydro to the site and the use of a heavy bulldozer which increased the compaction level and extends the capacity of the landfill. Reduced expenses by bringing the heavy equipment operation in-house have not been extensively publicized and future contemplated initiatives, like producing gravel onsite to reduce the cost of covering the garbage do not receive much public disclosure either.

There has been much media talk about Ontario's landfill capacity and how there is only 10 years before they are full. It takes 10 to 15 years to approve a new landfill, so there is bound to be pressure put on those landfills with capacity left. All municipalities have an interest in raising awareness about how waste management systems are going to operate in our province.

Summary

The first step to changing behaviours is knowledge about how the current system operates. Residents of East Ferris are entitled to know and need to know the entire life cycle of the food and products they consume. Municipalities could, and should, do a lot more to explain how that system works and the current environmental impact of it.

This [article](#) suggests there may be difficulty in the new waste management system for Ontario and combined with the lack of future capacity to landfill, it seems that municipalities will need to step up their game in letting their residents know how it may impact them and what the municipality is doing to mitigate any negative effects.

A good way to highlight how East Ferris handles Waste Management is to compare with surrounding communities. The following example shows the differences in cost to households in each community, although the differences in service levels needs to be fully explained.

I believe Bonfield and Chisholm do not provide waste collection, and Callander does not operate their own landfill, so those factors and others I am unaware of need to be highlighted.

Still, if these numbers accurately reflect the actual operations, it would appear that East Ferris is well managed and has some room for improvements.

	East Ferris	Callander	Bonfield	Chisholm	Powassan
	2020	2020	2020	2020	2020
Solid Waste Collection					
- Wages & Benefits					\$97,237
- Contracted Services	\$124,639	\$126,562			
Solid Waste Disposal					
- Wages & Benefits			\$41,974	\$22,666	\$54,211
- Material	\$12,355		\$12,971	\$66,977	\$180,470
- Rents & Financial Expense	\$6,441				
- Contracted Services	\$9,306	\$236,299	\$10,094	\$37,972	\$55
Solid Waste Disposal	\$28,102	\$236,299	\$23,065	\$104,949	\$180,525
Waste Diversion					
- Material					\$105,439
- Contracted Services\	\$106,740	\$72,852	\$19,212		
- Rents & Financial Expense	\$4,162				
Waste Diversion	\$110,902	\$72,852	\$19,212	\$0	\$105,439
Total Operational Cost of Waste	\$275,519	\$435,713	\$49,777	\$104,949	\$285,964
Households	2185	1806	1123	675	1495
Solid Waste & Disposal & Landfill Closing Costs per Household	\$75	\$201	\$27	\$155	\$186