

City hopes harbour cleanup gets three-pronged attack

Mayor pushing for Ontario and federal funds to help with \$650-million project

BY CHRIS SORENSEN

The city is hoping an atmosphere of political co-operation will help it pay for the cleanup of Hamilton Harbour, an ongoing project with projected costs of more than \$650 million.

At a meeting with the International Joint Commission, Mayor Larry Di Ianni called on local MPs and MPPs Saturday to help him push for a “tripartite agreement” that would see federal and provincial dollars funnelled into improvements in Hamilton’s water and sewer systems.

“So far Hamilton has been footing almost the entire bill for the harbour cleanup,” Di Ianni said after the breakfast gathering at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington.

“The numbers are so big that we can’t do it on our own,” Di Ianni said.

The Hamilton Harbour Remediation Action Plan (RAP) has set a cleanup deadline of 2015. Success would see the port removed from a 1987 list of communities that failed to meet Great Lakes quality standards.

Of the 43 hot spots, 12 are in Canada. Only two have been de-listed. And while Hamilton Harbour was once among the worst, it has made steady progress.

Some \$50 million has already been poured into five combined sewer overflow tanks.

They are designed to control the release of untreated waste into the lake by catching the material and pumping

it through a sewage treatment plant.

However, there’s still about \$650 million worth of upgrades needed, according to Di Ianni. As well, an estimated \$30 million will be required to contain the contamination of Randle Reef, just off the western edge of Stelco’s Hilton Works dock.

Transport Minister Tony Valeri attended the meeting and said he was prepared to work with the city and his federal and provincial counterparts to secure some sort of “sustainable revenue stream.”

“This all plays into the city’s agenda,” Valeri added.

IJC chair Herb Gray, who was at the meeting to hear updates on the remediation project, said he was “optimistic” that the city, Ottawa and the province could reach an agreement. He added that he would support efforts to secure a deal. “Now’s the time to press for (funding),” he said.

According to the IJC’s most recent report, the U.S. government has spent \$5 billion to upgrade waste-water infrastructure at two contaminated sites and \$200 million to clean more than 1.6 million cubic metres of contaminated sediment from several waterways, including the Maumee River in Ohio.

By contrast, Canada has spent about \$300 million on waste-water infrastructure.

John Shaw, manager of Environment Canada’s Great Lakes Sustainability Fund, said it’s important to sell Ottawa

and the province on the larger economic benefits of remediation as well as the costs of doing nothing.

He has spent years trying to broker a solution that would deal with the heavily contaminated sediment on the harbour floor at Randle Reef. The current conceptual design calls for the most harmful waste to be permanently entombed.

Once the material is contained, Shaw says the harbour will be in a better position to attract badly needed development to its shores and be safely dredged to allow better access for large commercial ships.

Roger Wheelock, the director of RBG, presented a proposal Saturday that would see Cootes Paradise eventually become a federal nature reserve or national park, luring tourism dollars to the area.

A likely model would be Point Pelee National Park, on the western end of Lake Erie, because of its small size and relative proximity to urban areas.

Marilyn Baxter, the manager of the Bay Area Restoration Council, said all the pieces finally appear to be falling into place — particularly with all the recent talk in Ottawa about lending a hand to the country’s cash-strapped cities.

“Timing is everything and everything seems to be lining up right now,” Baxter said.

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