

## **Clearly, the harbour is much improved**

Once one of the worst there was, Hamilton may one day be pristine

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The Hamilton Spectator

(Dec 27, 2008)

More than 20 years ago, Hamilton's harbour got blacklisted.

Stamped as an area of concern by a Canada-U.S. watchdog agency, it was a sorry sight with cancerous fish and cross-billed birds that couldn't eat.

Among the 43 Great Lakes sites listed by the International Joint Commission, Hamilton was probably the most polluted on the Canadian side, says Jim Hudson, executive director of the Bay Area Restoration Council.

He says roughly 50 groups banded together to get the harbour off the list by 2015, including all three levels of government, local steel makers and conservation authorities. They put their heads together to design a solution.

Out came the Remedial Action Plan (RAP).

It has cost the key players a whopping \$1 billion since then and there's yet another \$500 million to go.

"My guess is that we're at least 60 per cent of the way there," says Hudson, speaking about progress made to date.

But a badly needed \$200 million in funding is key to those efforts.

The money would go toward a total of \$700 million in upgrades to the Woodward Avenue wastewater treatment plant.

"If we don't get the funding, there is a good chance we won't meet the 2015 deadline," says Jim Harnum, senior director of water and wastewater with the city.

Better water quality levels from the upgrades are essential to creating a harbour that can finally shed its place as a pollution hot spot.

"We're at a point where the water quality is as good as it can get and it's just kind of stabilized and it won't get any better until these improvements are made to the Woodward plant," says John Hall, RAP co-ordinator.

With funding, cleaner water could be flowing as soon as 2010 with increasing clarity until upgrades are completed in 2014.

Without funding, those timelines aren't so certain. The city will also draft plans next year for staged upgrades to fall back on should federal funding not materialize.

The city has applied for the money through a federal program called the Building Canada Fund. In the past six years, it has received \$68 million from the provincial and federal governments toward wastewater treatment plant upgrades, says Harnum. He says during initial discussions, the federal government was receptive to its need for what the city at the time thought would be \$180 million.

The city has approved a 4.5 per cent increase in water and sewer rates for 2009. It will cost \$26 more per household annually.

The boost will help support a 10-year, \$1.8-billion water, wastewater and storm water capital project. That includes the \$700-million upgrades to the Woodward plant.

### **The problem**

Poor water clarity and unacceptably high levels of ammonia, raw sewage, phosphorus and other pollutants in 1986.

### **Achievements to date**

- \* Return of native aquatic plants such as eel grass.
- \* Reduction of deformed wildlife.
- \* Re-appearance of native fish such as pike, trout and perch.
- \* Improved water clarity of between two and two-and-a-half metres from one metre. Target is three.
- \* 85 per cent reduction in overflow containing raw sewage in last five years.
- \* Sewage solids down from roughly 26 milligrams per litre a decade ago to roughly 13 milligrams now. Target is 3 milligrams.
- \* Phosphorus down to 35 micrograms per litre from 70 micrograms. Target is 17 micrograms.

### **How we did it**

- \* Built overflow tanks to hold back extra water during heavy rain storms until sewage plant can catch up. Hamilton has an old system of combined sewers that take both sewer and storm water. Heavy rains cause overflow, dumping raw sewage into the harbour.
- \* Industries have reduced run-off from factory operations.

### **Critical action remaining**

1. Upgrades to Woodward plant
2. Containment of tar sediment on Randle Reef
3. Watershed education, i.e. teaching farmers better fertilization management; teaching developers to restrict silt run-off

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