



Water quality commitment

\$75m first step to clean up harbour and take city off Great Lakes pollution list

BY PETER VAN HARTEN

You will be able to see the difference in water quality at Hamilton Harbour.

That's both the promise and the expectation with the \$75 million in harbour cleanup money announced yesterday by federal, provincial and municipal politicians.

But it's only a "first step" in the more than \$600 million needed to take Hamilton off the list of 41 Great Lakes pollution hot spots — called "areas of concern" by the International Joint Commission.

"We will see a measurable change," said John Hall, coordinator, Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan (HHRAP).

"This is a very, very significant first step."

The bulk of the money (\$64 million) will go to clean up the discharges of sewage and rainwater that go directly into the harbour without any treatment whenever it rains and treatment plants are swamped with combined sewer overflows.

The city already has huge overflow storage tanks but there are not enough to hold back all the flow during storms.

Jim Harnum, head of water and wastewater for the city, says it has not yet been determined whether the money will be used to build more tanks or actual high-rate treatment facilities at three discharge outflows at Wentworth, Wellington and Birch streets.

But the results will mean less harbour loading of harmful nitrogen, phosphorus, ammonia and sewage solids and should improve water oxygen levels for fish and aquatic life, he said.

Harnum said the city has budgeted \$300 million for water and wastewater improvements and is looking to governments for another \$300 million to improve the harbour.

"We are getting \$50 million; it's a beginning," he said.

Yesterday, the federal government committed \$35 million and the province pledged \$15 million.

The commitment allows the city to go ahead with various projects that will be outlined in its 2006 water and wastewater master plan.

Hamilton will contribute \$25 million from its sewer and water rate charges.

Additional funding will be needed to upgrade the Woodward Avenue treatment plant.

The combined sewer overflow control work now planned will be carried out in 2009 and 2010.

From 2007 to 2009, the city plans to spend \$8.1 million of the \$75 million on wastewater



TORY ZIMMERMAN, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Jim Harnum, head of water and wastewater for the city, joined politicians at three levels of government for yesterday's announcement.

disinfection upgrades at its Waterdown, Dundas and Woodward treatment plants.

The city plans to use ultraviolet light chambers and improved chemical treatment to eliminate the use of harmful chlorine which now ends up being discharged into the harbour in summer months at the plants.

The third priority for the funding is Windermere Basin where \$2.9 million is being spent to naturalize the area into a wetland and floodplain to capture sediments from the Woodward plant and Red Hill Creek.

The Spectator's view: A17

It costs \$24 million to dredge the basin of built-up sediments and the city wants to avoid the recurring costs of dredging with a more sustainable natural area to tie in with the Red Hill Valley area.

"We want it to be an area people can enjoy rather than a big hole in the ground," Harnum said.

Hall said the Skyway treatment plant in Burlington is meeting some of its effluent discharge targets established to get the harbour off the list of "areas of concern" set by the International Joint Commission.

"Hamilton is having a very difficult time meeting the HHRAP water quality targets," he said.

"When it rains, you get this huge additional flow into your plant."



HAMILTON SPECTATOR FILE PHOTO

Workers vacuum sewage overflow trapped by a boom in Windermere Basin.

To get delisted, Hamilton will require a lot more money from the two senior levels of government, he said.

Marilyn Baxter, of the Bay Area Restoration Council, said Hamilton has made progress on its waterfront trails and harbour access.

But harbour water quality is "not halfway there yet" if Hamilton is to be delisted, she adds.

The \$75 million will bring a noticeable difference in water quality, reduce stinky algae and provide better oxygen levels to support fish life.

The money committed yesterday does not provide for any progress on cleaning up the toxic Randle Reef area in the east harbour.

Baxter said that is a high priority and hopes the needed

millions (of dollars) will flow from the federal and provincial governments to contain it.

"Our goal is delisting in 2015, so Randle Reef better be cleaned up by then," she said.

"We hope to have major steps within a year on that."

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