City of Hamilton - Request to Speak to a Committee of Council

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If your request is for a specific committee meeting, this form must be received by NOON the day before the scheduled committee meeting. Requests for Monday meetings must be received the Friday before the meeting. Requests for meetings scheduled for the day after a statutory holiday must be received the last business day before the meeting.

Standing Committee Requested

Kindly indicate which Standing Committee: *  General Issues Committee

Requestor Information

Name of Individual: *  Maureen Reilly
Name of Organization:  Sludge Watch
Do you or your organization represent a lobbyist (voluntary)  ○ Yes  ○ No
Contact Number: *  416 922 4099
Email Address: *  maureen.reilly@sympatico.ca
Mailing Address: *  103 Avenue Rd Toronto Ontario Canada M5R 2G9
Reason(s) for delegation request: *  To discuss issues related to Land Application of Hamilton sewage sludge
Will you be submitting a formal presentation?*  ○ Yes  ○ No

 inadvertent decision: Overhead projector required for the presentation

Power Point required for the presentation

Requests to speak to Council are forwarded to the Standing Committee for consideration. Once considered by Committee, and approved, you will be notified of the date for your presentation.

This form is not for the purpose of presenting unsolicited proposals by Vendors to Committee. Such proposals are subject to a competitive process as required by the City’s Purchasing Policy.

Personal information collected on this form is authorized under Section 5.10(2) of the City’s Procedural By-law No. 10-053 for the purpose of contacting individuals and/or organizations requesting an opportunity to appear as a delegation before a Standing Committee and will be published with the Committee Agenda. The Voluntary Lobbyist Registry is a public document and will be available for viewing in the City Clerk’s office. The Procedural By-law is a requirement of Section 238(2) of the Municipal Act. Questions about its collection can be directed to the Manager, Legislative Services / Deputy Clerk, City Hall, 71 Main St. W., Hamilton, ON L8P 4Y5 (905 546-2424 ext. 4304).
Dear Hamilton Councillors,

Thank you for allowing me to provide this information for your consideration.
I spend a lot of time looking at the impacts of city sludge on farmland. As you know, the homes and industries of Hamilton produce a great deal of sewage sludge, about 55,000 tonnes per year.

Currently all this sludge goes on Ontario farmfields. But in many recent years there have been so few farmfields available — especially years with wet weather — that as little as 20% of the sludge can go on farmfields, and is sent to storage in PowerGrow in Niagara.

Reminder: Why Hamilton has decided against its current sludge practice:

With climate change we see more and more unusual weather patterns, which make sludge spreading difficult to predict, since no sludge can be spread in the rain or winter or wet weather conditions.

As more farmers turn to cattle production — they generate manure and don’t need sludge. As more farmers grow soya beans — they don’t need sludge fertilizer since soya fixes nitrogen. As the Nutrient Management Act now includes all Non-Agricultural Source Materials — like sewage sludge, all fields spread with sludges are limited to spreading in ways consistent with nutrient management limits.

As more toxins are discovered in sewage sludge, there is increasing reluctance to use sludge on food lands. The major grocery chains in Canada have said that they will not buy food grown in sewage sludge. As the public is more aware of the benefits of the ‘Eat Local’ movement, they come to understand that sewage sludge — with its payload of toxins — is not what they want to fertilize their farms.

The Hamilton Biosolids Master Plan has set forth very cogent reasons that land application is not a sustainable practice:

"The management of biosolids land application is increasing in complexity. Recently-implemented provincial legislation (for example, the Nutrient Management Act [NMA]), creates greater competition for land from other municipalities, continuing concerns with certain biosolids constituents levels (metals and pathogens) and biosolids odor have limited the future land bank available to the City for the spreading of biosolids. Off-season and inclement weather storage costs, increasing transportation distances and stringent approval requirements for securing land are further complicating and increasing the risk of the application process. In addition to the above-mentioned pressures, one of the major elements to sustaining this alternative is the dependence on a volunteer farmer base which has proven difficult to secure and maintain because of application timing logistics and neighbour odor concerns. During off-season or times of inclement weather when land application is not feasible, or when biosolids storage is precluded, the City’s contingency of landfilling has been used. The overall sustainability of this management approach, especially over the medium- to long-term, is tentative and uncertain. While the City’s experiences with land application over the past 11 years have been generally positive, opportunities to continue the program are limited; this due primarily to the growing constraints of increasing regulation and decreasing land availability."

You probably don’t know that Hamilton puts over 2.6 tonnes of lead on farmland every year through its ‘biosolids’ land application program (see NPFI for Woodward). The National Pollutant Release Inventory also sets out all the mercury, arsenic, selenium, and chromium in Hamilton’s sewage sludge laced onto the fields where we grow our food. With a modern thermal approach, these metals are sequestered safely. You may not know...
You may not know that through the sewage treatment process bacteria confer antibiotic resistance. Thus there are high percentages of multi-antibiotic resistant in the sludge that is land applied.

You may not know that federal research shows sludge gushing into surface water from farm tile drains just minutes after it starts to rain on sludge spread fields, polluting surface water with urban chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and resistant pathogens.

Please don't forget that rural residents in Ontario are trying to protect their well water from pollutants, and urban sludges contain very mobile toxic elements like PFOS and nonylphenol, and lethal bacteria like Ecoli 0157, that can migrate to groundwater and nearby wells. Toronto moves to new thermal technology

The City of Toronto Works Committee voted last month to replace the old sewage sludge hearth incinerators at their Highland Creek Plant with modern fluidized bed thermal treatment, utilizing the best available pollution controls. They found that due to the high projected cost of land application, and lack of available farmfields, the thermal approach, even with all the expensive pollution controls, is still cheaper than land application. And through this technology, 95% - 99% of most sludge toxins are removed. Otherwise these pollutants go out 100% into the environment together with the trucking, and stockpiling, and storage site pollutants.

Hamilton, you made a good decision when you decided against continuing land application of sewage sludge in favour of thermal technology. Hamilton made a good decision in taking up the Ontario renewable energy mandate. Look to European cities - those that are voted the most green and most liveable - cities like Copenhagen, Vienna, Munich - and see the pride they take in carefully managing their sewage sludge as a renewable energy fuel.

As challenging as waste management decisions can be, please remember that contamination of Ontario's rural communities - and our foodchain - through land application of Hamilton's wastewater sludge is undesirable, unsustainable, and impractical.

It needs to stop.

Thank You

Maureen Reilly
Sludge Watch