

## Pickering residents take Big Pipe fight to Queen's Park

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June 02, 2010

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PICKERING -- Betty Burkholder's 100-acre farm has been in the family since 1833.

She never thought the expansion of the 'Big Pipe' that will go less than 500 metres from her farm would actually be approved.

"It just seemed like right would prevail," she said in an interview.

But in April, the Minister of the Environment, John Gerretsen, approved the environmental assessment of the York-Durham Sanitary Sewer expansion, despite outcry from Pickering residents, politicians, and even environmental lawyers and advocates that live outside of the area.

The opponents are not ready to back down yet.

The pipe takes 90 per cent of York Region's waste water to the Duffin Creek Water Pollution Control Plant in Pickering for treatment. York wants to expand the pipe to accommodate the region's population.

The City of Pickering has launched legal action against the plans, which is still before the courts.

Ms. Burkholder attended a press conference at Queen's Park Thursday, where Jim Robb, a volunteer with the Rouge Duffins



Sabrina Byrnes / Metroland

PICKERING -- Betty Burkholder's family farm has been around since 1833. Now, a pipe is going less than 500 metres away from the farm. An odor control facility is going to be built 150 metres away from a local Mennonite church that is now a heritage building, and she is concerned. May 31, 2010

Greenspace Coalition, Devi Gopalan of Pickering community group Stop the Stink, and Ward 1 Regional Councillor Bonnie Littley demanded that the Province either withdraw approval of the pipe expansion, or at least impose stricter conditions than those already set out by the ministry when it was approved in April.

"They're weak, they're toothless, there's no strength to them," said Coun. Littley.

Mr. Robb pointed out York plans to increase its sewage exports to Pickering of approximately 400 million litres per day in 2010 to approximately 930 million per day in 2032.

The conditions proposed by the group include imposing strict impact avoidance measures and non-performance sanctions to protect Pickering and its residents from the pipe's odours and pollution, and ensuring the pipe is built around Bob Hunter Memorial Park, not right through it, which is currently proposed.

"He was and I am opposed to the Big Pipe in totality," said Mr. Hunter's widow, Bobbi Hunter, in a letter she had sent to Premier Dalton McGuinty and Mr. Gerretsen.

Other recommendations from pipe opponents include requiring a 75-per cent reduction in groundwater and surface water leakage and wasting through the pipe and its feeder sewers within 10 years, and requiring advanced water purification at the plant to remove pharmaceuticals, carcinogens, phosphorous, and other biologically active chemicals to safeguard public drinking water and health.

Mr. Robb said California uses advanced technologies to fully treat and purify sewage for around the same cost as the pipe expansion, which has created purified water that meets drinking water standards. He doesn't understand why Ontario can't go that route.

"The public wants better water protection and conservation decisions, not provincial puffery and pronouncements," he said.

He added the premier on May 18 proposed to make Ontario a North American leader in clean water technology.

Pickering-Scarborough East MP Wayne Arthurs, who is "not opposed to the pipe," had not received a copy of the conditions proposed by pipe opponents, but he feels that after the long EA process, and now that it's been approved by the minister, it's unlikely that the Province will change its mind, or even implement the conditions.

As for the comments that conditions are toothless, Mr. Arthurs said there is an "extensive range of conditions," more than the number usually imposed on an EA. Those conditions include an advisory committee to be engaged in the process "all the way to implementation."

Other current EA conditions include creating measures to conserve and use water efficiently and to reduce inflow and infiltration of water into the sewer, and protecting and enhancing Bob Hunter Memorial Park.

If it's found in the implementation process that there would be environmental degradation or significant problems, then "one would have to adjust the plan as it's being implemented. But to go back now and review the EA approval and revise the plan, probably not."

York officials have always insisted the pipe will be safe and say they have taken concerns into consideration.

Mr. Robb said if the conditions are tacked onto the approval, the opponents will tolerate the expansion.