

Delegation to the Community Services Committee  
Monday, July 14, 2014

Re. Item #11 the Harbours Feasibility and Capacity Study

By Liz Benneian  
On behalf of the Trumpeter Swan Coalition

Good Evening, my name is Liz Benneian and I'm here on behalf of the Trumpeter Swan Coalition to speak to our concerns about the Capacity Study. I attended Halton's Waterfront Committee meeting where this study was first presented and my comments are based on that meeting and from reading the Capacity Study.

The bottom line with this study is that it concludes that Halton Region will need 7 marinas, including four new ones, and an expanded LaSalle Park to meet future demand.

This is problematic for many reasons not the least of which is that even if shoreline space could be found to accommodate this type of expansion, the amount of land damage that would occur along the shoreline to service this expansion would be unsupportable. As Burlington Councillor Rick Craven pointed out: "You can't just look at expanding marinas, you also have to look at expanding amenities" and that means increased traffic to the shore, new and expanded parking lots, washroom facilities, fueling stations, road and traffic improvements etc. One of the Waterfront Committee members noted that the only place to expand parking at LaSalle was to take over the beach area and that would destroy critical habitat and a passive recreational area used by thousands of citizens.

The biggest problem with this study is that by and large the consultants went to the boating industry and said do you think there will be increased demand in the future and would you like to meet that demand, and not surprisingly, they said yes.

I'm sure you could ask developers if they wanted to expand into more greenfields to build single family homes on large lots and they would say yes. Nevertheless, there are sound fiscal, social and environmental reasons for governments to fight sprawl — and they are doing so.

Similarly, I'm sure you could ask most drivers if they want more roads and highways and they would say yes, nevertheless, there are sound fiscal, social and environmental reasons for governments to move away from more roads and to build better public transit infrastructure instead — and they are doing so.

There is a strong case to be made that there are real fiscal, social and environmental limits to building four new marinas in Halton and expanding LaSalle Park.

As well, many red flags have been raised about the Capacity Study, for instance, the way it predicts future behaviour based on past behaviour. We are living in more chaotic and unpredictable times with everything from the economy to the weather subject to rapidly changing conditions.

Members of the Waterfront Committee rightly challenged the assumptions made in this report.

For instance, one member asked the consultant whether the increased diversity of Halton's citizens had been taken into account as many may not have the same cultural affinity for boating. The answer was the consultants talked to the marinas and they say a lot of people from diverse ethnicities are taking up boating. Talking to marina owners to answer questions like this does not result in empirical data that you can count on.

Another Waterfront Committee member asked a question about whether young people would continue to participate in boating at the levels projected in the report as the report did not take into account that the coming generations are expected to have less earning power and have less disposable income than their parents' generation. Again, the consultant's response was that they had talked to marina owners and they had been assured that young people were showing a lot of interest in boating. The youngest member of the Waterfront committee challenged this response saying, "We may be interested in boating but we might not be able to afford it."

In its way, the Capacity Study does point out the societal issue of growing income inequality, citing as one of the many reasons for increasing marina capacity the fact that the richer rich tend to be buying bigger boats. I suppose the question becomes should the public purse and the environment be made to pay so they can park their luxury liners? What about the concept of user pay?

Also, as one member of the Waterfront Committee pointed out, citing growing income inequality and the rising cost of gas, wouldn't it be equally possible to project a substantial drop in demand for marinas and dock space as less people are able to afford boating and those that can buy smaller more fuel efficient boats. The consultant's answer to that was that the boaters he'd talked to said they would keep boating no matter how high the cost of fuel went. I say that's both an inadequate answer to a good question and shabby research methodology.

A major failing with this study is its narrowness. As Shoreplan Engineering, one of the consultants on this project says on their website: "Our approach is to work closely with the client to ensure that the final products meet their needs."

We argue they have worked so closely with the clients, including in this case the LaSalle Park Marina Association, they have actually failed to take other factors into account that

would have provided a more nuanced and balanced report on what future needs might be given limiting factors.

For instance, a study released on June 26 by the Mowat Centre and the Council of the Great Lake Region, partly funded by the Government of Ontario, looked at the impact of Global Warming on the Great Lakes and estimated lower water levels may cost the Regional economy \$19 billion by 2050. Recreational boating and fishing may be the hardest hit areas, says the report, with losses of \$13 billion by 2050. In other words, you may build and expand these marinas to find them high and dry in a few decades.

And finally, while the consultants took great pains to explain that this study only addressed capacity, and that locations for expansions and new builds would be looked at in the second phase of the study, it is important to raise the red flag that this study does mention the proposed expansion at LaSalle Park from 219 non-permanent slips to 340 permanent ones and the building of a permanent 400 m breakwall that will cover most of the harbour.

The Trumpeter Swan Coalition has serious concerns about both aspects of the proposal and we believe the EA was inadequate in addressing those concerns. That's why we, as well as Conservation Halton, asked the Ministry of the Environment to issue a Part 11 order. The Ministry has been reviewing the proposal for almost a year now. If anyone would like details about our concerns, I would be happy to provide them.

The Coalition would also like me to point out that we are concerned that a private entity, the LaSalle Park Marina Association, was allowed to fund part of the study — a study whose results they would benefit from. Furthermore, the fact they paid for part of the study was not disclosed until we found out about it and made it public. It does not help with public perception of the issue when the LaSalle Park Marina Association's president claims it "is the best \$6,800 we have ever spent."

In conclusion, I would like to mention a story Mr. Stirling Todd, senior planner at Halton Region, relayed at the Waterfront Committee meeting. He noted that about 8 years ago, he was involved in a Region of Halton study to determine how much land might be required for future golf courses. Diligent work was done and a figure arrived at. A few years later, following the recession of 2008, they reviewed the work and found the estimated capacity was completely over-inflated given changing demographics, trends and economic issues. As we know by the Golf industry's own study, commissioned by the National Allied Golf Associations and published in 2012, the industry is in trouble. I would suggest that we need to be very wary of the numbers in this study and note that given the timelines to build new marina the capacity projections will need to be reviewed before building begins.

For now, the Trumpeter Swan Coalition suggests that this study be reviewed by Halton's politicians with a critical eye. Consider both how the data was obtained and what data may have been left out. As well take a wide view as you move into Phase Two of the

study which must not only consider where to build but should we build, can we afford to build and what will the environmental and social costs be.

Thank you.