



# The Rucksack

Newsletter of The Friends of McNabs Island Society

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Autumn '92

## CONSULTANTS RELEASE ASSESSMENT OF SEWAGE PLANT PROPOSAL OUR WORST FEARS CONFIRMED

“*Aside from Point Pleasant Park, McNabs Island is the only landscape unit that offers the semblance of a natural landscape in Halifax Harbour. It is unique for several reasons. First, unlike Point Pleasant, it can be seen from most of the inner harbour and the central business districts of Halifax and Dartmouth. It is also seen as a discrete land unit with distinct definition because it is an island and, therefore, separated from adjacent landscape units. ... McNabs Island forms a unique visual, natural and cultural resource.*

**...The proposed STP site is positioned between much of the viewing area and McNabs Island. The plant could potentially deprive the island of much of its unique visual character when viewed from the mainland. ...The cove shown in the concept plans has an uncharacteristic shape for the Halifax Inlet and the drumlin landscape. ...It will also be many years before a vegetative community at all similar to that of the shores of McNabs Island can be established. ...The presence of vehicles and large buildings would be regarded as an intrusion. ...The [artificial island] will probably be seen as an uncharacteristic shape, being almost round instead of elongated along a northwest-southeast axis. The eventual growth of vegetation will ...do nothing to improve the apparent shape of the island.” \***

*Story on page 2...*

\*Report to Halifax Harbour Cleanup Inc. Environmental Assessment Report for the Halifax-Dartmouth Metropolitan Sewage Treatment Facility, Component Study Report on the Visual Environment. Jacques Whitford Environment Ltd./Porter Dillon Ltd.

## Wilderness Under Siege



**Beach at Ives Point, McNabs Island.** If sewage system proposed by HHCI is built, Ives Point will be destroyed and replaced by an ugly, sprawling complex. The shoreline of McNabs Island will be drenched by 100-million litres-per-day of chlorinated sewage, and the Island will be downwind of the sludge incinerator at least 50% of the time.

*David Smith photo*

## Our Worst Fears Confirmed

by David Smith

Jacques Whitford Environment Ltd. has released its massive Environmental Assessment Report on the \$430-million regional sewage treatment system proposed by Halifax Harbour Cleanup Inc. (HHCI). The Report consists of two thick volumes and 24 accompanying studies, and cost taxpayers an astounding \$2.3-million to prepare. An initial reading of the Report confirms our worst suspicions on the devastating impact the proposed facility would have on McNabs Island and our harbour environment.

Under the heading 'Rationale,' the Report admits at the outset that, "The environmental problems of the harbour cannot be resolved by the project alone." This is, of course, a gross understatement.

The Report underscores the venal opportunism and tunnel-vision of the

politicians and engineers who hatched this bizarre proposal, which would do little to 'clean-up' or otherwise improve the harbour.

The Report states, "...important decisions including primary treatment at a single STP [sewage plant] and an outfall location were presented [in the Fournier task force report]... These decisions have enabled engineering studies to proceed in respect to *economical tunnel routes*." In other words, HHCI's vaunted 'public consultation' process was all a charade, a multi-million dollar media circus.

### Outfall

The Report attributes moving the system's outfall (from outside an area recommended by the Fournier task force), to the "Halifax Port Corporation...[having] rejected all of the initially proposed outfall sites...and, accordingly, nominated a preferred site immediately west of Ives Point."

With no stated environmental justification and barely a whimper of protest from the members of the Fournier task force, forthwith this became the proposed outfall site. Former members of the task force have said they selected the area northeast of George's Island for the outfall, after they had established the principle that Metro's sewage was *not* to be exported outside the inner harbour.

### End run around zoning

According to the Report, HHCI is planning an end-run around county and municipal zoning and park use by-laws, by claiming that the site of its proposed 'artificial island' (Ives Point on McNabs Island) is "...on a water lot," and that "Halifax Port Corporation has direct jurisdiction over water lot acquisition requirements of the project."

During HHCI's 'site selection process,' the president of the Halifax Port Corporation angrily rejected the Halifax Railyards Site. The site received the highest (i.e., most favourable) score under HHCI's own 'site evaluation matrix,' for placement of the sewage and OFS (oil-from-sludge) plants.

### STP Pollution

Aside from inflicting needless destruction in the Harbour's only remaining wilderness area, the sewage system would also cause massive water and air pollution. Under the HHCI proposal chlorinated effluent, still loaded with industrial contaminants, would be discharged in a plume up to 5-kilometres long into the channel between McNabs Island and Point Pleasant. The oil-from-sludge incineration process would generate hundreds of tons of greenhouse gases and untold quantities of vaporized heavy metals such as lead and mercury, which would fall (depending upon wind direction) over densely populated areas or fishing grounds. It is obvious that environmental concerns rank very low, if at all, to HHCI—unless they can be hypocritically exploited to enhance the project's public appeal.

*(continues on next page)*

While the Report exalts supposed benefits of the project, including reduction of beach litter and "economic benefits," it also states, "*The project arises from broad engineering considerations of technology and cost*" (apparently the higher the better). More significant is the admission, "*The implementation of OFS technology is a requirement for federal funding.*"

#### Taken to the cleaners—again

To qualify for ca. \$65-million in federal funds (i.e. the \$95-million ACOA contribution, minus GST on the whole project), area tax payers are being asked to pay-up *\$350-million* just to see the project built; and anywhere from *two-billion, five-hundred-million dollars to seven-billion dollars* to amortize, maintain and operate the system over the next sixty years. From this vast expenditure, the Report boasts, we may see a return of just

\$150-million in wages and locally-purchased supplies.

#### Horrific visual impact

As the quotes on page 1 show, the Component Study Report on the Visual Environment (prepared by Porter Dillon Ltd., in association with Reinhart L. Petersmann Landscape Architect Ltd.), doesn't mince words when describing the unique and priceless value of McNabs Island *as a wilderness*, or the irreparable harm that would be inflicted on the Island's visual aspect and, perhaps more importantly, its wilderness image by the proposed sewage plant.

#### Ridiculous

Yet the component study is prefaced by a ridiculous disclaimer: that it is "*based on a project description that was current in November 1991.*" This startling admission is followed by a shopping-list of sketchily-described,

proposed mitigations.

How much else of the \$2.3-million Report is obsolete, and why are erroneous and conflicting descriptions of the project being foisted on the EAR Panel and the public at this stage of the process?

#### Sickening

If such shoddy work is accepted without challenge from the Panel, it will point to a continuation of sickening levels of corruption and ineptitude that have plagued this sorry bailiwick for generations.

Were it not for the deepening cynicism that has greeted every fresh display of autocratic contempt by HHCI and its political masters, we would almost welcome the Jacques Whitford assessment report as a vindication of every objection we have raised. As it is, we have every reason to fear the worst.

## The Metro Coalition for Harbour Clean-up

### INTERVENER UPDATE

by Royce Walker

Over the summer, considerable progress has been made in our preparations for the EAR (Environmental Assessment Review) hearings.

As previously reported, The Friends of McNabs Island Society has pursued the formation of a co-operative with several metro environmental organizations that share our concerns regarding the HHCI sewage treatment system proposal. The co-op was formed because the Federal Environmental Review Office (FERO) indicated in application guidelines that it would direct us to do so, and it would create a much larger membership base, thus permitting more issues to be effectively addressed.

We have named our co-op The Metro Coalition for Harbour Clean-up, with members representing Friends of McNabs (Royce Walker, Candace Malcolm), the Ecology Action Centre (Howard Epstein, Rosalie Lydra), the Halifax Field Naturalists (Colin Stewart), Its Not Garbage Coalition (David

Wimberly), and McNabs Island Ferry Co. (John Jenkins).

The District 6 Ratepayers (Eastern Passage) withdrew from co-op negotiations earlier, to apply for separate funding. They share many of our concerns and will continue to exchange information and strategies.

Our application to FERO for intervener funding was submitted in May, and we were awarded \$77,500 to respond to HHCI's proposal during the upcoming hearings.

#### Alan Ruffman—Coordinator

Co-op members have been meeting weekly since June. During that time, we advertised for a full-time coordinator, interviewed several candidates and selected Alan Ruffman. Alan has been an active member of the Friends and of the EAC for several years and is well known for his outspoken views on environmental and community issues. He served on the Halifax Harbour ('Fournier') Task Force, and is already very well informed about the technical aspects of HHCI's pro-

posal and community concerns for the protection of McNabs.

(see interview on page 4)

The co-op members also discussed aspects of HHCI's proposal which we feel ought to be addressed, and representatives of the respective organizations outlined how they will be proceeding.

The Friends of McNabs' Board has identified four areas of primary concern:

#### 1) violation of park land,

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**INTERVENER UPDATE***(continued from page 3)*

- 2) legal issues such as zoning,
- 3) impact on tourism and recreation, and
- 4) abuses of the public process.

Committees (within the Friends of McNabs) have been formed to address these issues, with the intent to document our concerns in a joint submission of the co-op to the EARP. Our co-op partners will make similar contributions.

Presently, the co-op members and our coordinator are trying to wade through the Jacques Whitford environmental assessment report released on August 6.

Any Friends of McNabs interested in learning more, helping us out with this daunting project, or having suggestions, please feel free to contact me at 462-7346.

The clock is ticking on the future of McNabs Island!

**Meeting with John Leefe**

by Dusan Soudek

On August 27, Board members Cathy McCarthy, Mike Tilley and Dusan Soudek; and Mt. St. Vincent professor of tourism Patricia Glencross met with N.S. Minister of Natural Resources John Leefe and three staff members. Our objective was to inform the minister of our concerns, and learn of the department's plans for McNabs Island. Here are some of the highlights of our conversation with the minister:

Although we reiterated our opposition to the proposed sewage plant for Ives Point, we agreed that this issue will be debated during the environmental assessment. Mr. Leefe informed us that the Department of Natural Resources is preparing a submission but, ominously, refused to say what position he will take.

With respect to the long-awaited, and frequently promised provincial

park on McNabs, Mr. Leefe admitted that no further planning has been done by department staff since the 1985 Preliminary Management Concept was published. Nevertheless, negotiations with the Canadian Parks Service over transfer of federal holdings on the Island are proceeding.

The CPS will retain Fort McNab, its immediate surroundings and two other small enclaves. However, Fort Ives will be transferred to the province, despite the utter lack of conservation experience by the Department of Natural Resources. Several options for interim conservation of Fort Ives are presently being reviewed, including what is euphemistically known as 'stabilization'—burial. Needless to say, we all expressed our revulsion at this idea!

The department is actively negotiating with two of the five remaining private land owners on the island. Both outright purchases and conservation easements are being considered. The largest property entails about forty acres.

We were amazed to learn that the department does not monitor use of the Island either in terms of numbers of visitors or their activities.

Other concerns brought to the minister's attention included the fate of Garrison Pier; the poor health of significant tree species, notably the copper beech; poaching of deer; overgrown trails and fields; undesirable alterations to the Davis and Lynch houses such as the removal of a beachstone chimney; absence of a reliable supply of safe drinking water on the Island; increased litter and poor condition of public outhouses.

However, we complimented Mr. Leefe on the decision to keep Mr. Seboyer, the provincial park ranger, on the island for the foreseeable future.

The minister seemed quite eager for The Friends of McNabs Island Society to assume an undefined management or guardianship role on McNabs.

Both parties expressed a desire to meet again in a few months, and to continue our dialogue.

*Interview with Alan Ruffman*

**Q.** What is the mandate of the coalition?

**A.** First, to comment on technical deficiencies and inadequacies of the environmental assessment report. Then, to convince the EAR Panel to recommend major changes to the proposal.

**Q.** What is your initial impression of the Jacques Whitford Ltd. Environmental Assessment Report?

**A.** The Report is solely focused on HHCI's proposal. The Panel must have unbiased information on alternatives. The Report does not give that.

**Q.** What role will the public have in the environmental assessment?

**A.** The Panel will want to hear from the public. There is no guarantee government will follow the Panel's recommendations, [but] public opinion is bound to be a factor in coming federal and provincial elections.

**Q.** What will the Coalition be doing to dramatize this issue?

**A.** We intend to put the key issues of site choice, treatment alternatives, outfall location, sludge treatment, and

effect on the Island and the ferry service in front of the public in a forceful way.

**Q.** Will it be possible to turn HHCI towards a more rational and environmentally sound approach to treating Metro's wastewater?

**A.** Our job is to convince the Panel that there are better alternatives to various aspects of HHCI's proposal. Whatever is built will last a century and we are concerned about "Getting it Right the First Time"—as HHCI has trumpeted in its advertising. [If we follow HHCI's proposal] then those are decisions society probably can never reverse or change. Their vision of "cleanup" is very much born of outdated thinking going back to the MacLaren Report of 1970. Can we change that? ... We will try.

*This interview was extensively edited for reasons of space. For a complete transcript, contact the editor. Mr. Ruffman may be reached at the Coalition's phone # 492-2789.*