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## Understanding the Environmental Assessment Process: The Proposed Walker Southwest Landfill

After extensive review and consultation, the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change has approved the Terms of Reference (ToR) for Walker Environmental Group's (Walker) proposal to develop a landfill inside a limestone quarry in Oxford County.

Approval of the ToR does not imply that the landfill project is approved. Rather, the approval means that the minister accepts the ToR as an appropriate work plan outlining the types of studies Walker must take to determine if the project can be completed in a way that protects the environment and public health.

The minister also required the following additional amendments to the ToR to address concerns raised during the review of the ToR by government agencies, the public, and Aboriginal communities:

- Completion of a Cumulative Effects Assessment work plan for the assessment of cumulative effects in the EA;
- Assessment of alternative methods to source separation of waste either at source, at the landfill, or by other method in response to the ministry's draft Waste Strategy; and
- Assessment of potential contributions to greenhouse gas emissions and consideration of mitigation measures in response to potential effects due to climate change.

The minister further required, in these amendments, Walker to distribute draft technical work plans for review by the Joint Municipal Coordinating Committee (JMCC), members of the public, government agencies, and Aboriginal communities. These technical work plans need to be completed before the technical studies and will allow the reviewers to provide input to the ministry on the technical studies to be completed as part of the EA process.

Walker's ToR provided preliminary technical work plans for each environmental component associated with the natural, social, cultural, built, and economic environments. The following is a list of studies to be provided for each environmental component based on the approved ToR and minister's amendments. These are minimum requirements and not an exhaustive list as the ministry may require additional and/or revised studies during the comprehensive reviews of the technical work plans.

- Agriculture
  - Assessment of potential displacement of agricultural land and disruption to farm operations.
- Air Quality
  - Assessment of existing dust and particulate and odour conditions;
  - Determine, with support of modelling, all anticipated sources and anticipated levels of dust and particulate and odours in accordance with legislative requirements including

- Ontario Regulation 419 (Air Pollution - Local Air Quality), the Environmental Protection Act and others;
- Assessment of potential impacts to air quality associated with transportation and other ancillary site activities and;
  - Assessment of how landfill gas will be collected and used, for example, to generate an alternative source of energy.
- Cultural Heritage
    - Assessment of the displacement/disturbance to cultural heritage resources.
  - Archaeology
    - Assessment of the displacement/disturbance to archaeological resources through completion of Stage 1 and Stage 2 Archaeological assessments. Stage 3 and 4 Archaeological assessments will depend on results of Stage 1&2 assessments.
  - Ecology
    - Background data collection and field studies to determine conditions and provide plans to mitigate:
      - Disturbance to aquatic ecosystems, through the completion of benthic studies and water quality studies;
      - Disturbance to terrestrial ecosystems;
      - Disease transmission and potential pathways and;
      - Potential effects due to anticipated increase in avian species and numbers at the proposed site.
  - Economic/Financial
    - Property value assessment;
    - Assessment of potential effects to businesses, tourism, tax base, public costs, and employment.
  - Groundwater and Surface Water
    - Evaluate how the site can be designed and operated so that it will not have any unacceptable impacts to ground water located beyond the site property boundary;
    - Collection of background information and field data on groundwater conditions and specific geological features associated with local groundwater;
    - Collection of background information on surface water quality, quantity, and flow to determine potential effects to groundwater and surface water resources including drinking water and water supply in local wells.
  - Noise and Vibration
    - Collection of background data and use of modelling to determine ambient noise conditions and potential effects/contributions associated with landfill operations;
    - Assessment of cumulative effects due to multi-operations at the site.
  - Social Environment
    - Data collection through desktop resources and meetings to assess potential effects to employment, residents, use of public facilities and recreation, nuisances due to vermin and community character.

- Traffic
  - Background and field data collection to assess potential for traffic collisions and disruption to local traffic networks.
- Visual
  - Field data collection and digital mapping to assess potential effects to visual aesthetics as a result of the proposed landfill.
- Human Health
  - Completion of a human health risk assessment to assess potential exposure pathways through air emissions, particulate, surface water and groundwater.

The time to complete each study can vary; however, on average, each study could take between six months to two years. Along the way, Walker is required to provide the minister with updates on findings to ensure that the studies are done in a way that is acceptable.

The ministry's reviews and oversight of the studies involve an internal team of environmental engineers, scientists, technology and subject matter specialists, and regulators at each step of the process. If any step of the process is missed or not performed to the satisfaction of the minister, the company's Environmental Assessment will be delayed or not approved.

Government agencies and ministry technical reviewers will also review the draft EA in order to:

- Assess whether or not the EA reflects and addresses any comments provided on the ToR and technical work plans;
- Assess the completeness and accuracy of information;
- Verify the assumptions made and the interpretation of data;
- Evaluate the assessment of potential negative environmental effects;
- Determine if the proposed mitigation measures seem feasible and if the potential negative effects will be adequately addressed;
- Evaluate the implications of predicted residual impacts; and
- Assess the adequacy of the proposed monitoring program to address compliance issues.

Walker must consider all comments received on the draft EA and submit a final EA for review by government agencies, the public, and Aboriginal communities. Ministry technical reviewers will also consider these items when reviewing the final EA. All public comments will be fully reviewed by the ministry prior to providing the final EA to the minister for his decision on whether or not to approve the project.

The ministry is committed to their obligations to protect human health and the natural environment. Should the Walker Southwestern Landfill project successfully complete all EA and approvals requirements, the ministry will ensure the implementation of best currently available technology and scientific knowledge so that any future operations are managed to meet those expectations of the ministry and the community.

For more information about the ministry's Environmental Assessment process, please call Andrew Evers, Special Projects Officer at the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change at 416-314-7213.