

Written comments needed from North Huron citizens for environmental assessment of Howson Dam

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By [Kelsey Dunbar](#)

There was standing room only available in the North Huron council chambers as concerned citizens attended the public information meeting for the Howson Dam environmental assessment (EA) on Sept. 28. Two presentations were given that night as the number of citizens filled the council chambers twice.

The environmental assessment project manager said public input will have a bearing on the assessment when they are measuring impacts.

“Something in writing is the best feedback (from the public) ... I personally think something longer than a one line statement is helpful, but it is public input so it is subjective,” Jeff Graham, project manager said.

“Your comments will form a part of the decision and what is ultimately going to happen with this structure,” Sharon Chambers, North Huron CAO, said.

A wide array of factors are considered in the EA process, such as impacts and benefits to the natural, social, economic, and cultural environments. More research into the impacts and benefits will be presented in a future public meeting. Comments from the assessment and public will also be presented in a final report to council when it comes time for a decision to be made.

“Normally we don’t show you how we have done (our research) in advance ... Perhaps we can do the evaluation scoring system in advance and try and put that out in the public forum before the next public meeting as a draft,” Graham said. “I don’t see why that would be a problem.”

The EA process is an approved public consultation process under Ontario’s Environmental Assessment Act. The EA is mandatory for a large number of infrastructure projects undertaken by municipalities. It is a process that documents the decision-making process where a municipality eventually selects the preferred alternative for an infrastructure project.

The purpose of the meeting was initially to explain the EA process, however quickly went off course as citizens asked for more information about research into the dam. Citizens asked about everything from hydro electricity being included in the dam project to a price; both are based on information that has not been collected as of yet.

One of the main concerns of the evening was the inclusion of the bridge above the dam.

“We have done without the bridge for 15 years, we don’t need a new bridge,” Andy McBride said. “If you come into town from the north we have a very good bridge just up stream. We don’t want the cost of this project escalated because you think the bridge needs to be rebuilt.”

The alternatives considered for the dam project are as followed:

Alternative 1 – Rebuild dam and bridge structure and restore dam headpond to former level; a brand new dam, or dam and bridge. The most expensive alternative.

Alternative 2 – Rehabilitate the existing dam and bridge. Maintain water levels in headpond at current (lower) level.

Alternative 3 - Rehabilitate the existing dam and bridge. Restore water levels in headpond to original (higher) level.

Alternative 4 - Decommission (remove) the dam.

Alternative 5 – Do nothing. Leave dam as is.

A citizen said that if council chooses alternative five – eventually the dam will need to be removed when it starts falling down and becoming dangerous, the community is going to be faced with a significant cost so why not spend the money now to fix the dam.

Over one third of the town signed a petition to get the dam cosmetically refurbished so it isn’t an eyesore and to raise the water levels.

Graham explained that he has been a part of a couple of EAs, which resulted in the removal of the assessed dams. He has more experience with EAs of structures such as sewage and water plants. He also explained that there hasn’t been a lot of research done on dams in this part of Ontario.

“My observation, and this isn’t scientific, but my observation is that a lot of municipalities have let their dams deteriorate, because there is no legislation in Canada or Ontario to force anyone to do something with their dam,” Graham said.

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