



COUNTY OF WELLINGTON

COMMITTEE REPORT

To: Chair and Members of the Solid Waste Services Committee
From: Das Soligo, Manager of Solid Waste Services
Date: Tuesday, March 11, 2025
Subject: **Arthur Closed Landfill Site – Request to Allow Public Access**

Background:

The County of Wellington owns and is responsible for one active and 16 closed landfill sites. Five of these closed landfill sites host waste transfer stations (public drop-off facilities) and the other 11 do not allow public access and are secured with six-foot high perimeter fencing and locked gates. These sites are typically located in rural settings and access is restricted to County staff and County consultants. The properties are inspected quarterly at least, and are otherwise accessed for the purposes of maintenance or ground and surface water monitoring, where required.

During the January 2025 Solid Waste Services (SWS) Committee meeting, a County Councillor made a request for staff to explore converting the Arthur closed landfill site to a public pollinator park. Local resident Jack Benham has volunteered his time and spearheaded efforts in recent years to plant pollinator-friendly flowers, trees and shrubs and has built and established features that will aid certain species of pollinators in constructing habitat. These efforts to support pollinators are consistent with the direction received by staff for the use of closed landfill properties, through the development of the County's short to long-term waste management strategy.

Context:

In November 2017 County Council established direction through the Solid Waste Services Strategy, for the use of its closed landfill properties. At that time a number of options were considered, including allowing recreational uses for these properties such as converting sites to public parks.

The end result of the strategic review related to the use of closed landfill properties was a commitment to continue to naturalize the County's landfill sites, with particular emphasis on establishing and promoting pollinator habitat and food sources. These naturalization and pollinator-supportive projects have been initiated at a number of the County's closed landfill properties.

Converting a restricted access closed landfill site to a public park can potentially be both costly and complicated. There are a number of potentially challenging factors with converting a landfill site to a recreational destination. Some sites have experienced methane issues with buildings that are constructed to support the recreational use. Others have experienced jurisdictional issues where different tiers of municipal government are responsible for waste management and parks and recreation (such as is the case with Wellington County). Otherwise, there can be concerns with unauthorized access or activities, liability, damage to the landfill cap or monitoring equipment and on-going maintenance costs.

Furthermore, closed landfill sites typically have an Environmental Compliance Approval (ECA) issued by the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) which governs the use and permitted activities on these properties by laying out terms and conditions which the owner must comply with. By requesting that the MECP allow for changes in the use of a landfill site an ECA amendment must be applied for and approved.

In the process of opening an ECA, the owner accepts the risk that modern terms, conditions, standards and guidelines may be inserted into the updated ECA. This could include having to undertake costly compliance measures, remedial works and/or accepting new monitoring requirements or operational terms and conditions.

However, there are potentially less concerns related to allowing the public to access the Arthur closed landfill site as a park, compared to other landfill sites which the County owns.

Arthur Landfill Request:

Some municipalities invest significant resources into converting closed landfill sites to recreational destinations, including; ski hills, parks, water parks, playgrounds and golf courses. These uses of a closed landfill site would require extensive capital works to ensure the property can be used safely in its future state, while also protecting the environment by not disturbing buried waste.

However, presumably very little works would be required to allow public access to the Arthur site. At a minimum, the perimeter fencing would need to be adjusted with portions of fence removed and gates and/or bollards installed in two locations. As there is a steep slope with some exposed rubble on one side of the site, staff recommend that fencing would be required along the top of the slope, to mitigate health and safety concerns. It would be prudent to increase monitoring of the site to ensure the fencing is intact and does not require repairs.

Otherwise, it could be expected that there would be additional costs associated with installing trails and waste receptacles, as well as potential costs associated with maintenance and upkeep of these features. As the County does not have a department responsible for recreational facilities, it is possible that partnerships with the local municipality or service clubs could help make the project more feasible from an operational standpoint.

Some landfill sites have environmental issues or concerns which would be a limiting factor when considering any changed use of the property. Some properties also have infrastructure on site, such as groundwater monitoring wells or landfill gas collection or destruction systems. The Arthur property is a landfill site that has been closed for many years, where there is negligible risks related to methane. There is no infrastructure on site and the existing ECA contains no terms or conditions which would be significantly limiting in considering a change to allow public access to the property.

Staff have no reasons to believe there would be environmental or health and safety concerns associated with allowing public access to the property. However, in considering this request staff can only anticipate what the MECP may require, which is especially difficult once the ECA is opened to consider an amendment request. Pre-consultation with the MECP would be prudent as the Ministry could require terms and conditions which may make the proposal untenable from a cost standpoint.

Furthermore, allowing public access to the Arthur closed landfill site could be an opportunity to further continue the County's supports of pollinators. It would also provide education to the public about the many benefits that pollinators provide to communities through the vital ecosystem services they provide to the agricultural sector, a critical component of the County's local economy.

Recommended Course of Action:

As 2025 is a very busy year for SWS, with many priority projects underway or soon to be initiated, staff suggest that further assessing the request to allow public access to the Arthur closed landfill site can be done this year, when time allows. While not a main priority for SWS at this time, exploring the request is not expected to be time consuming initially. Pre-consultation with the Ministry would be necessary from a staff perspective, as feedback from the MECP could prove the proposal to be either feasible or not.

If potential Ministry requirements are modest and staff feel that allowing public access to the Arthur closed landfill is appropriate following these initial discussions, staff could begin to plan next steps, including preparing budget impact estimates. Before any works are initiated an ECA amendment application would need to be prepared and submitted, with a timeline of approximately a year to receive approvals. This timeline can be extended if further information or negotiation is required.

Staff suggest that further exploring this request is appropriate in this context, when time allows, and isn't necessarily setting a precedent. Most County-owned closed landfill sites are small, in rural areas and are either not suitable or are likely to be undesirable to consider converting them to parks. There are very few closed landfill properties that appear to be candidates for a similar consideration. Staff recommend that should the Arthur request be deemed feasible, that the strategic direction be maintained of further naturalizing these properties with a focus on supporting pollinator species where possible.

In 2020 the Town of Erin requested that a small portion of the Erin closed landfill site be used to build Phase II of the Erin Riverwalk Trail. This request was granted and the trail was constructed at the Town's cost in 2023. Should future requests to consider a change in use to a closed landfill be received, staff suggest they continue to be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Staff suggest pre-consultation with the Ministry can occur during the Spring months with an update on these discussions brought to Council in the Fall.

Strategic Action Plan:

This report relates to the following objectives and priorities in the County's Strategic Action Plan:

- Best infrastructure in place to meet the current and future needs of the community

Recommendation:

That the report "Arthur Closed Landfill Site – Request to Allow Public Access" be received for information.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Das Soligo', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Das Soligo
Manager of Solid Waste Services

In consultation with/approved by:
Don Kudo, County Engineer
Scott Wilson, Chief Administrative Officer