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SAMMY'S A FISH ON A MISSION

Awareness campaign in Ajax featuring Sammy the Salmon designed to get Province on side with Ajax regarding algae problem on waterfront

P10

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p.22 African Children's Choir to perform in Ajax p.26 Moonlight returns to Games on home turf

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Ajax group hopes videos will help fix algae problem at lakefront

Citizens' group enlists the help of Sammy the Salmon

Keith Gilligan

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AJAX -- Sammy the Salmon is hoping videos will hook provincial officials into taking action to correct the algae problem along the Ajax waterfront.

The Pickering Ajax Citizens Together to Protect Our Waterfront has produced a series of videos calling on Premier Kathleen Wynne, Environment Minister Glen Murray and Ajax-Pickering MPP Joe Dickson to support the Town's efforts in dealing with the algae.

Ward 3 local Councillor Joanne Dies, co-chairwoman of PACT POW, said in an interview the group is releasing the videos because it's been waiting 18 months for a provincial answer.

Ajax has undertaken studies on the problem and found the algae was caused by the amount of phosphorous in Lake Ontario, which the algae feeds on. The Town studies point to the Duffin Creek water pollution control plant, which releases treated effluent into the lake from an outfall pipe that stretches one kilometre into the lake.

The Duffin plant is owned by Durham and York regions which filed an Class environmental assessment on the outfall pipe 18 months ago and it found the pipe is operating properly.

Ajax wants an individual EA to study the outfall pipe. An individual EA is a much more in-depth study that could take years to complete. Asking for such an EA is called a bump-up.

The Town has wanted the pipe to be extended out three kilometres into the lake. Putting it out farther would allow for the effluent to be more diluted, which would cut down on the growth of algae.

Coun. Dies said, "It's been 18 months since the EA was completed and we hadn't heard any word on what's happening."

Kate Jordan, a spokeswoman for the environment ministry, said in an e-mail, "The ministry is currently reviewing the requests for further environmental



HOW THIS IMPACTS YOU

- Ajax has spent \$1.7 million to hire environmental consultants and lawyers to help combat the algae issue along the Town's waterfront.
- Algae that usually starts forming along the shoreline in late July has already begun to accumulate.
- Residents living near the waterfront can't enjoy their properties when the algae begins to decompose and smell.

AJAX—Pickering Beach is already filled with dried algae along the shore. Tomi Sami and her brother Tolu walked along the beach on a warm sunny summer afternoon.

Daniel Luk photo

FRONT: Councillor Joanne Dies, member of PACT POW, with Sammy the Salmon at the Ajax waterfront. PACT POW has started a campaign hoping the Province will side with the Town of Ajax regarding the algae problem along the lakeshore.

assessment work. While we expect a decision shortly, I can't speak to a firm date at this point."

Coun. Dies noted members of the group met with Mr. Dickson to push for help on the issue.

"It's another season. This year, it's a bumper crop as they say. At Rotary Park beach, it's a foot thick. It's not usually this early," she said. "It really shouldn't be there until the end of July. It was there in June."

The presence of the algae "affects residents, it affects tourism."

Durham officials argue the algae problem isn't caused by the Duffin plant. Rather, it's a problem in all the Great Lakes and cutting the phosphorous from the plant won't stop algae growth, Durham says.

Coun. Dies noted the Pan Am Games are about to start and the Town could have up to 125,000 spectators, some of whom might want to visit the waterfront.

"It's not going away. It's getting worse," Coun. Dies said. "Politicians promised to fix it during the election."

During last year's provincial election, members of PACT POW met with Ms. Wynne and she pledged to work with the group. All the main candidates who ran in Ajax-Pickering signed a pledge to help address the issue.

"We're reminding them, as you know, they signed the pledge. We met with the premier and she was supportive and said we were preaching to the converted," Coun. Dies said.

She said members are planning to go to Queen's Park and request a meeting

with the premier and with Mr. Murray, the environment minister.

Since the Town has taken up the fight to stop the algae, it's spent \$1.7 million on consultants and lawyers specializing in environmental law.

During a recent meeting of Ajax council's general government committee, planning and development director Paul Allore noted, "A lot has transpired in the first six months of the year."

The Province recently released the Great Lakes Protection Act in an attempt to clean up water.

If the Province doesn't address the Ajax algae issue and the GLPA "it flies in the face of their very own policies. It's creating a problem for them," said Mr. Allore.

Town planner Barb Hodgins predicted "the issue will only worsen" if the problem isn't rectified soon.

Wards 3 and 4 Regional Councillor Colleen Jordan noted whatever the provincial government decides "will last a generation," as the next time the plant will be expanded won't be until 2031.

"It will be another 50 to 60 years," Mr. Allore said.

David Steele of PACT POW said the group sent a letter to Ms. Wynne and Mr. Murray on June 18, explaining that the organization has been raising awareness of the issue for almost two years.

"We were privileged to meet the premier on her bus during the campaign. She assured us she would take action. Another summer is upon us," he said.

"We haven't heard anything from the Ministry of Environment since they

received our request for a bump-up," he said. "We're very, very disturbed about the regions of Durham and York submitting a technical report after the deadline."

He noted the Pan Am Games are about to start and the hope was to "show tourists the best of what we have."

"Ajax has gone to great lengths to explore the cause of the algae. Ajax has spent a lot of money on this. The scientific evidence is not complex," Mr. Steele said.

The group met recently with Mr. Dickson and "we asked why it's taking so long to reach such a simple decision. It's nothing complex. The cause has already been identified."

Mr. Dickson said any claim he doesn't support the group in its efforts is "utter nonsense. They know where I am. I'm leading the troops at Queen's Park."

Mayor Steve Parish said council members have been hearing from constituents about when a decision will come out.

"We won't get another chance to deal with this again for another generation. It's a shame, a crime to not deal with it for a generation. It's a shame Durham and York regions' leadership ignores the people of Ajax," Mayor Parish said.

"They don't want to deal with this because they don't want to spend the money and it's caused primarily by (population) growth in York Region," he added.

He said of the provincial Great Lakes Protection Act, "The legislation will turn out to be a sham and hollow paper unless they support Ajax's bump-up request."

Visit saveourwaterfrontnow.com to see the PACT POW videos.