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NEWS

Coalition seeking provincial intervention in Erin's wastewater treatment plant

Town of Erin says water levels will not harm brook trout

By [Joshua Santos](#) Orangeville Banner
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Opponents of a wastewater treatment plant planned for Erin continue to put up a fight.

The Coalition for the West Credit River and several environmental groups have filed an Environmental Bill of Rights application with the province to investigate the proposed facility.

"The town has not fulfilled key commitments it made in the environmental study report (ESR)," said Ann Seymour of the Coalition for the West Credit River. "The ESR committed to issuing an addendum to the ESR, as well as an environmental management plan, bird and bat surveys and an arborist report, once the final project site was chosen."

They state the town contravened or violated Section 38 of the Environment Assessment Act. The Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) will determine if their allegation is true.

The Ontario River Alliance (ORA), a partner with the coalition, is not against the plant's proposal but has specific concerns with its impact on brook trout and the cold-water habitat necessary for their survival.

their sensitive cold-water fish habitat on the West Credit River will be placed at risk," said Linda Heron, chair of the Ontario Rivers Alliance.

To have open discussions, members of the coalition met with Erin Mayor Allan Aills and Nick Colucci, director of engineering, to discuss a collaborative approach to address the potential thermal impact on the West Credit River.

"The town still maintains that they are not required to keep their effluent temperature under 19 C to protect the brook trout, even though the federal impact assessment agency's analysis report described the town as being committed to doing so," said Seymour. "Erin's reputation for public transparency on this project is problematic."

The federal government previously decided not to designate the project under the federal impact assessment. A project placed in the impact assessment act would go through a rigorous regulatory analysis. This would involve peer reviewers to assess the environmental, economic, health and social effects of proposed projects and evaluate the impacts on Indigenous groups and Indigenous individuals' rights.

The town will not make any changes to its proposal, even though the ESR was approved in August 2019, and the project site wasn't chosen until August 2020 — a whole year later.

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"The municipal class environmental assessment and the environmental assessment act requires that any changes to the approved project must be set out in an addendum to the ESR and, in this case, to explain the reasons why the Solmar site was chosen," said Seymour. "The legislation also affords the public and Indigenous communities with a 30-day comment period."

These recent developments follow a proposal from the coalition to develop an in-ground, indirect infiltration of the final effluent through an extensive underground perforated pipe system. The slow percolation of the infiltrated effluent will cool and dilute it as it slowly infiltrates down the stream. This will allow the effluent to be cooled to average background groundwater temperatures of 9 degrees Celsius. The Town of Erin has looked at the practice, but it has not deemed it necessary to adopt at this time.

Joshua Santos is a reporter for the Orangeville Banner, covering municipal affairs.

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