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Peninsula News Review

Senanus project goes ahead

By Christine van Reeuwijk - Peninsula News Review

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Mediation request denied by Central Saanich council

A stopped-up water project will move forward in Central Saanich.

Last April council rescinded the motion that would have seen staff create the necessary bylaws to move the proposed Senanus/Mount Newton waterline project move forward. That was to allow for a wording change in the Regional Context Statement of the Central Saanich Official Community Plan in order for it to be consistent with the Capital Regional District and allow for extending water and sewer outside the urban settlement area for health or fire suppression reasons. Council made those alterations during the recent OCP review.

Now the project can move forward, but the direction is still much-discussed in the district as there are two opposed factions in the neighbourhood.

The Central Saanich West Voters Association, who undertook the successful petition to move the project forward, want a pipeline to provide clean and plentiful water to the area. The Mount Newton Neighbourhood Association, who do not accept the validity of the petition, want to take more time to look at alternative solutions.

With the wording cleared up, municipal staff laid out the options for council. Previously a trio of options were presented to council: basic water; water with fire suppression flow; and water, fire suppression and agricultural irrigation capabilities. At the time, council opted for the least expensive project — potable water only — for the grant application.

Still council was issued three options. Option one, as previously, is to provide basic potable water. Option two is to not proceed with the project and close the file or refer it to some other process such as third party mediation or district-led dispute resolution. The third option is a “modified option one” to seek engineering consultants’ input to include potable water and minimum acceptable fire suppression to meet insurance standards.

“The residents are not, do not, request any change to the project,” said Frank Towler of the Central Saanich West Voters Association. They want to see option one put into place. “We’d be particularly pleased if it happens before summer, before our water dries up again.”

Council did not consider closing the file. However, discussion swirled around mediation, or moving forward with bylaw preparation.

Councillor Adam Olsen quickly made a motion that the district develop a third-party mediation process with the goals: “[To] research and compile a full audit of the previous 10-plus years of information gathered on this issue by all parties. To complete a full assessment of all the aspects that have developed in the history of this neighbourhood dispute including but not limited to the water, human, environmental, historical, heritage and cultural implications of the issue. To research and compile a number of possible solutions to the water and human aspects of this issue. To develop a series of recommendations that employ an integrated approach to achieving solutions that take into account and factor the many aspects of this neighbourhood dispute.”

It was much like the solution proposed by the Mount Newton Neighbourhood Association. Olsen suggested it would achieve some recommendations that “both sides could live with.”

“It’s my belief [the Mount Newton Neighbourhood Association] would be happy to move forward with that decision,” Olsen said. “We need a full accounting of this discussion that’s been ongoing for 10 years.”

Councillor John Garrison supported the “modified option one.”

“I think it’s up to the council to make a decision. This has been around the table long enough,” he said, suggesting getting the cost analysis on the option. “If it’s just a pump and some fire hydrants ... the cost may not be that great.”

Olsen disagreed, seeing it as more of a human issue as well as water.

“I think this has gone past a water issue ... I see this as a divided neighbourhood,” Olsen said, adding that moving forward without mediation would be like “putting gas on a fire” and more is needed than just a water solution.

“The fact this has gone on so long has created a divided community,” he said. “I would not like to go to the polls three years from now and have this as an election issue.”

It was an election issue in the most recent election, and councillor Ron Kubek was clear throughout the

election he wanted to see the project move ahead.

“Option one modified is an option that will make it easy to get done,” Kubek said. He suggested staff create the necessary bylaws while simultaneously costing out the addition of minimal fire suppression, noting that option could lower insurance premiums.

Councillor Susan Mason supported Olsen’s motion in that she wanted to see more information.

“We don’t have clarity,” she said. “I have a high level of concern proceeding at this point.” She wanted to see fire suppression and agricultural uses added to water project. “We need to have the community working together.”

She agreed with the need for water, but professed concern over doing the project too quickly and “piecemeal”.

“You need to do things once. You need to do things right,” she said.

“If fast-track in Central Saanich is 16 years I’m concerned,” said Kubek, referring to the length of time some residents have requested water in that area. “We keep going around and around and council are elected to make decisions.”

“I agree we need a water solution for folks on Senanus and Mount Newton,” Olsen said. However, some people there don’t believe in the “big pipe” solutions and the mediation route would be “most expedient,” he added.

Council voted down his mediation motion. They agreed instead to move forward with the project, having staff create the bylaws and investigate costs of “modified option one.”

Councillor Terry Siklenka noted that the motion only asks for information, and isn’t binding council to any project.

“We’re on a fact-finding mission,” he said. “It’s best that we go and find out what these costs are.”

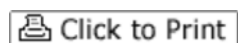
Councillors Mason and Olsen voted opposed.

Councillor Alastair Bryson left for the discussion citing possible conflict of interest as he owns property near the service area.

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