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Province says no to NS

By Cat George - Peninsula News Review - June 10, 2008

BC government won't cover archaeological costs

Archaeological work during municipal construction projects are the financial responsibility of the municipality in question, the provincial government has confirmed.

The district of North Saanich requested at the 2007 Union of BC Municipalities meeting that the province consider providing funding for archaeological costs, such as those the district incurred during sewer installation on West Saanich Road. Finding First Nations remains along the route required the hiring of archaeologists, rerouting of pipes, and ceremonial costs for the local First Nations, among other expenditures. The municipalities at UBCM endorsed the resolution, but the province's response has indicated that they will not bear the costs in similar situations.

"The Ministry's policy that 'the developer pays' is congruent with that of other provincial heritage conservation approaches across Canada," read the official provincial response. "Local governments are encouraged to integrate archaeological studies into their project environmental phase, and, where eligible, defray archaeological impact assessment costs through the Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund."

"I'm really disappointed with this," said North Saanich Councillor Sheilah Fea, suggesting that they resubmit the resolution to UBCM again, this time indicating that if the province wouldn't cover 100 per cent of the costs, some sort of cost-sharing procedure could be worked out. "Council is mandated to put in the sewer; we should not be incurring this kind of cost," she said. The archaeology portion of the sewer bill came to \$485,000.

Fea noted that other municipalities had the same problem and had been looking for some aid from the UBCM resolution.

"I'm somewhat offended by the response from the province," said Councillor Bob Shaw. "We're not the developer, when, for health reasons, we're putting in sewer systems."

The provincial response did note that the Ministry of Tourism, Sports and the Arts, in conjunction with the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, are reviewing the Heritage Conservation Act (which legislates municipal response to archaeological finds) and will consult with local governments. Shaw noted that they should focus their efforts now on that review. "Hopefully we can try and move this along."

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