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Senanus Waterline

Municipal, Central Saanich Municipality

August 30th, 2008



Ranter's Roost

A place to rant. Sometimes we'll rant, sometimes you'll get to rant. Just send us your rant (about anything) of 500 words or less, and we may, if our socks are blown off by it, publish it. Send submissions to editor@peninsulatimes.ca

Senanus Waterline: Bureaucracy in Action Sean McNulty

The residents of Senanus Drive have been trying to obtain clean potable water for over 15 years now. The inaction from the municipality of Central Saanich on this issue is an example of bureaucracy in action. There have been endless engineer reports, studies, legal opinions and other roadblocks thrown in the way, while residents continue to truck in water from the Sooke Lake Reservoir at a rate of one water truck per week.

The water quality on Senanus Drive started to become an issue when neighbouring hay farms began digging additional wells to provide more water for their fields. Hay fields without water only yield one crop per year, whereas those with water can yield three. A side effect of this additional watering: depletion of the aquifer resulting in a loss of hydrostatic pressure and increased mineralization and saltwater intrusion into the wells. This happened to such an extent that the Capital Regional District's (CRD's) Chief Medical Officer deemed the water from the wells on Senanus **unsafe for consumption**.

The main argument against extending the waterline is that it will lead to development, but nothing could be further from the truth.

There are waterlines running throughout the municipality and development doesn't automatically follow them. In fact, the zoning was changed on Senanus Drive so that even with the waterline extension the minimum lot size allowed is five acres which means any subdivision would require rezoning.

It's particularly interesting the extent some members of mayor and council, both past and present, have gone to stop this waterline.

Another argument against the waterline is that it contradicts the Regional Context Statement in the Central Saanich OCP and the CRD's Regional Growth Strategy (RGS). This doesn't hold water. For one, these are to regu-

late growth; the houses are existing, and two, the RGS outlines exceptions for health and fire reasons, both of which apply to this situation.

It's particularly interesting the extent some members of mayor and council, both past and present, have gone to stop this waterline. In 2002, the residents on Senanus offered to pay for the entire thing. At the time, under Bylaw 524, if they were to pay for it the municipality would be required to provide the service. Amazingly, the mayor and council at that time then amended the bylaw, in only six weeks, which removed the obligation.

The residents forged ahead despite this setback, drawing up a petition that showed overwhelming support from the area for the waterline. The municipality then accused the residents of using coercive tactics to get the signatures, with no proof! Not to mention that during all of this, the costs for installation increased from \$800,000 to \$1.6 million.

The petition has since been submitted, a grant has been applied for and approved for \$1.1 million, and it appears the residents of Senanus Drive will finally receive potable drinking water barring any unwise decisions by the current mayor and council. Interestingly, the majority of councilors get their water through the municipal waterlines; it's time for them to allow their fellow residents access as well. ■

Senanus Waterline : Bureaucracy in Action

By Sean McNulty

The residents of Senanus drive have been trying to obtain clean potable water for over 15 years now. The inaction from the municipality of Central Saanich regarding this issue is an example of beauracrazy in action. There has been an endless amount of engineer reports, studies, legal opinions and other roadblocks thrown in the way, while in the meantime residents have been trucking in water from the Sooke Lake Reservoir at the rate of one water truck per week.

The water quality on Senanus drive started to become an issue when the neighboring hay farms began digging additional wells to provide more water to their fields. Hay fields without water only yield one crop per year, whereas hay fields with water can yield three. A side effect of this additional watering: depletion of the aquifer which results in a loss of hydrostatic pressure and increased mineralization and salt water intrusion into the wells. This happened to such an extent that the Capital Regional Districts (CRD's) Chief Medical Officer deemed the water from the wells on Senanus unsafe for consumption.

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the zoning was changed on Senanus drive so that even with the water line extension the minimum lot size allowed is five acres which means any subdivision would require rezoning.

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The petition has since been submitted, a grant has been applied for and approved for \$1.1 million, and it appears the residents of Senanus Drive will finally receive potable drinking water barring any unwise decisions on behalf of the current Mayor and Council. Interestingly, the majority of the councilors get their water through the municipal waterlines; it's time for them to allow their fellow residents access as well.

1. **Gerry McQuade** Says:

September 1st, 2008 at 2:57 pm

Good article Sean. I'll pass it along to my daughter Colleen to forward to her friends on Seananus Drive.

2. **Sean McNulty** Says:

September 2nd, 2008 at 1:36 pm

Appreciate that Gerry.

Sincerely,

Sean

3. **John Vincent** Says:

September 4th, 2008 at 2:13 pm

Sean;

Good arguments. One other that has been raised by some who have good wells is that they do not want to pay for water to be brought in which they do not need. On the surface this seems like a reasonable argument. Unfortunately municipal law, as I understand it, requires everyone to pay for this service whether they hook up to it or not.

But this is true of most government services. I do not have children, but I pay taxes for schools. Why? Because my neighbors and our community have children and we need schools to educate them. Same is true for water. I live on Senanus Drive, and I do not actually need water. But my neighbors do. And so I support bringing water in for them. It is the neighborly and communal thing to do. It is the right thing to do.

John Vincent

4. **Sean McNulty** Says:

September 4th, 2008 at 8:36 pm

Great point John, it is definitely the right thing to do.

Sincerely,

Sean

5. **Dale Shpak** Says:

September 12th, 2008 at 8:14 am

There is the issue of cost and benefit to the residents along Mt. Newton X-Road up to W. Saanich Road, many of whom have invested many thousands of dollars drilling several wells and building cisterns. For many (especially seniors) the tax burden for this waterline is an unbearable cost with NO benefit.

Note that since a 6" line is proposed, there is NO fire suppression since an 8" line is required for hydrants. This is one of the misleading assertions in the original petition initiated by Seananus residents that led to the invalidation of the proposal. The petition should have been re-done with the correct information.

1) At the risk of sounding realistic: all residents along the proposed water line paid fair value for their properties which included the value of their existing water supply. The waterline tax burden will have some residents subsidizing the market value of other residents' properties.

2) There would be value for everyone if the waterline was big enough for fire suppression since this would offset the tax burdened by reducing home insurance costs. And, with the specter of drier summers: remember the Kelowna fires.

3) A \$10,000 hookup fee would help to more equitably distribute costs.

6. **Sean McNulty** Says:

September 13th, 2008 at 7:37 pm

Hi Dale,

Excellent insight regarding the installation of the 6" line which wouldn't be adequate for fire suppression. It makes no sense to not do so when you're already digging the hole, plus the added value makes it a worthwhile addition.

I disagree that the costs associated with the installation of the waterline should be tied to property value. Everyone is getting the same service (the availability of hooking up to municipal water), and although some may choose not to hook up, their property value will reflect this added benefit. If you talk to any realtor they'll tell you that having a hook up to municipal water, or at least the option, is a huge benefit when assessing a houses value.

Thanks for the comment.

Sean