

Development fear stalls residents' fight for water

Addition to Central Saanich supply could be issue in upcoming election

Richard Watts

Times Colonist

Wednesday, September 17, 2008

Clean drinking water for residents of an area in Central Saanich has moved one small, step closer but still remains a long way off.

Central Saanich councillors have agreed to make additions to their official regional context statement to allow the extension of municipal water under some criteria, public health, environment, firefighting or farms. That amendment now goes to the Capital Regional District for approval.

But that CRD approval could take many weeks, leaving drinking water for the 60-odd houses on and near Senanus Drive, now served by wells, an issue to be bandied about in the upcoming election. It will pit those who need water against those who fear it will bring development.

"People see water extension as a development issue, I see it as a right to potable water," said Central Saanich councillor John Garrison, during this week's council meeting.

Gordon Denford, who has lived on Senanus Drive for 40 years, has been trying for over a decade to get municipal water. His has sunk four wells and they have been failing during the summer since the 1990s.

Health authorities have tested and judged the water unfit for consumption. Bathing in it gave Denford's grandkids such bad eczema, his son left the area. It kills plants and corrodes pipes and tanks. "I replaced nine water tanks in nine years."

In 2002, fed up with municipal inaction Denford said he and his neighbours banded together. They agreed to finance \$800,000 themselves to bring in a waterline, only to have the municipality rewrite its bylaws to prevent the move.

The group then lobbied senior levels of government and last year, the province and Ottawa agreed to put up \$1.1 million to bring in municipal water. But that offer has yet to be taken up because it was discovered the official community plan wouldn't allow it.

That created the need for the agreed amendment.

Denford said as a developer himself, it is sewers that is the key service for development. He says that those who say municipal water will lead to urbanization are wrong.

Central Saanich councillor Zeb King who tried to suggest any extension of water services require a two-thirds majority vote of council, insisted in a

telephone interview he is not opposed to those families getting clean water.

"I'm not opposed to them having water, I'm in favour of taking a different approach to the solution," said King.

Central Saanich Mayor Jack Mar said he has no doubt the water along Senanus Drive will become an election issue although, for him, the issue requires no thought.

"A person should be entitled to potable water in the 21st Century," said Mar.

rwatts@tc.canwest.com

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