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Grant under fire

By Christine van Reeuwijk - Peninsula News Review

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CS residents seek alternative solutions for Senanus area

A group of residents in Central Saanich are pointing out flaws in the grant application that garnered more than a million dollars in funding for the proposed water main extension in the Mount Newton X Road and Senanus Drive area.

Lori Waters, a member of the Mount Newton Neighbourhood Association, said a legal letter outlining inaccurate information in the application for the federal-provincial Municipal Rural Infrastructure Funding grant was sent to the district and the provincial and federal granting agencies.

“Based on those problems, the thinking is the District should not have been provided those funds,” said Waters, who has a home on Mount Newton X Road.

The Mount Newton association is a group of “residents who did not sign the watermain petition, catchment residents who have rescinded their support for the petition, district citizens and groups concerned with preservation of rural lands, and groups in Central Saanich and regionally concerned with social and environmental responsibility,” according to the website www.senanus.net. The group is working with the POLIS Project on Ecological

Governance, West Coast Environmental Law and the Environmental Law Centre at the University of Victoria.

Among the concerns are questions surrounding service area, funding and a petition. The grant application, Waters said, stated the project was allowable under the Official Community Plan. Earlier this year Central Saanich council started the process to amend the Regional Context Statement in the Official Community Plan because the RCS in the Central Saanich OCP says the district does not extend urban services such as the sewer and water system into rural or agricultural lands.

Another concern, Waters said, is the condition of the municipal coffers. One eligibility requirement for the grant is that the Central Saanich third of the funding — \$563,334 — be in place before applying for the grant. As well as funding in place to cover ongoing costs and maintenance. She points to the January 2008 Financing Options Report which indicates that within the current five-year financial plan that the district may need to

seek interim financing for day-to-day operations as an indicator that the municipality isn't prepared to pay for those costs.

"The district applied for the grant and used as a basis for proving a local service area exists, a petition from 2000," Waters said. "The catchment has changed since then, so the Local Service Area is different."

While seeking environmental ways to create more water in the area, Waters says the idea that there isn't potable drinking water in the area is a myth. "The argument that there isn't adequate drinking water on Senanus doesn't hold water," she said. "We need to get rid of the notion that there's no water on Senanus." Waters added that the water supply is used in "pools, spas and toilet tanks." She said properties are large and property owners have given little thought to aquifer recharge or rainwater retention.

"If we can look at what the problems are, we can solve them," Waters said. "We have a lot of good things working for us right now, so we can facilitate a solution ... we want to ensure a sustainable solution."

Those solutions, she said, have been mentioned in earlier reports regarding the water situation in the area. They include rainwater retention, water use and reuse, and aquifer recharge.

"There have been recommendations made, the district hasn't followed them but the district hasn't been inactive," Waters said, referring to a grant application in 2000 that dealt with the environmental aspects. "That grant was really forward thinking, but rescinded when pipeline proponents opposed [it]," she said.

With the new BC Living Water Smart guide (www.livingwatersmart.ca) out Waters said now is an opportune time to look at alternative solutions.


"The good thing about the guide is it supports rainwater collection, aquifers and alternate sources for irrigation."

Central Saanich Mayor Jack Mar said he couldn't comment on the issue because it is currently being discussed in camera by council.

reporter@peninsulanewsreview.com

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