

Contractor offers to bring municipal water to Central Saanich neighbourhood

BY RICHARD WATTS, TIMES COLONIST MARCH 4, 2009

Fed up with delays over bringing municipal water to his home, a Central Saanich businessman is offering to do the job himself.

Gordon Denford, president of Denford Construction Management Ltd., has not only offered his company as project manager, for free, he has also guaranteed the total construction cost of \$1.49 million, cheaper than the most recent municipal estimates of about \$1.75 million.

With the provincial and federal governments already committed to picking up \$1.1 million of the cost, Denford said he's making an offer Central Saanich shouldn't refuse. He said his record of construction work in virtually every municipality in the region speaks for itself.

"It's a chance to get this thing done at pretty well a bargain price," said Denford in a telephone interview earlier this week. "The time to do it is right now and I'm saying, 'This is it.'"

Longtime Central Saanich Coun. John Garrison said he was intrigued by the offer, although he's awaiting a report from staff on the legalities of accepting it.

"But it seems to me to be a cost-effective way of moving it forward and getting it done," said Garrison.

He and his fellow councillors took Denford's offer under consideration earlier this week. They also instructed Central Saanich staffers to prepare bylaws to get the water project underway.

Denford and residents of about 60 houses on and near Senanus Drive have been lobbying for more than a decade to bring municipal water to their homes. The Senanus wells have become brackish, contaminated by mineral salts, the result of what Denford maintains is the water table being drawn down by expanded use.

Residents say the well water will kill house plants and corrode pipes and tanks. Bathing in it will cause skin rashes. Denford trucks in water and stores it in tanks on his property.

Health authorities have given the water mixed reviews, saying it's drinkable. But those same health authorities concede a new home would never be approved if the only available water was comparable to Senanus quality.

In 2002, fed up with municipal inaction, Denford and his neighbours banded together and agreed to pay for the pipe themselves. But the municipality subsequently rewrote its bylaws to prevent the move. Since then, the municipality has held petitions that have finally approved the line.

But attempts to bring in municipal water have so far foundered. Others in Central Saanich have turned it into a development issue, accusing people on Senanus of trying to pave the way for increased density, a charge Denford, a developer himself, emphatically denies.

rwatts@tc.canwest.com

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