



This is an election publication of the Mississippi Mills Resident's Association, Fall 2006

Sewage treatment options

Almonte's sewage lagoon treats sewage from the town's sewer system. Mississippi Mills needs to upgrade the Almonte sewage lagoon.

The current lagoon does not permit the level of growth desired by the majority of the current Council. (See Bulletin #4 "Almonte's plan for growth" for details.) The lagoon has marginal capacity (particularly in light of planned subdivisions) and it periodically breaches Ontario MOE limits, possibly adding effluent into the Mississippi River.

It is a matter of responsibility: Mississippi Mills must deal effectively with its sewage and avoid polluting the Mississippi River.

In the near future, the sewage lagoon may also receive septage (residue from septic tanks) from rural residents because provincial regulations will soon ban the spreading of raw septage on farmers' fields.

Information before Council

The consultant's report in June 2006 presented three options¹:

- Convert to a mechanical treatment plant at a cost of \$16.5 million, with an operations and maintenance cost (O&M) of \$475,000 per year, (the recommended - and highest cost - option);
- Upgrade the lagoon at a cost of \$14.5 million with an O&M of \$350,000 annually;

¹ J.L. Richardson & Associates: "Almonte Ward Sewage Treatment System, Review of Options", June 2006

- Build an engineered wetland for \$13.8 million with an O&M of \$350,000 annually.

By August 2006, the expected cost of the mechanical treatment plant option had risen to between \$17.8 and \$20.3 million². The price may yet rise further. The other two options all but disappeared from the discussion.

Potential impact

What's this mean to Almonte residents?

For an Almonte home using 50,000 gallons per year, the average cost – based on June's estimates - would rise from \$533 (2005 bill) to \$888 in 2015 on a full cost-recovery basis³ (that is, as user fees). This assumes that 2/3 of the costs will be covered by federal and provincial grants. Without grants, the corresponding 2015 charge will rise to \$1224. If the cost of the final project goes up according to the August estimate, or more, so will the per-household cost.

What's this mean to rural residents?

The amalgamation agreement states that Almonte lagoon costs are the responsibility of Almonte residents. If the new treatment plant is designed to accept septage, however, rural residents could be taxed for a portion of the construction and pay user fees to have their septage dumped. It is estimated⁴ that costs

² J.L. Richardson & Associates: "Almonte Ward Sewage Treatment System, Public Open House No. 3", August 2006

³ "Water and Wastewater Rate Study" by Watson & Associates, June 2006

⁴ Trow Associates, Trow Associates Inc.: "Business Plan for Addition of a Septage Treatment System", March 2005

would be in the range of \$450 to \$675 per septic tank service By-laws may be passed requiring regular pumping out of septic tanks and dumping in Almonte's sewage treatment facility.

Unanswered questions

There are many questions that still need to be answered:

- Why are the estimates so volatile and are they likely to be significantly larger?
- Why is a mechanical treatment plant the best option? Is it predicated on growth figures that may be overstated?
- If growth projections are overstated and development charges don't materialize, how much higher will tax bills and user fees actually be for a smaller population base?
- How does the town anticipate paying for these costs, given limited provincial/ federal funding now available?
- What is the developer's contribution via development charges and is it consistent with the market price (e.g. Ottawa, CP, etc)?

- Would an immediate moratorium against all new development be prudent until the lagoon question is answered and costed in a sensible manner?
- What's "fair and fitting"? If septage treatment becomes a service commitment, what's a fair portion of the costs for rural users? If urban development drives sewage treatment capacity, what's a fair tax and user charge Almonte residents must assume?

What can you do?

During the current municipal election, if you concerned about the future cost and manner of sewage treatment, tell your candidates.

Other bulletins in this series

#1 Downtown Almonte

#2 De-amalgamation

#4 Almonte's plan for growth

#5 Sunday hunting

#6 Regulating pesticides

The MMRA Board has reviewed these election 2006 bulletin articles for factual accuracy. The bulletins, and the opinions represented within them, are meant to stimulate community discussion and awareness in the time period leading up to the 2006 municipal elections in Mississippi Mills. Your vote counts!

The MMRA is a non-profit residents' association. For more information on the MMRA or to join, visit our web site at www.mmra.ca.