

Member report from the June 18, 2009 Water & Sewer Subcommittee

Rural Septage Issue

The meeting heard a presentation by Andrew Grunda, a consultant from Watson & Associates. Grunda was well prepared and polished. Most of his presentation dealt with water & sewer charges for urban Almonte. The town is moving to full-cost recovery, which means big increases for Almonters.

Regarding the septage component of the sewage treatment plant (STP), Grunda presented three scenarios for recovering the capital cost and paying the operating cost (estimated at \$30,000 annually).

1. Charge rural homes an annual fee starting at about \$30 in 2012 rising to about \$33 in 2019. \$20 of that is to pay down the septage component capital cost. That charge would last 25 years (total = \$500). This would apply only to existing homes only. New homes would be exempt because of the proposed increase in rural development charges (\$1200). All rural homes would pay an annual fee of \$10 (which will increase annually) to cover operating costs.
2. Increase the rural tax rate to cover both the capital cost and operating cost. This would apply to all homes, new and old. For an average home (assessment = \$214,000) this would add \$26.40 to taxes in 2012.
3. Use a dumping fee of \$40 per cubic metre (tanks hold 4 to 5 cubic metres) to cover both the capital cost and operating cost. Grunda says this might not work because the fee is very high and haulers may go elsewhere.

If you empty your septic tank every five years, under the current rate you'd pay \$200. Under option 1, you would pay an additional \$150 dollars. Under option 2, you would pay an additional \$133. Under option 3, you would pay an additional \$160 to \$200.

The costs are not huge; about the price of one 2-4 of beer annually. If you believe that treating septage in a municipal sewage treatment plant is the best option—as most councillors seem to—then there is not much to gripe about.

At the Water & Sewer Subcommittee meeting Councillor Alex Gillis said he didn't understand why rural folks are complaining about the STP since they will pay far less than Almonters.

It's not about the money. It is about HOW we will forced to spend it and WHY we will be forced to spend it.

The How

Right now, rural dwellers deal only with the private sector. If we need a septic system, or we need it repaired, or we need the tank pumped, we get a CHOICE of who to deal with. We

determine where 100% of our money will be spent. We have not needed the Town before and we don't really need it now.

Has Council ever considered just leaving septage up to the septage experts to deal with? The haulers will do what the law requires, that is their business. They may need to charge us more, but we can still shop around. We don't need the Town to pick one option out of the many and create a monopoly. Private enterprise is more effective and efficient than the public sector. Don't build the septage component. Hold on to the \$2.8 million allocated for it and use that to pay the cost overruns—you'll need it.

Hands of our septage.

The Why

As I've said before, the only reason the Town chose to treat septage in the STP is because the Town needs to build the STP to service Almonte's dreams of urban expansion.

I believe development charges should pay every cent of the STP (including septage treatment if the Town remains stubborn). To do that, the Town needs to raise urban development charges, not lower them as is currently proposed.

Shaun McLaughlin