

Meeting about the Town of Mississippi Mills' plan to add a septage treatment facility to the proposed Sewage Treatment Plant

Wednesday, August 19, 2009
Pakenham Arena

Sponsored by:

- Mississippi Mills Residents Association (MMRA): <http://www.mmra.ca>
- Canadian Property Rights Coalition (CPRC): <http://canadianpropertyrightscoalition.org>
- Appleton Community Association (ACA): <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/appleton/>

Meeting organizers:

Alison Ball (ACA, MMRA), Ronald Burgess (CPRC), Bill Duncan (CPRC), Arnie Francis (MMRA), Amanda Gorman (MMRA), Jill McCubbin (MMRA), Shaun McLaughlin (MMRA), Phil Warland (CPRC), George Yaremchuk (MMRA), Paul Zollman (MMRA)

Attendees:

- Number of attendees: 245
- By a show of hands, most attendees were from Ramsay and Pakenham Wards. All Ramsay Councilors were present.

Phil Warland, Master of Ceremonies

- At the Town's public meeting in June, the Town and their consultants presented the technical aspects. The presentations at this meeting will focus on the funding models.

1. Amanda Gorman, MMRA: What the Town has planned

Facts and Figures from Town documentation and presentations	
Capital costs, Sewage Treatment Plant (STP)	
Estimated total cost	\$28m
Estimated total cost when it goes to tender	Unknown but high probability that it will be higher than \$28m.
Federal and provincial grants for septage treatment component	Limited funding that currently stands to be 2/3 of the estimated cost of \$28m (STP and septage component). An increase in cost would have to be carried by Mississippi Mills.
Increase in grants from federal and provincial government if the actual cost is greater than the estimated cost	0%
Increased cost to tax payers if the actual cost is greater than the estimated cost	Actual cost minus the estimated cost
Capital costs, Septage Treatment Facility	
Estimated cost of septage treatment component	10% of the total cost; i.e., \$2.8m
Estimated balance of the septage component (not covered by federal and provincial grants)	1/3 of 10% of the total estimated cost = \$933,333
Estimated amount to be raised by rural development charges	\$235,000

Estimated balance to be raised for capital costs from the rural taxpayers	\$698,000
Estimated charge to each rural household for capital costs	\$300 Possible collection methods: levy over three years or tax increase
Extra variable costs	Interest expenses town will incur from the loan required to pay the outstanding costs of the STP, less provincial and federal funding.
Operating costs, Sewage Treatment Plant (STP)	
Estimated operating costs	\$400,000/year
Operating costs, Septage Treatment Facility	
Estimated operating costs	10% of total operating costs

2. Shaun McLaughlin, MMRA: Alternative funding models

The community groups agree that spreading raw septage on land is unwise. They are not opposed to treating septage.

Watson & Associates consulting company prepared 3 funding options for the covering the operating costs of the septage facility:

- Option 1: Charge rural homes an annual levy starting in 2012 for 25 years to cover the capital cost of a septage treatment facility. This would apply only to existing homes. New homes would be exempt because of a pending increase in rural development charges. In addition, all rural homes would pay an annual levy to cover operating costs. That fee would increase annually due to inflation and unexpected maintenance costs.
 - Option 2: Increase the rural tax rate to cover both the capital cost and operating cost of septage treatment. This would apply to all homes, new and old.
 - Option 3: Charge a high tipping fee to cover both the capital cost and operating cost. The consultant said this could backfire because a high fee may encourage haulers to go elsewhere.
- The Town has not decided which option to take, and may implement a combination of these, such as a levy and a tipping fee.

Background:

- Main reason that the Town needs a new STP is to service 1200 new homes in Almonte Ward (5 subdivisions). Existing residents should not pay for the capital costs of the new plant. All costs of the STP should be covered by development costs for new houses.
- The Town has significantly lowered urban development charges for “stormwater drainage and control services” and for “wastewater services”. Why will urban homes be charged less for sewage treatment, when the Town is about to build a \$28m sewage treatment plant to service them? Development charges applied to new Almonte Ward subdivisions will pay down only the non-septage components of the STP, even though the only reason the Town needs a new STP is because of these subdivisions.
- Meanwhile, rural developers will have to pay septage treatment charges for non-residential buildings that will have no output. As well, changes will be in place for several years before the facility exists.

Development charges		
	Existing	As of Sept. 29 th
Urban		
Stormwater drainage and control services	\$800	\$335
Wastewater Services	\$4,180	\$2363
Total (stormwater & wastewater)	\$4,980	\$2698
Grand total (all services)	\$10,823	\$8,134
Rural		
Septage Treatment Services, house	\$0	\$194
Septage Treatment Services, non-residential	\$0	\$0.15/ft ²
Grand total (all services)	\$3695	\$4929

- Did urban developers pressure Almonte politicians to cut development charges to make their new houses more cost competitive compared with nearby communities?
- There is no united opposition to protect rural residents from unfair tax increases.
- By lowering the development charge on new subdivisions, Town Council is effectively shifting costs from developers to taxpayers. In short, rural residents will be subsidizing new urban houses.
- **[Update.** Since Shaun delivered this message August 19, he received more information on development charges. Of the \$2363 allotted for waste water services, \$1745 goes towards paying for the new sewage treatment plant. The town projects 2001 new homes in Almonte ward by 2029. This means this charge will bring in \$3.5 million of the estimated \$9.3 million Mississippi Mills must pay for the plant (it may be more). Of this amount, 10% is to be paid for by rural residents and the rest by Almonte ward residents. Provincial legislation does not permit the Town to put all the cost of the sewage plant onto new homes, since the sewage plant is seen as a replacement for the old lagoons.]

Alternatives for Operating Cost

- One proposal is to charge rural residents 10% of the overall operating costs of the new plant, since the septage component is 10% of the capital cost.
- Almonte Ward residents will pay the largest portion of the operating costs but their portion will be reduced by revenues paid to Mississippi Mills from the hydro generation station.
- At amalgamation, all parties agreed that rural residents would not pay for a sewage system and that Almonte Ward residents could keep all hydro revenues. That money helps defray water and sewage costs in Almonte Ward.
- If rural residents must now pay for part of the sewage plant, then hydro revenues must be used to reduce the operating costs of the sewage plant for all wards.
- When it comes to the operating costs, is it fair to tax rural residents annually for a service they use only once or twice a decade? We believe a tipping fee is a fairer method—it falls in line with the user-pay principle.
- One option for septage treatment is for the Town to do nothing because the haulers will take care of it.

Let's reduce the sewage plant's total operating cost as much as possible using hydro revenues, and cover the remainder of the operating cost related to rural septage through a tipping fee.

If you think the Town's new development charges and proposed taxes are unfair, please complain to your elected representatives.

3. Ron Burgess, CPRC: Renfrew Planning Study

- There are many relevant Ontario acts and policies; e.g., Nutrient Management Act, the Clean Water Act, the Source Water Protection Act and the Provincial Policy Statement.
- Within the next five years, no one will be allowed to spread raw sewage on land. This was one of the main motivations of the Renfrew study.
- The 2005 Renfrew study looked at existing sewage and septage systems and available land. [PowerPoint summary of the study: [http://www.countyofrenfrew.on.ca/publicworks/Enviro/Septage&BiosolidsPresentationMay_17.pps.](http://www.countyofrenfrew.on.ca/publicworks/Enviro/Septage&BiosolidsPresentationMay_17.pps)]
- The Renfrew study detailed eight options. They estimated the range for the costs/cleanout for the eight options to be: \$50 - \$355.
- Option 1, “in truck lime stabilization”, was the cheap method at \$.80/cu m. The result can be disposed of on the land. It is the most cost effective to the home owner and the easiest for the municipality to manage. The processing can take place in the truck, in some cases. A holding area is still required because can’t spread the biosolids on fields in winter or when the ground is very wet. Renfrew consulted MOE on this alkaline system and lagoon use.
- Option 7, “Municipal Waste Water Treatment Plant, On-site Storage”, was the most expensive method at \$10/cu m. This is the option that Mississippi Mills is proposing.
- According to the Renfrew report, the cost of setting up a lime stabilization tank on a septage hauler is about \$75,000. Given that the Town plans to pay \$933,333 (1/3 of the total estimated costs, after grants) for the septage part of the STP, wouldn’t it make more sense to pay two or three local haulers \$75,000 each to build their treatment tanks?

4. Bill Duncan: Uncertainties

- The community groups have done the best they could with the facts that have been made available. We are the official opposition to the Town Council.
- Difficult to understand how the septage component would cost \$2.8m for holding tanks and pipes.
- If there are cost overruns, which are very likely, there is no more funding from federal or provincial sources so the tax-payers would have to pay the difference.
- At Town’s public meeting on June 2nd, they said that biosolids are harmless and residents would want to come and pick it up to use on their gardens. However, there was an article in the Ontario Farmer Newsletter a few weeks ago about current legislation that affects the use of biosolids on land and proposed legislation that would result in further restrictions; e.g., Canadian Environmental Protection Act, Clean Water Act and the Nutrient Management Act (and related regulations and protocols). In the future, anyone spreading biosolids on land would have to go through the onerous process of:
 - o Attending a course and passing a test
 - o Writing a plan for the use of the non-agricultural biosolids and having it approved
 - o Demonstrating a benefit
 - o Identifying the level of all nutrients
 - o Identifying the level of odour
 - o Testing the soil
- In order for the public to find out who is spreading biosolids, they will have to file a Freedom of Information request.
- Guelph – hoping to increase 8 tons biosolids/acre to 20 tons/acre with new regulations.

- The Town thinks that the septage facility will be a revenue generator as neighbouring counties would use it; e.g., Lanark Highlands.
- An alternative to building a septage facility would be for the Town to pay tipping fees at the dump in Ottawa for the biosolids, if the farms won't take it.
- Currently in Ottawa, anyone spreading biosolids has to post a sign by the field: "Biosolid Beneficial Use Program Site."
- As part of the Source Water investigation, it was determined that areas downstream from Carleton Place are at deemed "land at risk" (There are 21 categories for risk). Almost everything at a farm becomes a risk.
- Some of the current lagoons in Almonte Ward will be used for overflow for the sewage treatment plant because after a big rain there is a large increase in volume. This is a result of a failing pipe system throughout the ward. There are several risks to Almonte Ward wells, which could be expensive to fix in the future; e.g., salt storage beside the some of the drinking-water wells. Lagoons should be risk 10 because of proximity to Almonte wells.
- To comply with the Nutrient Management Act, farmers must store biosolids for 240 days before spreading but Town is exempt.

Questions and Comments from attendees:

- Added costs for pumpouts will be in addition to the levy for capital costs and for operating costs.
- Mayor suggested that tipping fees may be lower. However, the haulers may not even want to use the Almonte facility.
- The Town should provide a pumping service to residents with septic systems as part of the costs being charged to rural residents.
- In the future, that may be a provincial regulation for mandatory annual septic tank pumping – if a resident doesn't comply, they would be charged anyway. Quebec already has such a regulation.
- The current building code specifies that septic tanks must be pumped when they contain 30% solids.
- Many houses in Appleton are on holding tanks that must be pumped 3-4 times/year. Would they have to pay increased tipping fees for each pumpout?
- New development costs of \$194/rural house are not fair because the septage treatment facility doesn't exist yet.
- Because the Town will not be able to find anyone to take the biosolids, the pile could get as high as the Carp dump.
- What are the options now that development charges have already been passed? It could be difficult to reverse this decision now however it might be possible to submit a Motion to Reconsider.
- The Town is aiming for September for making decision on the funding options for the STP and septage. Everyone was urged to put pressure on their councilors, esp. Pakenham councilors.
- A private company could set up aerobic digester (e.g., Waste Management) and undercut the municipality.
- There should be credit for rural residents who don't put a lot of chemical in their septic systems (because chemicals harm the bacterial action of their systems).
- Use of the septage facility twice a decade doesn't justify annual tax increases.
- Rural residents would be paying twice because they are paying for their septic systems and then for the septage facility.

- Will the information be available after the meeting? Yes, notes will be posted and the community group may make a delegation to MM council.
- It costs \$7K to hook up a new house to water and sewer but rural septic systems cost about \$20K.
- Charging rural residents for the STP is like buying a new car and giving the neighbours the gas and tune-up bills.
- Some councilors say that urban growth is good for all residents.
- Mississippi Mills may want to keep development costs down so that developers will build in Almonte instead of Carleton Place or Kanata.
- New STP facility is needed to service the new subdivisions. Why is the Town allowing subdivisions to be built before there is sufficient infrastructure?
- All residents have already paid for the environmental assessment without even knowing it.
- It is unlikely that other communities will want to truck their septage to another community.
- Rural residents are subsidizing urban subdivisions.
- What happens if the lagoons fail? Will the town wells be contaminated?
- Will waste management companies buy up farms to dump biosolids?
- Operating costs will be affected by volume and the Town plans to increase the number of urban houses. Has this been factored into the projected costs?
- In the future, will rural residents be able to choose who they hire to pumpout their septic tanks? That is, will they be able to choose the cheapest method?
- Waste contains toxins and residues of prescription drugs that STP's are not able to remove during treatment. This will then be in the biosolids that they propose be spread on farmers' fields.
- Can we take this to the OMB?
- Don't want the Town to use tax dollars to build a facility that will compete with private enterprise.
- Have to remember that your taxes paid for the federal and provincial grants, as well as the costs that are proposed to be charged as taxes, levies or tipping fees.
- Will a loan be required to bridge the capital costs? Yes, the loan will be paid off over 25 years.
- Too bad they couldn't have used some of the money that was spent on the roundabout on the STP/septage project.
- Is it possible to de-amalgamate Mississippi Mills?

Votes:

Attendees were asked to raise their hands	
If they agreed that all capital costs for the Town's share of the new sewage treatment plant be paid for by development charges, not taxes or levies.	Unanimous
If they agreed that rural residents pay for septage treatment through a tipping fee, NOT taxes or levies.	Unanimous
If they agreed that the Town's hydro generation revenues are shared among all three wards.	Unanimous

This must be septafuge!