Notes from the Meeting of the Lakelse Lake, Jackpine Flats Septic Tank Management Program Working Group held Thursday, April 19, 2012, in the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine Board Room, 300 - 4545 Lazelle Avenue, Terrace, BC, commencing at 11:00 am

In Attendance

Working Group Members

John Jensen, Jackpine Flats Community Association (President)
Terry Brown, Lakelse Lake Advisory Planning Commission
Gordon Gillam, Lakelse Lake Community Association
Dave Materi, Lakelse Lake Community Association & DL 6263 Residents

Agency Representatives

Azreer Gill, Public Health Inspector, Northern Health Authority
Doug Quibell, Manager of Public Health, Northern Health Authority

Regional District Representatives

Doug McLeod, Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine (RDKS) Electoral Area C Director
Linda Zurkirchen, Cambria Gordon (Project Consultant)
Roger Tooms, RDKS Manager of Works & Services
Ted Pellegrino, RDKS Planner
Margaret Kujat, RDKS Working Group Assistant

Others

No others were in attendance

1. Introduction

This is the second meeting of the Working Group (WG).

Linda Zurkirchen of Cambria Gordon served as Chair for this meeting. Linda welcomed those in attendance and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

2. Notes of the Meeting held March 8, 2012

The Chair asked if the notes of the previous meeting were acceptable to the WG.

Roger Tooms indicated that a correction is required to the statement attributed to him on "page 1" "paragraph 1". The correction requested is regarding the discussion on sewage treatment and Roger asked that the sentence be amended to read "the challenge will be where to locate a sewer treatment plant and determine effluent disposal options".

The (WG) determined to accept the notes of the meeting held March 8, 2012 as amended with the above noted change. Linda reviewed the meeting agenda and indicated that the first item will be the presentation by staff with the Northern Health Authority.
3. Presentation by the Northern Health Authority (NHA)

Azreer Gill and Doug Quibell provided a presentation on septic system maintenance and the course that NHA is developing to assist property owners. Azreer spoke to a "septic savvy" course that NHA is developing cooperatively with staff from their Northeast and Interior regions. He added that this course, when developed will be offered to property owners interested in learning how individual on-site septic systems work and how they should be maintained to ensure they continue to function properly. Azreer added that the septic savvy course is modeled after one that was developed by the Capital Regional District on Vancouver Island.

Azreer and Doug Quibell provided a background on the Provincial legislation including the new (2005) Sewerage System Regulations as they apply to single family residential development. Azreer indicated that under the regulations only an authorized person or a Registered Onsite Wastewater Practitioner (ROWP) can carry our repair, installation and site assessments on septic systems. This was a role that was previously mandated to the Health Authorities in BC and since the implementation of the new legislation, NHA’s role with administering and regulating septic systems changed.

Doug Quibell added that NHA’s present role is more focused towards increasing opportunities to improve public health. He explained that the proposed septic savvy course will be used as a tool utilizing video, workshops and a self teaching website. The focus will be on type 1 & 2 systems. Doug also indicated that he/NHA is open to suggestions from the WG on how to administer the proposed course.

Linda asked about the time frame when NHA will have the course completed and when will it be available to offer to the residents. Doug indicated that it will take approximately another 3 to 6 months for NHA to finish developing this course including incorporating local considerations, input from groups such as local ROWP’s and RDKS.

Linda asked the WG if they are interested in providing input. The WG indicated that they would like the opportunity to learn more about the septic savvy course.

Roger added that the septic savvy program developed by NHA is a good initiative and the Regional District would be amiable to assisting them with facilitating the workshops including organizing and finding a suitable venue.

Doug MacLeod added that he welcomed this initiative by NHA and added that RDKS will help to facilitate the workshops adding that he would like to see it being offered to property owners as soon as possible. Doug suggested end of summer or early fall as a good time to ensure people that use their residences on a seasonal basis can take advantage of the course and local residents are usually back from vacations.

Gordon added that at the end of summer most of the seasonal residents have left and the opportunity to present the course to that group is missed.

Gordon presented concerns as expressed during the last meeting of the Lakelse Lake Community Association he attended. He noted there were some 25 to 30 people present at the meeting. He added that those in attendance were adamant in their opinion that they do not want to see more bureaucracy resulting from a septic system management program. A suggestion was that rather than having mandatory RDKS led inspections, property owners could produce a receipt showing that they had their septic system inspected and serviced and the tank pumped. He added that those at the meeting were not supportive of paying additional costs and fees for this service.

(2)
Linda noted that septic system ownership responsibility will be looked at during this process.

John Jensen added that this subject was also considered at a meeting of the Jackpine Community Association. He added that the difficulty posed with inspecting underground septic systems was discussed. John noted that having a third party policing septic systems is not a good idea and the concept of presenting receipts as mentioned by Gordon is worth considering.

Doug MacLeod indicated that he agreed with Gordon and John’s comments and asked what Provincial regulations are in place to ensure compliance of septic system. Doug Quibell spoke to Provincial Regulations and the Sewerage System Regulations that removed enforcement abilities from the NHA. He added that NHA would only become involved if there is clear evidence of a failing system resulting in a risk to public health otherwise the management of residential septic system is left the ROWP’s.

Linda noted that the intent of this process is to present and discuss all the options that may be available by preparing a list of those options and discussing each in detail.

Roger indicated the RDKS Administration is not in favor of or intending to create more unwanted regulations. He added that increased ownership responsibility is an option; however, the WG still needs to develop some standards around owner initiated inspections to ensure that the entire septic system and the important components of the system are considered and addressed. Roger spoke to important considerations such as inspecting the tanks, distribution box and the distribution field. He added that RDKS Administration’s preference is to develop a program that is not bureaucratic, not expensive, provides a simple process with a focus towards addressing the non-compliant systems.

Terry asked if the RDKS is still working towards providing the lake with a community sewer system. Roger responded yes but in the interim septic system need to function properly in order to address possible adverse environmental impacts to the lake, wells and the groundwater and potable water wells in Jackpine Flats. Further that depending on the type of community system, a tank could remain as a component particularly for a STEP (septic tank effluent pumping system). He added that at this point it’s not known what type of community system would be developed for particular areas of the lake.

Dave Materi asked if a company such as “Norco” is able carry out the type on maintenance that is necessary. Roger noted that he has had discussions with property owners with onsite septic systems at the lake that are not aware they have a septic system on their property or that it requires regular maintenance. He added that the RDKS could possibly assist the property owners in locating their septic systems.

Roger noted that the RDKS is concerned about where the pump outs from the tanks end up. He explained that presently the pump outs end up at the Thornhill landfill site; however this will need to be discussed with those companies. While the pump outs take the sewage away from the Lakelse properties how it's subsequently treated within the receiving environment remains an issue.

Roger added that educating people about their septic system, how it functions and how to manage them is important and the RDKS will look to the WG to assist with developing a public education strategy. He noted that the work done for the Liquid Waste Management Plan included hiring a summer student to map water wells and septic systems in Jackpine and this could also be done as a project to assist property owners at the Lake and Jackpine.
Gordon asked Dave Materi about his experience as a realtor in selling properties with onsite septic systems. Dave responded that it is good if a seller can confirm that his septic system has been pumped and operating properly. He added that prospective purchasers are wary or buying a property that may require an entirely new septic system.

Doug Quibell added that NHA can provide copies of septic permits and ROWP septic filings. He added that in his opinion, septic pumping companies should have more training on inspecting the entire septic system.

Doug MacLeod noted that there is a shortage of ROWP's in this area and asked about the likelihood of getting more of them. Doug Quibell responded that the likelihood is not good unless there is an increased demand for ROWP's.

Doug MacLeod asked Doug Quibell to provide an overview of how NHA's role in managing septic systems has changed. Doug Quibell responded that prior to the new provincial regulations; the Health Authority played a significant role in permitting and inspecting septic systems. He added that they were also involved in conducting audits to determine if septic was surfacing on properties at the lake. After the new regulations, inspection has gone over to the private sector and with ROWP's who are regulated by a professional body (ASTTBC). NHA now receives copies of septic system installation and repair filings submitted by the ROWP/installer. He added that NHA does have the ability to review the filing and determine if the system installed by the ROWP will work for a particular property. Further that they still have the authority to inspect if there is evidence of risk to public health but will not dig up a system (for example) to determine if it's functioning properly.

Roger indicated that system failure rates and documenting this information for a particular area is important when it comes to applying for infrastructure grants for community sewer. Without this information/documentation to build a strong case/application, the likelihood of being considered for a grant diminishes.

Doug Quibell noted that government stepping away from regulating septic systems in not unique to BC as this has also occurred in Ontario. Roger spoke to his earlier relationship with Doug Quibell as a Health Officer in the region. Roger explained that Doug came up with the idea of incorporating a layer of soils in the tile field to slow perc rates in the gravelly rocky soils of Jackpine Flats and this improved greatly the functioning of the system. Roger suggesting that perhaps requiring this design concept in a Bylaw can improve systems in Jackpine Flats.

Terry asked if property owners are required to demonstrate that their property has sufficient room to accommodate a second field. Doug Quibell responded that it is not a requirement but properties should provide sufficient room for a second field because the fields will eventually fail. Roger noted that the RDKS has amended a Zoning Bylaw to require larger lots for subdivision purpose where the lots are not serviced by a community sewer system to ensure there is room on the lot for a backup/second field. Doug Quibell stated that ensuring a safe potable water supply also needs be considered when siting a septic system on the property including appropriate distances to the well. Roger advised that the RDKS has distributed information pamphlets prepared by the Province on this topic including ones that address well stewardship and what private well owners should know about safe operation of their potable water supply.

Linda asked when the septic savvy course will be ready to offer. Doug responded that he would like to get some input from the WG. Linda suggested that NHA consider having the course available by July of this year and offered to include this as a topic on a future WG meeting.
Roger emphasized that the quality of the septic savvy course is important and should not be rushing to ensure a good quality course is developed for this area.

Gordon asked that if information on the number of permanent year round residents at Lakelse Lake is available. Linda responded that she would investigate if this information is available.

The best times of the year to offer the course was discussed. John noted that Jackpine is a very quiet place in summer as resident tend to be on vacation at that time. Doug MacLeod noted that late August is the best time for Lakelse Lake. Doug Quibell noted that the work on developing this course could be completed by late fall and possibly available next year. It was agreed that septic savvy for the Lake and Jackpine could serve as a model for other areas of the Regional District particularly flood prone areas where systems can become inundated by water.

4. Review WG Terms of Reference

Linda reviewed the Revised Terms of Reference (TOR) dated April 2012. The WG agreed that the name of the program should be changed to “septic system management program” given that the tank is only one component of a septic system.

The scope and list of committee representation was discussed and the WG agreed to the scope and list of representatives.

John noted that other areas of the RDKS such as Rosswood would benefit from this program. Roger agreed and added that this could be offered to other area in the future. Doug MacLeod noted that as Area Director his vision is to think beyond Jackpine and Lakelse Lake to other areas that could benefit. He also added that these meetings are open to the public and people from other areas are welcome to sit in on WG meetings. Linda concurred that the work of the WG and the program that will be developed can serve as a template for similar programs in other areas. Roger added that we will look to this WG on how best to distribute information about the program to the public. John noted that in his experience people want to provide input at the beginning of a process rather than the end.

Linda’s role in this program was discussed. It was noted that Linda will provide information and her expertise to the members and also run the meetings. The WG was in support of Linda’s role.

The WG’s objectives and tasks were discussed. Cost recovery models were discussed including the various options of user pay, assessment based, parcel tax and a two tier system. Roger noted that this will be discussed further by the WG prior to making any final decisions and that some examples will be provided to the WG for discussion and recommendation to the Regional Board. Gordon noted that in his opinion, priority should be placed on systems/properties that are within floodplain and likely non compliant.

Section 4.5 was discussed and Linda will rephrase task 4.5 to reflect WG recommendation.

It was noted that once the TOR are finalized they should be posted on the RDKS website for public information. Linda will also revise the TOR and bring back to the WG as another draft for further consideration. Doug MacLeod noted that a timeline for completion should be considered and included. Linda noted that this will be discussed and completion dates will be proposed to the WG.
The WG recessed the meeting at 12:45 pm for a lunch break.

The Meeting resumed at 1:05 pm

Doug Quibell left the meeting due to another commitment.

The conduct of meeting was discussed. It was determined that the WG will work through a consensus based approach. It was also discussed that the WG could revert to Bourinot’s Rules of Order at the discretion of the Chair if a vote is required to resolve and move forward on a particular issue. Conduct at meetings was discussed. It was decided that there should be an opportunity at a point in the meeting for other people in attendance to address and present to the WG. It was noted that this should be a presentation rather than debate with the WG on a particular issue or point. It was also decided that people should be encouraged to attend as observers and that the Chair have the ability to invite people in attendance to address the WG. Roger noted that the preference will be that people or groups advise the RDKS in advance of their intention to address the WG and the topic to be presented so they may be put on the agenda. If they just show up at the meeting they should be given a 5 or 10 minute opportunity to address the WG. Linda noted that the TOR will be revised and circulated at the next meeting.

5. Program Components

Linda spoke to the program components. Roger emphasized the importance of an education strategy. Providing information to the public was discussed. Utilizing the RDKS website to post information was also discussed. It was noted that it’s important to be as transparent as possible on this project. Opportunities for the meeting notes to be made available to the public and the RDKS Board was discussed. Developing a newsletter was also discussed. Ted will provide for the next meeting a draft list he prepared that attempts to identify the various interest groups in Lakelse Lake and Jackpine Flats.

6. Next Meeting

Linda indicated that the next meeting will including a review of the action items, a communication plan, identify any items not completed and to be carried forward, new business and set the next meeting date.

It was decided that the next meeting will be at 11 am on Wednesday May 30, 2012 in the Regional District Offices. Lunch will be provided.

7. Adjournment of Meeting

Linda thanked everyone for attending. The meeting ended at 2:05 pm.