Notes from the Meeting of the Lakelse Lake, Jackpine Flats Septic System Management Program Working Group held Wednesday, May 30, 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

Terry Brown, Lakelse Lake Advisory Planning Commission
Gordon Gillam, Lakelse Lake Community Association
Ken Koltermann, Lakelse Lake Watershed Society
Dave Materi, Lakelse Lake Community Association & DL 6263 Residents

Agency Representatives

Azreer Gill, Public Health Inspector, 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 & Meeting Recorder

Others

No others were in attendance

1. Introduction

This is the third (3rd) meeting of the Working Group (WG).

Linda Zurkirchen of Cambria Gordon served as Chair for this meeting. Linda welcomed those in attendance.

2. Notes of the Meeting held April 19, 2012

The WG determined that the notes of the meeting held on April 19, 2012 be tabled to the next meeting in order to provide further opportunity for members to review the notes. The notes of meeting will be included with the next meeting agenda for consideration for acceptance. The WG asked that the notes of meeting be circulated one week in advance of the next meeting.

3. Review Terms of Reference (TOR)

Linda circulated copies of the Terms of Reference (TOR) for discussion by the WG. It was decided that the WG will review the TOR for consideration and acceptance at the meeting.
4. Update on the Lakelse Lake Community Sewer Potential Designs

Linda and Roger provided an update and answered questions by WG members regarding the potential design of a community sewer system for Lakelse Lake. Roger spoke to options that are available including potential system designs. He provided a description of a grinder pump system where each property has a chamber housing a grinder pump that will grind and pump effluent into a force main to a treatment site.

Roger noted that a public communication plan will be an important and integral part of developing a community sewer system for Lakelse Lake including newsletters, informational meetings and a public open house where required. Roger noted that the RD will be developing a communication plan as this project proceeds.

5. Northern Health Update on the Septic Savvy Course

Azreer Gill provided an update on the Northern Health Authority (NHA) development of the septic savvy course. This course is being developed by NHA and utilizes video, workshops and a self teaching website to train property owners on the care and maintenance of their onsite septic systems. He added that the proposed course was well received at a recent meeting of the Healthy Communities Committee held in Prince George. He added that the course should be at the review stage by this August. NHA's aim is to circulate for feedback from the public, other agencies including the WG and make any necessary changes prior to finalizing the course.

Linda asked about the delivery method for the course. Azreer respond that it will likely be a power-point document.

Roger asked who will facilitate the course. Azreer indicated it will be NHA and that there will be a prior requirement to train NHA staff in delivering the course. He added that the NHA Committee developing the course includes Inspectors familiar with septic systems and environmental health professionals. Their intention is to offer the course in the area of the NHA.

Roger commented that this can serve as a teaching tool that could be offered to all areas of the Regional District with onsite septic disposal systems including places like Two Mile, Hazelton where they have a number of issues with septic disposal including high water table, small lots and the absence of a community water system. He added that the RD and the WG would be prepared to provide input. Azreer emphasized that the draft program will be open for changes.

Gordon noted that the last two weeks of August is a good time to offer the course to get participation from seasonal residents who are at the lake for the summer. Roger added that the RD is prepared to assist with facilitating the course.

6. Discussion on Individual Septic Systems and Community Systems

Terry circulated a brochure he obtained from a registered septic system installer who is selling and installing these particular systems. He noted that this is an advanced system that has minimal servicing requirements. Copy of the brochure by Norweco on the "Singular Green Bio-Kinetic Wastewater Treatment System" is attached to the May 30/12 Agenda. The WG discussed engineered onsite septic treatment systems. Roger noted that in his opinion there is reluctance to install an engineered system because of their high cost, complexity and on-going maintenance requirements. There is also a requirement for a long-term maintenance contract with the vendor which presents additional ongoing costs for homeowners.
Dave Materi noted that engineered treatment systems cost some 20-25 thousand to install plus the ongoing cost of maintenance.

Roger noted that it would be useful to property owners if an informational “fact sheet” were available on the types of systems that can be utilized depending on individual site specific circumstances. This could be useful information particularly if Lakelse Lake does not get a community sewer system.

Dave commented that given the high cost, individuals that have spent $25,000.00 on an engineered system are likely not willing to support and pay for a community sewer system.

Roger noted that some areas of the lake with small lots and difficult soil conditions may have few options on the type of system that is required unlike those homes on larger lots; however, a community sewer system would be less expensive than individual engineering treatment system. He added that public consultation is very important. The Regional District Board has determined that Lakelse Lake needs community sewer and RD Staff have been directed to seek senior government funding for the project. Since a liquid waste management plan has been done and approved, the Regional Board has discretion in determining to proceed with a community system with or without an approval process such as a referendum. He added that RD Staff have submitted a grant application for the community project under the Gas Tax Funding initiative for a $15 million project that would provide a 2/3 grant. Roger added that BC Parks is supportive and has shown willingness to be part of a community sewer project at Lakelse Lake. Roger also spoke to the $5 million grant the RD received for solid waste management planning including developing the proposed new Forceman Ridge landfill.

Terry asked about the type of community system that would be installed at the lake. Roger responded that this is still under consideration. Roger described potential types including a septic tank effluent pumping system and a grinder pump system. He explained that these types of systems require a septic tank or chamber and since the tanks/chamber would remain on the property, a maintenance program is still necessary. Similarly with Jackpine Flats as this area will continue to utilize individual septic tanks and distribution fields. Roger explained that the community sewer project is being done as a parallel project to the septic system management program. He added that if community sewer is not developed (for example) over the next 15 years, the existing onsite septic systems still need consideration for a management program to support a healthy lake environment. Roger noted that an environmental assessment is a component of planning for the community sewer project and once completed, the WG will have the opportunity for review and provide their comments.

Gordon asked about the areas of the lake that could be part of a community sewer system. Roger responded that while a potential service area still needs to be determined, there is a great deal of flexibility to include different areas of the lake particularly utilizing a pressurized grinder pump type of system where a collection/sewer main use smaller diameter pipe that can be more easily installed.

Ken noted that during the first WG meeting, there was discussion about cluster systems particularly for the west side of the lake and whether clusters remain as an option. Roger responded that further investigation has determined that the ground/soils in most of this area contain clays and bedrock and are not conducive to a distribution field for a cluster system. Options for the west side still need to be further considered.

Gordon asked is there is a potential to develop two systems one for each side of the lake. Roger responded that there is that potential.
Linda spoke to the two projects (septic system management & community sewer) as separate projects and explained how they remain linked to each other.

Terry asked if there is a WG for the community sewer project. Roger responded no. He added that Linda is working on the environmental assessment component which will determine/raise any issues that need to be addressed. Roger noted that community sewer is more of an engineering exercise and the environmental assessment will be a component towards bringing the project to shelf ready status. Linda added that the assessment is a key component of a grant application in that it will present the options that have been considered and help to build a case for the option that the RD determines to pursue. The environmental assessment will also demonstrate to the funding and regulatory/permitting agencies that the project as proposed is feasible as the environmental issues have been considered.

7. Overview of Conceptual Program

Linda provided a review of the options for the septic system management program and spoke to what a program would look like including the various components. She distributed a table presenting how a clean-out and inspections program would operate. Linda referenced a program that was developed by the Fraser Basin Council. She added that models of other programs will be examined to determine which one is best for this area. Linda asked if the WG would like to consider the information presented for discussion at the next meeting.

Linda noted that the focus remains on how we can get the septic systems to the point that they are sustainable. Maintaining a database for each septic system was discussed as an option to keep track of individual systems. Linda reviewed the implications of the 3 options presented.

The 3 options were further discussed. Roger indicated that the RD is not advocating any particular option at this time. Linda stated that she will do more work on the options presented including providing the cost of each and potential cost recovery methods for WG discussion at the next meeting.

The WG recessed the meeting at 12:10 pm for a lunch break.

The Meeting resumed at 12:30 pm

Linda continued with the review of the flow chart on a potential inspecting process. Roger noted that how inspections should occur needs to be considered and developed further to identify process issues including what to looking for, how often to inspect and a for re-inspection if repairs are required for a particular system. Cleanout frequency was discussed and it was noted that this could be a contentious issue as properties use is not all the same. Some are occupied by two people while others may have a large family and some are used seasonally while others are occupied year round. Roger spoke to economies of scale where the RD could contract to do an entire neighborhood. Gordon gave an example of property owners that saved money by contracting to have a number of systems pumped at the same time/contract.

Doug asked Gordon about other types of businesses that take advantage of economies of scale in obtaining services. Gordon gave the example of fire certification whereby one company is hired to inspect a number of businesses on fire code requirements for insurance purposes.

Terry asked if tank pumping and inspections reports could be requested in writing rather than verbal. Linda responded that a written report could be made to be a program requirement in a service contract. Roger added that a written report could serve as a trigger in identifying what else needs to be looked at.
Ken noted that inspections would need to be done by a qualified individual adding that anyone can pump out septic tanks without knowing how the entire system works.

Roger noted that the inspections will need to be done by trained and qualified individuals. Gordon suggested that a checklist be developed which identifies the components that need to be looked at with an inspection.

Roger spoke to the flow chart prepared by Linda including the process to ensure that issues identified in the inspection are addressed by the property owners. Roger noted that the RD has little to no enforcement capability/authority for nonfunctioning systems. He asked Azreer about the role of NHA in enforcement of noncompliant systems. Azreer responded that NHA receives a copy of the filing by the ROWP but will only get involved on enforcement. The exception is if a failure is evident where for example sewage is surfacing and running on the ground. Roger noted that sewage does not have to be running on the ground for a system to be failing and noncompliant. Further, the RD does not want to enforce septic system regulations. Azreer noted that educating the homeowner is the main approach for NHA. He added that enforcement options will be discussed with others at NHA and he will report back at the next meeting.

Linda spoke to the options under a public-private and private-private scenario. Roger noted that inspection services could be contracted and gave an example whereby the contract could be for a 2 year period until all the systems have been inspected. He commented that other useful information could also be obtained during the site investigation and incorporated into a database such as GPS location for buildings, water wells and other potable water sources on a property.

Doug noted that his preference is for property owners to have a choice of inspectors rather than create a monopoly situation. He added that providing property owners with a list of qualified inspectors they can choose from should be considered.

Gordon noted the RD should make it clear that there is no such thing as the ability or the option to grandfather noncompliant systems. He added that people need to be advised that a failing system is a failing system no matter when it was installed.

Roger spoke to the ability of the RD to establish a Bylaw that creates a service area and standards for compliant systems. Timeframe to bring systems into compliance following inspection was discussed. The WG determined that two years was deemed to be reasonable for a property owner to bring their system into compliance. Roger suggested that if the system is still noncompliant at the end of the two years, then a letter would be sent to NHA advising of the noncompliance. Roger indicated that the RD may have an option to issue fines through the municipal ticketing information system (MTI) which is available to local governments.

Ted spoke to the Development Procedures Bylaw the RD is developing and will adopt shortly. Dave suggested a presentation to the local realtors regarding the new regulation as realtors are generally the first contact for new property owners and they are in a good position to pass on information.

8. New Items

Linda indicated that she will add additional columns to the flow chart that will show the pros and cons of each program option and the costs. These will be further discussed at the next WG meeting.
Roger spoke to the education package that the RD will forward to the WG for their review and input. The information package will be sent to all the property owners in Jackpine Flats and Lakelse Lake and will also be made available on the RD website. Linda added that she will ask the WG to provide input on a newsletter that is being developed on septic system management.

Dave asked about the process in mailing the information and whether it will be sent by bulk mail. Roger responded that it will be addressed to the property owner. Gordon noted that addressing the information package to the individual property owners is preferable.

Azreer offered to provide an update on the progress of the NHA septic savvy program at the next meeting.

9. Next Meeting Date

It was determined that the next meeting date will be on June 27th commencing at 11 am in the Regional District office. Lunch will be provided.

Ted will confirm the meeting date.

10. Adjournment

Linda thanked everyone for attending. The meeting ended at 1:55 pm.