Notes from the Meeting of the Lakelse Lake, Jackpine Flats Septic System Management Program Working Group held Wednesday, September 25, 2012, in the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine Board Room, 300 - 4545 Lazelle Avenue, Terrace commencing at 9:00 am

In Attendance

Working Group Members In Attendance

Gordon Gillam, Lakelse Lake Community Association
John Jensen, President Jackpine Flats Community Association
Dave Materi, Lakelse Lake Community Association & DL 6263 Residents (arrived at10:15 a.m.)

Agency Representatives

Azeer 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
Margaret Kujat, RDKS Environmental Services Coordinator

Others

No others were in attendance

1. Introduction

This is the Seventh (7th) meeting of the Working Group (WG).

The Meeting commenced at 9:05 am. Linda Zurkirchen, Project Consultant with Cambria Gordon, served as Chair for the meeting. Linda welcomed those in attendance.

Linda explained to the WG that Margaret Kujat has taken a new position with the Regional District as the Environmental Services Coordinator and will continue to assist the WG with this project. Roger stated this is a position that was previously held by another individual on a contact basis who is no longer available to the Regional District. He added that Margaret will be the WG contact for this project and will also assist with the community sewer EA project.

Notes of the Meeting held September 5, 2012

Linda presented and reviewed the notes of the previous meeting for WG consideration. The WG determined that the notes of the previous meeting of September 5, 2012 be accepted as presented.

2. Action and Outstanding Items from the Previous Meeting

Linda reviewed the Action Items from the last meeting and the agenda for this meeting.

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Survey Questionnaire

Roger reviewed the draft survey questionnaire. He noted that a similar survey was used for Thornhill to obtain information on the condition of septic systems on private land parcels. The survey on the agenda has been customized for this project. The intent of the survey and the type of information that is intended to be obtained was discussed by the WG. Salient points raised regarding the intent of the survey include;

- to generate an inventory of waste water disposal systems and general information on development on properties within the intended service area
- a way to ask the property owner and/or occupier to work cooperatively with the RDKS to provide information on their own without the need for RDKS staff or others to enter the property
- obtain feedback on the proposed service and potential cost to the property owners
- assist with potential future infrastructure grant applications for senior government funding
- intent is to have the survey available to be completed on a website or offer to mail the property owners that request a paper copy
- deadline for completing the survey should be at or about November 15th possibly with an incentive/small prize draw for those that submit the survey by that date

Doug asked why there was such a low return with the survey that was done for Thornhill. Roger explained the project was under a time constraint as the results had to be submitted along with an application for infrastructure funding for community sewer. He added that the timing was not optimal and the deadline too short. Property owners were only given two weeks to respond during the Christmas season. Roger noted that there will be further opportunity to do another survey for Thornhill.

Roger was asked about the origin of the survey. He responded that it was customized from a survey provided by the Province. The RDKS had to modify the survey to meet our specific project and objectives. Roger explained that other project surveys he had administered had very high returns. He spoke to the one done for the North Terrace water where nearly 95% were obtained by following up with phone calls reminding property owners to complete the survey and providing assistance where requested. He added that generally to support grant applications the Province requires evidence of 25% failure rate however in his opinion, rate of system malfunction is a much more useful and practical indicator of septic system problems in a community. John noted the difficulty with administering surveys and obtaining a high response rates adding that often a 10% return can be considered a good response.

Roger stated that with this survey, the RDKS will reach out to the various community groups and societies for help in prompting their respective residents to respond to the survey.

John noted that this program should continue to be referenced as a septic system (as opposed to septic tank) management program. Linda agreed that septic system is more representative of the intent of the program which includes other components like education and water monitoring in addition to the physical septic system.

The WG discussed the potential annual cost to property owners for administering the program. John noted that $150 a year to have one’s system pumped every 5 years could be difficult to obtain support. Roger explained that the program cost considered in the LWMP was based on a 3 year frequency. Decreased frequency would lower cost, however other important program components also need to be considered such as education and water quality monitoring.
John noted that we need to present the cost of this program so that people will have the correct information to consider. Roger noted that once the program is drafted and the components are determined, the estimated costs can be refined.

Doug noted that the RDKS needs to be invited onto a property by the owner adding that the RDKS can make regulations and allow people to look after their own system. Linda noted that the current program direction is to put the onus on the property owners to demonstrate that they are maintaining their system and it is functioning in accordance with established requirements.

Gordon noted that in his opinion, 5 year intervals for pumping is too long and those that live on a property on a year round basis should be pumping more often to prevent problems occurring during winter when its considerable more difficult to make necessary repairs. Linda responded that 5 years could be a maximum and pumping could be more frequent depending on individual circumstances. Roger spoke to the questions of frequency noting that the initial inspection will help to determine frequency including determinants such as size of tanks and other criteria that the program will develop.

Roger spoke to the question of entering onto people’s (private) property. He noted that Lakelse Lake is viewed as a regional amenity and the RDKS Board has directed that a septic system management program be developed to protect public and environmental health of the lake and public health in Jackpine with regards to proactive groundwater protection initiatives. He added that local governments are given authority to establish bylaws to provide public services where requested by its citizens and establish regulations when they serve the common public interest of a community. He gave the example of dog control services. Doug noted that in his opinion people will be in favor of the proposed project but there are limits to how much government intervention they want in their lives adding that there is a desire to keep the lake clean but they will want to manage their own property.

John noted that in his opinion Jackpine residents will support the program but the pumping interval should be consistent for everyone. He added that the initial cost for the first inspection will be supported but if the annual cost is too high it could be a concern. Roger noted that the RDKS is listening to these issues that there is no desire to have the “septic police” come onto my property and that people do not want to subsidize those that require more frequent pumping because they have a smaller tank. He added that perhaps those that require more frequent pumping will need to pay themselves. Doug added that any rules and regulations should be made clear to give people the option to comply and police those that do not. With regards to tank inspection and ease of access, Doug asked if there are any regulations that ensure tanks are installed to make it easily accessible.

The WG discussed compliance and information sharing regarding condition of septic systems.

Review of the Survey Questionnaire

The WG reviewed the questions contained in the survey and provided recommendation. Some of the suggestions presented are noted below.

- Further clarification on some of the questions is required (55) articulate the management program, explain the components, use the word pumping, more explanation of what the program will consist of
- Add information about the groundwater protection aspect for Jackpine and need to protect the lake environment
- Consider providing this information in the newsletter

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• Better definition for question 56 is required, include that this service also includes water quality sampling

The WG discussed testing individual property wells. Azreer noted that testing water wells should not be in the survey and that this should be kept separate. Roger noted that the RDKS has mailed information/education package to all property owners on well protection and water sampling.

John asked about water quality monitoring. Roger noted that the RDKS has done a considerable amount of work on this and has a draft program in place. Sampling was done for some one dozen properties in Jackpine with the assistance of property owners and at select sites around Lakelse Lake. He explained that this was done cooperatively with Ministry of Environment, however to continue on a regular basis requires that a specific program is developed and implemented. It was noted that for Jackpine Flats residents, given that nearly every property obtains their potable water from individual wells, groundwater monitoring and initiatives to protect groundwater will be a very important to those residents.

Roger spoke to the cost of the program noting that the annual cost can come down as the program gets implemented. He added that the initial implementation stage will require the most work and resultant costs. Once the program is operational and streamlined, the amount of work/expense necessary to operate the program may be reduced.

Roger spoke to the components the fees will cover. Gordon asked how the fees would be collected. Roger responded that this will be determined by the program. He spoke to options that are available including parcel tax or assessment based. He added that if tank pumping is paid by the property owner, costs of additional components provided will need to be confirmed.

Linda reviewed the WG comments presented regarding the survey/questionnaire. She spoke to the newsletter that will be mailed to all property owners within the project area. Possible incentives offered to those that complete the questionnaire by the due date was discussed. The WG supported providing up to $100 to be used towards reimbursement for tank pumping or purchasing water saving fixtures.

The WG recessed at 10:25 am and reconvened at 10:45 am.

Linda discussed Action Items for the next meeting.

**ACTION ITEM** – Refine and present conceptual program costs for the next meeting

Linda provided an update for WG discussion on her meeting with local septic system pumping companies.

**ACTION ITEM** – Obtain further information from pumping companies on what they do and are able to do, workloads, knowledge of systems and what information they are able to collect for the RDKS such as size of tank, etc.

Gordon asked if the companies are able to provide or disclose information when they encounter potential problem situations. Linda noted that form her initial discussions, she gleamed that lots of their work is in response to problem being experienced by a property owner and that most of their work is reacting to problems and remedial work keeps them the busiest.
John asked if they were in a position to report problem system to the RDKS or if privacy issue would prevail. He suggested that at the very least they should be able to confirm that a system has been serviced/pumped.

Linda spoke to the information that would be necessary from private inspections which the RDKS needs to manage through a potential program including the indicators that show that a system is functioning properly in order to get to the established (possibly 5 year) frequency such as size of tank, scum layer, sludge layer, is the distribution box working and not plugged and is the tile distribution field function properly.

Linda discussed a potential checklist. She noted that they exist in other jurisdiction for homeowners and health authorities. Most pumping companies have the knowledge and are capable of doing inspections. She noted that the critical question will be what will that first important initial inspection consist of and how will that be different form subsequent on-going inspections. Roger noted that the first inspection will need to provide the important baseline information that needs to be logged and form the basis and groundwork for the program. This will include information such as size of tank, what does the inside of the tank look like, size and number of dwellings on a property/ number of bedrooms, what is the type and condition of the distribution field. He stated that the first inspection could also include a pump-out. He added that the homeowners can be given the opportunity to provide the information, however where it is difficult for the homeowner to do the initial inspection because they cannot find the tank lid or the outlet, offer those homeowners assistance in providing this information.

**ACTION ITEM** – Obtain further information on this topic and establish the indicators for a healthy properly functioning system and place this information on a check list that could be made available to property owners and inspectors. Draft a checklist for WG consideration.

Azreer was asked about the progress of the NHA “Septic Savvy Program” that is being developed. He indicated that NHA’s Healthy Communities Committee is working on that program. Their deadline for completion a draft program available for review is this month. Roger reiterated that the RDKS sees this as an important program and is very willing to assist with delivering the program to area residents including organize the workshops. The proposed service areas of Lakelse Lake & Jackpine Flats could be used as test communities for the septic savvy program.

Doug noted that septic system regulations need to provide that systems are installed in such a way that they are easily accessible for maintenance by the homeowner.

Azreer left the meeting at 11:15 am due to other commitments.

Dave noted that asking homeowners to provide this information is a difficult request and it’s more likely to be obtained by the pumping companies.

John spoke to the need of the WG to establish concrete decisions so that once a decision is made the WG can move forward to a new task. He added that determining a program cost is a concrete decision that needs to be made by the WG.

The WG discussed how long a time period should be give to the homeowner to provide the necessary information and enter the program. The WG noted that 2 years is a reasonable amount of time.
Roger spoke to information available from qualified professional about the life expectancy of a type 1 septic system. He noted that most would say that if a system is properly maintained it should last 20-25 years before it needs to be replaced.

Roger added that at Lakelse Lake most of the systems are older than 25 years, they are developed on land that is in floodplain, high water table or land not conducive to the proper functioning of type 1 systems, and development on properties has changed with more year round occupancy of homes, development of guest homes. In some cases septic systems have not changed to follow these changing circumstances. The ability for the properties to enter the potential “5-year cycle” will be based on the story about each system that is in place through the information that is obtained.

The WG discussed the issue of compliance and non-compliance and re-inspection of non-compliant systems to have them enter the “5-year cycle”.

Doug noted that we cannot have a situation where RDKS employees can make an arbitrary decision that intrudes on property owner right. Roger responded that decision made by RDKS staff will be based on established criteria that will set out in the program and be endorsed and directed by the RDKS Board.

The enforcement role of NHA was discussed. Azreer reiterated that NHA has stepped away from enforcement and this role has been left to the ROWP. NHA will enforce is situations where human health is being clearly impacted.

Dave noted that program information to the public needs to reinforce that the intent is to protect groundwater and peoples wells and the health of the lake environment.

Doug stated that he supports implementing regulation but there is a need to avoid program situations with arbitrary decisions making.

John indicated that the Jackpine flats Community Association is having an AGM on October 3rd and asked if RDKS representatives to attend to speak on the program. Roger responded that the RDKS would be very willing to attend the meeting or any other meeting by community groups to discuss and answer question. He indicated that unfortunately he will be out of town on that date but others would to available to attend.

Ted spoke to the information obtained from Home Inspectors regarding whether septic systems inspections are a part of their service. He stated that their inspection is limited to the building/home and whether the toilets flush and the drains drain and whether there is clear evidence of septic system failure where sewage is running on the ground. The Inspectors contacted indicated that they leave the inspection of septic systems up to the ROWP.

**Action Items for Future Meetings**

1. Draft check list and process to address non-compliant system
2. Prepare a flowchart or spreadsheet that indicates the decisions made to date by the WG
3. provide information on the cost of the program
4. finalize the next newsletter which will serve to provide a project update and sent to property owners as soon as possible
5. have the survey questionnaire available to property owners on the survey monkey website
6. Linda and Ted to attend the October 3, 2012 meeting of the Lakelse Lake community association to discuss and answer question about the proposed program
The time of subsequent meetings was discussed.

The WG decided that a start time of 9 am to approximately 12 noon should continue. Dave advised that he will be away on December 5th. Linda suggested that the proposed November 21st meeting date could be rescheduled to November 20th. It was suggested that an ROWP be invited to a subsequent meeting of the WG.

It was decided that the next meeting date will be on Wednesday October 24, 2012 commencing at 9 am in the Regional District office.

Margaret will confirm the meeting date.

Adjournment

Linda thanked everyone for attending. The meeting ended at 11:55 pm.

NOTE:

Some WG members remained to further discuss general parked and interest items which did not relate to the work plan identified for this meeting.

Roger spoke to the Environmental Assessment (EA) project currently underway for Lakelse Lake community sewer. Roger indicated that the direction from the RDKS Board is for more community engagement regarding community sewer at the lake to provide further information to the residents. Doug added that public outreach before decisions are made is very important.

Roger added that a newsletter is in the works and a public open house is planned in mid-November. Holding an open house in Prince Rupert is also under consideration to better accommodate property owners that live in that community.