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Sewage project will be costly, but benefit us all

CRD promises to listen to residents, but the facilities have to go somewhere

As the Times Colonist's Jan. 11 editorial suggests, wastewater treatment for our region's core area will indeed be expensive. We should not have unpleasant surprises along the way, though. Costs are far from being finalized, but the Capital Regional District's approximate costs estimates are conservative, and allow for inflation and contingencies.

In planning for wastewater treatment, the CRD is exploring many resource management options. Resource recovery from sewage — including heat energy, water reuse, biogas or composting — will be done wherever it is feasible. We also hope to earn credits for reducing greenhouse-gas emissions; the CRD is aiming for carbon neutrality by 2012. Our recent series of discussion papers details many of these technologies, some of which are still emerging. The CRD's Saanich wastewater treatment plant, which recently received a \$2.9-million provincial infrastructure grant to begin a heat-recovery project, will be a pilot for these emerging technologies. I am confident that the Core Area Wastewater Committee, chaired by director Judy Brownoff, will achieve a system design that will minimize the net cost of the system as well as allow for recovery of resources and greenhousegas credits.

The CRD will certainly be listening to the views of residents who live near potential plants. At the same time, the reality is that facilities must be located somewhere. Our region contains substantial development and possible sites are limited in number. Everyone will benefit when facilities are located where pumping and treatment costs and resource-recovery possibilities minimize net costs.

My own neighbourhood of Fairfield, for example, is very likely to see major expansion of Clover Point's existing underground station as well as new pipelines. I have suggested to my community association that residents should begin discussion on mitigation measures that would benefit the neighbourhood — perhaps a redesign of Clover Point Park after construction is complete, perhaps a stretch of new waterfront bike/rollerblade path. My hope is that other communities will do the same as treatment plant locations begin to be identified.

The allocation of the costs of the system among the municipalities is still to be determined. We do want to be sure that our cost allocation is fair to all and that it does not discourage municipalities or local areas (such as Docksider in Victoria, or perhaps a college or university) from pioneering new technologies for treatment that reduce loads to the system. And we want to encourage municipalities to continue working to reduce the inflow of rainwater that increases the load on the system in wet weather.

Each municipality will make its own decision about how to raise the funds to pay for its share of costs. Several municipalities will be basing sewage system charges on water consumption.

This is not a perfect system, however. Water that goes on farmers' fields never enters the sewage system, and conversely (as recent overflows have reminded us) in

wet weather most of the flow in our sewer systems is from storm water.

Thus (depending where we live) we may also see higher property taxes, frontage taxes or perhaps new taxes on impermeable areas to even out storm water flows. As your editorial suggests, some municipalities may decide to reduce, or even to withdraw completely, from some types of spending.

The costs that face us are high, but the requirement to provide sewage treatment has also been faced by most urban areas in Canada and the U.S. Even if we can no longer avoid the requirement to shoulder this burden, we should be grateful to live close to the ocean in a beautiful and ecologically rich region.

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