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McLoughlin option best for sewage plan

Esquimalt concerns unwarranted in choice for treatment plant location

The township of Esquimalt asks, in its new website on the core area wastewater project, if McLoughlin Point is the right long-term solution for the region.

We think so. There are many possible scenarios for wastewater treatment facilities in the Capital Regional District core area; all of them come with both benefits and drawbacks.

The McLoughlin Point plan will see the integration of many positive aspects of treatment, including significant resource recovery, lower cost and fewer impacts on neighbourhoods. In terms of social, economic and environmental sustainability, McLoughlin gives all residents the best available solution.

There has been ongoing public consultation throughout the planning process; this won't end now that a system configuration has been chosen. We will be returning to the communities of Esquimalt, Saanich East and those potentially affected by a biosolids facility throughout the fall and winter.

Esquimalt questions how a facility will look at the entrance to Victoria's Inner Harbour. Many cities, however, including Seattle and Vancouver, Wash., have made wastewater plants into public landmarks, using architectural design and landscaping to create a pleasing facility in keeping with the surroundings. There is no reason we can't follow suit at McLoughlin.

Resource recovery, another of Esquimalt's concerns, is one of the CRD's top priorities when it comes to wastewater treatment, and we've made it an integral part of the McLoughlin system. Heat recovery will occur at McLoughlin Point and possibly at Saanich East; we'll also be recovering or producing biomethane, phosphorus and biosolids as a fuel substitute, and planning for future opportunities through the development of distributed treatment facilities.

Esquimalt's wastewater website suggests the alternative use of a site in Colwood for a centralized plant. Considerable research has shown that building a tunnel across Esquimalt Harbour is an extremely high-risk and high-cost endeavour. Environmentally and economically speaking, it just isn't as good an option as McLoughlin Point.

Esquimalt is understandably concerned that the McLoughlin plant may result in negative effects to nearby neighbourhoods. The McLoughlin Point site is more than half a kilometre from existing residential neighbourhoods, however, which is one reason why it's such a good site.

There will be no problematic odours; planned redundancies and existing outfalls will prevent any discharge of raw sewage into the harbour.

Esquimalt questions the decision to locate a biosolids facility at Hartland. Pumping to Hartland would allow biosolids resource recovery to easily occur in tandem with solid waste, should future plans include such integration.

Hartland is a significant distance away from McLoughlin, however, which is why the CRD is investigating other sites for biosolids processing. Consultation will occur this fall

to gather public input on potential sites.

Is McLoughlin the best investment for taxpayers? Three years of planning and dedication to the social, environmental and economic concerns of residents have led us to think so.

We're committed to providing the full picture and we're confident this is the right plan.

Geoff Young is chairman of the Capital Regional District board of directors.

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