



LOCAL LEADERS SAY PLAN TO PUT PHASE 2 SEWER PIPE UNDER HIGH-WATER MARK WON'T HURT LAKE

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By Tasleem Mawji - Osoyoos Times

The Town of Osoyoos is now accepting tenders for Phase 2 of the Northwest Sector Sewer Project that will service 16 existing homes along 148th Street towards Roberts Point.

The [blueprints](#) for the second phase show the proposed sewage pipeline will, at some points, run along the foreshore of Osoyoos Lake.

The pipeline will be buried at the high-water mark of the lake in spots where the Town could not secure an easement for the pipe from local property owners.

“(It will be) buried under the ground at the high-water mark. (It’s) in the dirt so if the water does come up (it) would be under water, but under earth as well,” said Mark Pendergraft, the director for Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS) rural Area A.

“A sewer system is a closed system where no fluid goes anywhere except through the pipe into the sewage treatment plant,” he said. “The septic tanks, as they work, have a natural outflow; they’re not designed to be leak proof. Septic tanks are meant to fill up and then the excess flows out into the soil.”

[Phase 1 of the sewer project](#) began on March 22 and will service portions of 81st Street, 104th Ave., 98th Ave. and 87th Street. Phase 1 is now nearly complete, according to Pendergraft, who said he believes all that is left is a general cleanup. The sewer project has been in the works for almost 20 years and aims to protect the lake from old septic tanks that are leaching into the water.

“There have been tests for years that show excess phosphorous and whatnot are going into the lake,” said Pendergraft, adding that homes with new septic systems have significantly reduced the problem. “There was no requirement (to update septic tanks), but with the sewer line going through there’s a requirement to hook up if they’re within that sensitive zone.”

In Phase 1, 15 homeowners on 87th Street were given the choice to opt out of the service, as they were deemed to be out of the environmental control zone set out by the B.C. Health Ministry in

the 1990s. So far, about seven have done so, according to Pendergraft, who said that he believes there will be no more such exclusions in the following four phases.

Pendergraft said that it would have been preferable to have the pipe run through easements away from the lake, but refusals by a few property owners who did not want their landscaped yards torn up, and the subsequent need to have the pipeline run at a regular elevation, led to the current plan.

Mayor Stu Wells said the sewage line along hotel row on the east side of Osoyoos Lake has been buried under the water level since 1963. That pipeline has been updated over the years, but has never posed a problem to the lake, he said.

“The project is not going to stop because we can’t get a couple of the easements so, unfortunately, that is the routing that it’s going to take.”

Pendergraft also said the proposed pipe route would not cause an elevated threat to the environment.

“Under the ground it would be no different at that spot as opposed to being at 100 feet off the lake or somewhere else. If they’re underground there’s still the same damage potential – it’s minimal. There’s no change in the odds of a pipe rupturing or breaking.”

The only downsides, he said, would be the difficulty of pipe maintenance in high water season and the added cost of monitoring water quality during the construction period.

“You’ve got heavy machinery driving around on the beach and potentially there could be an issue. It’s not common, but you have to be monitored according to environmental rules,” he said.

Although the project’s Phase 1 pipeline is ready for use, there is a six-month timeframe for residents to fill out applications for service.

The final cost to homeowners will not be known until the full five phases of the project are complete, at which time a portion of the overall project cost will be divvied up evenly among all the properties, according to Pendergraft. However, those included in the early phases will begin paying annual user fees of \$302 and other related fees as soon as they connect to the system, he said.

During Phase 1, the cost to homeowners was an issue to several homeowners who claimed the funding from developers and the Okanagan Basin Water Board exceeded the estimated \$6.4 million cost of the project and said the reported \$8,000 per-homeowner cost was unnecessary.

Pendergraft said the cost of the entire project is still unclear and that Phase 1 has been completed below the anticipated budget.

“(The cost to homeowners) is expected to be lower than the \$8,000. That’s always been given as a worst-case scenario,” he said, adding that there is an option for homeowners to pay the Town over the next 20 to 25 years.

An ad for Phase 2 tenders was placed in the Dec. 15 edition of the *Osoyoos Times*, stating the deadline for submissions as 2 p.m. on Dec. 21. Barry Romanko, the Town's chief administrative officer, declined to comment to the *Times*, and said a press release would be issued in the near future.

The entire project is set to be completed by March 31, 2012.

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