

PARTNERSHIPS WERE KEY IN ALLOWING NORTHWEST SEWER EXTENSION PROJECT TO FINALLY BECOME REALITY

Posted on 05 September 2012 by Keith Lacey



There were a lot of smiling faces last Wednesday at the La Stella Winery as a

special celebration was held to recognize the completion of the \$6.4 million Northwest Osoyoos Sewer Extension project. Attending the special celebration were (from left) Boundary-Similkameen MLA John Slater, Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS) vice-chair and Area A representative Mark Pendergraft, Okanagan-Coquihalla MLA Dan Albas, Osoyoos Mayor Stu Wells, RDOS chair Dan Ashton and Osoyoos Coun. Michael Ryan. Photo by Keith Lacey.

Never in Town of Osoyoos history have partnerships between municipal, provincial and federal governments and local residents been more needed or worked better than they have with the Northwest Osoyoos Sewer Extension project, says former mayor and current MLA John Slater.

Slater was joined by Mayor Stu Wells, all members of the current town council and several other dignitaries last Wednesday at La Stella Winery for a special celebration to announce the completion of the \$6.4 million project, which was designed to allow more than 120 homeowners on the northwest side of Osoyoos Lake to hook up to the town's municipal sewer system and eliminate dozens of septic systems from emptying into Osoyoos Lake. The project came in on time and under budget, which is a credit to every individual who played a role in turning this project from a concept talked about dating back to the late 1980s, into a reality in the summer of 2012, said Slater.

"It's all about partnerships," said Slater, the MLA for Boundary-Similkameen who played a prominent role through the years on the Northwest Sewer project, dating back to his time as mayor of Osoyoos 10 years ago. "The vision was to not have any septic tanks around Osoyoos Lake ... and that dream has now become a reality."

The size and scope of this project makes the Northwest Osoyoos Sewer Extension Project one of the largest infrastructure projects in this town's history and one of the most important as the end result will benefit every resident of this community as Osoyoos Lake will be the biggest beneficiary, said Slater. Because this is such a prominent and historic project in this town's history, it was appropriate to hold a special ceremony to identify and honour all of the people who made it become a reality, said Wells.

"I never thought I would be involved in a celebration of a sewer project, but this is a celebration worth holding because of the importance and scope of it," said Wells.

Discussions about building a sewer extension to homeowners outside of town limits on the northwest corner of Osoyoos Lake date back to 1988 and has been discussed at length by various members of council and community leaders for more than 30 years. To see it become a reality is astounding and a very proud moment for a lot of people, said Wells.

"Different councils and elected officials worked hard on this ... but never did manage to cobble things together," he said. "To be here today and announce that the project has been completed on time and under budget is a truly significant day. And it's all in the name of protecting Osoyoos Lake, which is the biggest reason for celebration."

"It took a collaborative effort and many people put aside their differences to benefit the lake ... many citizens deserve credit for giving up easements onto their property. Everyone worked together to make this happen."

This project would never have happened without the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS) applying for and finally receiving, after several unsuccessful attempts, a grant from the Canada-B.C. Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund Program in the amount of \$4.5 million, which covered more than 60 per cent of the \$6.4 million final pricetag, said Wells.

On top of that, the Okanagan Basin Water Board was awarded an annual grant of \$81,000, which will also help reduce the debt payments for the project, he said.

In addition, developers of the Willow Beach property at the head of Osoyoos Lake and Reflection Point at the intersection of 87 Street and 120 Avenue were also going to help offset the cost to homeowners with Willow

Beach developers agreeing to pay \$950,000, plus hookup costs, for 40 lots, with \$615,000 going towards reducing costs for other property owners to hook up to the system, said Wells.

Reflection Point developers contributed \$154,000 to the project, which would service their 22 lots and upgrades to the town's sewer system, he said.

After all of this, a bill of \$1 million for 125 properties slated for hookup to the sewer extension had to agree to split the bill and agree to pay a one-time fee of \$8,000 or \$890 per year for 20 years to construct the extension, he said.

Each homeowner will also be responsible for his or her own cost of installation from the edge of their property to the residence with that cost varying based on length and location of service. The homeowners have also agreed to pay the costs to decommission their own septic tanks and residents with a forced main service would incur additional capital and operating costs.

The affected homeowners have played a significant role in making this project a reality and deserve credit for their co-operation after so many attempts failed, said Wells.

Coun. Michael Ryan gave a brief history of the project, making it clear how many people played a key role in making this dream become a reality.

"We are here today to celebrate a day that was more than 20 years in the making," he said. "We're on time and we're on budget and, more importantly, the waters of Osoyoos Lake have been given a level of protection for years to come."

The vast majority of residents in this area opposed any plans to build the sewer extension and ask them to help pay for it for more than a decade, he said.

Several attempts by the RDOS to apply for funding also failed and it looked like the project might never happen until a water science forum held in Osoyoos in 2007 identified a northwest sewer extension as a huge priority, he said.

When the RDOS applied for federal and provincial funding and was finally approved, things have come together very nicely over the past three years since construction started, he said.

afternoon I drove past the ‘honey truck’ busily pumping and stinking away.

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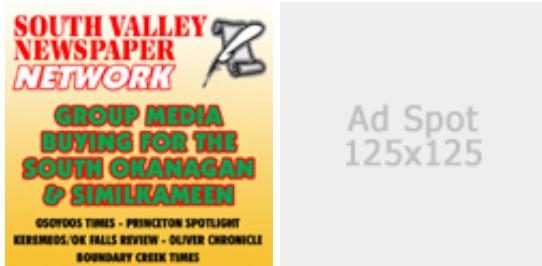
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