



## Engineering & Public Works

### ENGINEERING SERVICES

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# Meeting Minutes

Hart Highlands Sanitary Sewer LAS - Phase 4

June 28, 2017 - 7:00 pm  
Heather Park Elementary School  
Multi-Purpose Room

Pre-Petition Public Meeting

#### City Representatives:

Hayley Sedola - Supervisor, Engineering Projects  
Wil Wedel - Manager of Utilities  
Ian Sinclair - Engineering Assistant  
Scott Bilbrough - P.Eng. Stantec Engineering

#### Property Owners:

Approx. 35 attendees

Minutes prepared by Ian Sinclair / Pauline Fuentebella

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Hayley Sedola opened the meeting with introductions of the City representatives and a slide show which provided information about:

- Project update
- Costs and Project Funding
- LAS process in Detail

Presentation: Hayley Sedola

The purpose of this meeting was to provide information to property owners to help them to decide if they support the project or not.

The City last met with property owners in November 2016 to give preliminary information. Since then, the City has completed preliminary engineering design and completed cost estimate. The City acquired contractor pricing based on feedback from previous meeting and received estimates from local plumbers to provide cost of private side connection.

The LAS project includes approximately 1700m of new sanitary sewer main, 106 service connections and 26 manholes. If the LAS is approved, the City will also install water improvements which include replacing 1600m of watermain and replacement of services and fire hydrants. The project also includes road reconstruction which is split between the City water project, the LAS, and City road budget.

Property owner costs are the Local Area Service, individual private side connection and sanitary sewer utility fee. The City estimates the highest probable cost to be \$27,000 per lot which includes a 20% contingency. Included in the LAS price is the sanitary sewer works a portion of the restoration costs and a portion of asphalt paving. The City received estimates from plumbers who have done work in the area and their estimates for private side connection are between \$2,000 to \$7,000 per lot, depending on how the lot is situated. Estimates do not include restoration. A plumbing permit is also required. Once connected, property owners pay the sanitary utility fee which is currently \$222.60. If a property does not connect the fee is due after the two year grace period.

Presentation: Scott Bilbrough

Scott has been providing engineering services in Prince George for 20 years with a broad range of experience in subdivision development, commercial development, water and sewer municipal infrastructure, civil work through northern BC. The City engaged Stantec to provide cost estimates for the project to help residents to understand what the costs might be. Clients rely on engineers to help establish costs for a broad range of projects. Water and sewer work is fairly standard and easier to estimate than remote or specialized work. We compare similar past projects and rates and meet with contractors to get a feel for the market and what factors may adjust prices for the future. We consider factors like this project being a renovation and not new development. There is a range of price because there is still an estimate and still according to judgment. We do this type of work regularly and we try to balance being too conservative versus being too optimistic.

Presentation: Hayley Sedola

The City heard from property owners that they wanted to know if a contractor can do it for less or faster. The City is still open to a contractor if the costs can be kept below \$27,000.

Asphalt replacement is a shared cost between the road rehabilitation program, the water upgrade project and the sewer LAS. As in previous projects the property's owner portion of asphalt is 12.5%

For a LAS project to proceed, it needs support from property owners and City Council. Property owners will have the next few weeks to consider the petition. In order for the project to go ahead, at least 50% of the property owners must sign the petition. Not signing the petition automatically counts as a vote for no, signing the petition counts as a vote for yes. Together, the signatures on the petition must represent greater than 50% of the total assessed value. For each property with multiple owners, the majority must sign the petition for it to count as a vote for yes. If the petition is successful, bylaws will be brought to City Council for the LAS project and loan authorization. If this project goes forward, the City will be borrowing money to fund it and will require approval from the province, (the inspector of municipalities.)

The first step in the LAS process is to have residents in the neighborhood request a service. We have had requests from this neighborhood in addition to previous phases. We held a public meeting in November of 2016 where the City provided initial information and collected feedback. The City did an informal survey where we identified property owners' interest and priorities. Based on the feedback of the survey, there was enough support to proceed with project planning, preliminary design and detailed cost estimate. Today, we are here to provide information about the project to help you decide if you support the project.

At the end of this week, the City will be sending out a blank petition form to each property owner. If you would like to support the project, you will need to return the original signed petition form to City hall by 5:00pm on July 31<sup>st</sup> 2017. If at least 50% sign the petition, staff will go to Council with bylaws for approval. If approved, the Las project will be established and we would start planning for construction. Construction would start in 2018.

The next step is the formal petition. If successful, the City will report to council and provide bylaws, move forward with loan authorization. Hire an engineer to meet with each property owner to figure out where and how to best connect. The City will incorporate the engineer info into the design. If unsuccessful, we would report to City Council and property owners to inform them.

The floor was opened for questions from residents:

Questions were asked by residents.

Answers were provided by presenters.

Q: I live on Dunbar PI and we have petitioned you already. My question is if it's unsuccessful, where do we stand for the residents who already petitioned you?

A: We received an expression of interest from most properties on Dunbar PI. If this formal petition process does not succeed and there are still property owners who want it we can look at doing a separate smaller petition.

Q: Would it be in our advantage to make sure everyone in our area votes yes to aid our original request?

A: If people want the project to go forward it is very important they sign the petition. If you are in favor but don't sign the petition it counts as no. If we see most of a small neighborhood say no, then we would be hesitant to do another petition when that area did not support the first one.

Note WW: There is some benefit to cost in terms of economy of scale. It may be more expensive for a smaller group.

Q: Is the 12.5% paving cost extra or included?

A: The 12.5% is included in the LAS costs.

Q: With the water replacement, do we end up with water meters?

A: No, but we encourage you to get a water meter if you would like to reduce your utility bill.

Q: What kind of feedback can you give property owners who are on the fence to sway them in one direction or the other; especially people who are have newer homes or systems?

A: Unfortunately, it's not a black and white answer. It's difficult to decide to replace something part way through its service life. It's also difficult to determine when something might fail. By today's standards, subdivision of this size would not exist with septic fields. There are some cases where you could replace a septic field but normally harder in a developed area. There is also a question of timing if the project doesn't happen now when will it. Will it happen before I need it? At some time, septic fields will fail.

Q: What are the effects on real estate?

A: Depends on the buyer, what they are aware of and what their priorities are. The City looked at real estate and could not reliably determine the effect.

Q: What responsibility does the City have to ensure health and safety standards in the City? If we vote no what is the outcome going to be?

A: Watermains are being replaced of the similar works. We do have fire protection in the area but the standards are increasing. The upgrade helps surrounding areas not just within the LAS. If no, the watermain will remain as is until we start to see pipe breaks and failure. We do have aging infrastructure throughout the City which are competing costs.

- Q: Does the City have a responsibility to make sure it happens if it is in the best interest of health and safety?
- A: Because it is a cost of the property owner, the City must give the owners a choice and cannot impose the extra cost. The City cannot force the rest of the taxpayers to pay for this service when they have paid for theirs already through development or previous LAS. We are working with the feedback we have received from residents and not health and safety. It's not yet at the point where Northern Health is being involved.
- Q: The cost for the first phase was \$17,000. Why is this phase \$27,000?
- A: The first phase had a layout that was even and nice for building sewer. There were no very deep spots and there were long straight stretches. The traffic control in this area will be more complicated due to some areas which do not detour well. The first phase was completed a few years ago and things get more expensive.
- Q: Why is it taking so long to do the work? Why are we stockpiling material offsite? Isn't this more expensive? A contractor would work longer days and get things done.
- A: WW: The entire road needs to be removed and there is no room to stockpile the material next to the trench. It makes movement around the site more difficult. Stockpiling onsite reduces access to homes and increases restoration costs.
- Q: Is the plumber cost independent from the rest of the project?
- A: Yes, but the LAS project includes an engineering consultation to recommend how to connect.
- Q: Why not just use the plumber to provide that advice instead of paying an engineer?
- A: The consultation was not included in the first phase and homeowners had problems getting proper connections installed. The engineer provides quality advice to the homeowners.
- Q: How far does the excavation go into the property?
- A: There is excavation on the private side as well. The sewer connection is installed up to property line and the plumber does from there to the house.
- Q: The petition is during the summer and counting a non-response as a no. Is there consideration for longer petition or how people say no?
- A: How the petition works is strictly specified in provincial legislation. The City has extended the petition length to account for the time of year. We can also offer email the petition to be signed and mailed back.
- Q: Is there any evidence that property value goes up?
- A: We looked at real estate data but there was not enough data to reliably say what impact there is. Generally, property values have gone up across the City.
- Q: Do higher valued homes count more than lower valued homes.
- A: The 50% assessed value is mechanism designed to be a tie breaker. It would have to be very close vote where high value properties vote differently from low value for property values to come into play. It is provincial legislation and is not flexible.
- Q: It seems odd that many different ages of homes are all lumped together when different people want different things.
- A: The project was chosen to be the size it is to take advantage in cost savings. Some people have concerns that they will be the only street without sewer which might affect property value.

Q: What happened to the millions of dollars from amalgamation? The cost on Nixon was only \$500. This was supposed to be provided for free in the 80's.

A: There was a fair bit of money for infrastructure improvements from amalgamation. Part of that money went to providing sewers in the Hart Highway. There was a lot of infrastructure which needed to be installed throughout the hart and the money was used up.

Q: Do I have to pay 12.5% for the pavement to go past my house?

A: Yes, all of the pavement is being removed and the LAS pays a share to replace it.

Q: People who live in other areas who just had their streets paved don't have to pay anything. Why do I have to pay when it's free for everyone else?

A: There is a difference between fully removing the pavement and resurfacing. If the LAS is unsuccessful, then the road may be paved eventually at no cost.

Q: If this is voted down, what happens next? Does this process happen again in a few years?

A: This matter has come up in the past, most recently in early 2000's. The City waits for the property owners to express interest.

Q: Can I install a new waterline from the street to the house when the water is replaced?

A: Yes, but there needs to be separation between the two services and a plumbing permit is required.

Q: If you don't connect, do you still have to pay after 2 years?

A: Yes, utility fees are due after 2 years regardless of if you connect or not.

Comment: I don't expect property values to increase. People buying houses expect toilets to flush.

Q: Is the LAS tax transferable to another owner?

A: Yes, by default, the LAS tax stays with the property, but there is the option to pay out.

Q: I have large hedge in front of the house which will probably have to come out. Do you replace with like value or do we have to wait for 10 years for them to grow?

A: There are limitations on what we can re-plant. There are some options to save trees on a case by case basis. Hedges are a challenge.

Q: Can we choose where the connection is or change direction to avoid trees?

A: Yes, but there are limitations on how many bends or how far you can go before the pipe no longer drains.

Q: What is the depth of the service?

A: The minimum is 2 meters, but often they are deeper. If you want it to be shallower, you would have to pump from the basement.

Q: There are companies that can put pipes under houses.

A: Yes, directional drilling has been used in previous areas, but does need to be signed off by an engineer. Cost is unknown, but it is recommended use the engineer that does the individual assessment.

Q: Is Ian Sinclair available for discussions on this? I have some questions to determine if my house is easily serviced.

A: Yes. Call me; my info is on the letter.

Q: My house is below the level of the street, do I need to have a lift pump? If it would be a gravity sewer, it would be too deep in the ground.

A: There are a few houses that are just too deep and will have to be pumped, but most houses can be accommodated.

Q: Can we get copies of the preliminary design to see where the invert elevations are?

A: Copies of the design are not usually given out, but we could work with you and provide information about the design. Discussions are ongoing and changes are still yet to be made.

Q: In the other areas how close were the votes?

A: In all the cases so far, three different groups were 70% in favor. There is a map showing all the phases of the project.

Q: It would take the next two to three years to complete this project. Where would you start first?

A: The construction order right now is based on who requested it first, but also who is downhill. First phase will be the bottom of Langley to the top of Poyner, next is the bottom of Croft to Dunbar, Glengarry, Carleton Lane, the rest of Killarney, and finish with Montgomery and Teresa.

Q: Why is Killarney not included in the construction in Killarney right now?

A: There is a high point in the Killarney. Since gravity systems are being built, it must be built downhill.

Q: I don't understand why you dig it up, put some pipe down, fill it back in, and do it over and over. It doesn't look right.

A: In order to completely test the pipe, it needs to be buried and not exposed. Maintaining access for the homeowners in the area is also important.

Q: It's costly to drive back and forth. Trucks haul dirt just to bring it back to site.

A: Different methods have been practiced in previous projects, but the crew still ends up handling the material several times.

Q: I don't think the reason is just people don't want dirt on their lawn.

A: There are combinations of different reasons why excavated material do not stay on site. There is a large amount of excavated material, access must be provided, and the crew must maintain a safe distance away from the trench.

Q: Are you putting the sewer and the water in the same ditch?

A: It looks like they are installed in the same place, but they are offset and separate. Northern Health has a requirement on how the minimum distance between the sewer main and the water main should be 3 meters. If it is closer than that, joints must be wrapped to ensure that nothing can enter the drinking water system.

Q: Will the roads be widened?

A: All of the roads will be widened and will be regraded where possible. 6.3m wide roads will be brought up to 8m.

Q: The plumbing permit is required for everyone. Why do we need to get one individually if it's a requirement for everybody?

A: There is a two year grace period before homeowners start paying the utility fee, but some people might choose not to connect their service after a while. The City needs to make sure homeowners do not get charged twice.

Q: Can I hire a contractor and work on it myself with a plumber to oversee it?

A: It is a requirement to have a certified plumber to have the permit on your behalf, but it is up to your discretion if you install the pipe with plumber supervision or have the plumber install it themselves.

Q: Is it true that servicing should be free when the Hart became part of the City?

A: Money was set aside for infrastructure improvement. A lot of infrastructure needed to be installed and got used up.

A resident voiced a concern how they did not get the service they were promised when Hart Highlands joined the City of Prince George and how the budget was used in other parts of the City.

Q: Two houses on my street have their sewer connections already. What portion would they pay?

A: If homeowners have an available connection on their property line, they just need to get a plumbing permit and get it connected anytime and pay the actual costs for their connection. Water main upgrade is not included in the cost of \$27,000. The community benefits in both the road and water improvements, so the City is paying for it. Since the sewer installation only benefits the homeowner, they are responsible for the cost.

Q: Why is the City not accepting responsibility that they made a mistake for not providing sewer at the time of amalgamation and not provide the sewer for free?

A: This item and come up with the previous phases and senior management did look into it. There was a fair bit of money for infrastructure improvements from amalgamation. Part of that money went to providing sewers in the Hart Highway. There was a lot of infrastructure which needed to be installed throughout the hart and the money was used up. If you want more information you can formally put in a request through City clerk's department and they will provide you with what information they have.

Q: There were grants given for areas that have no connections that were spent somewhere else. When can you request the provincial government for a new grant?

A: This specific project did not receive any grants that we are aware of. Grant applications have very specific rules and guidelines that prevent the money received to be reallocated.

Q: Does the public pay for upgrading the water main when the sewer is already in place?

A: There are utility fees and a reserved budget that pays for upgrading existing infrastructure. Trenches overlap when installing the sewer and the water at the same time, so a portion of the restoration cost is included in the Local Area Service that is not included in the water upgrades.

Q: Do we get charged extra costs when installing the watermain?

A: Incorporating it helps keep the cost down. The price per property for just installing the sewer would be considerably higher.

Q: Do we get two votes if two people own the property?

A: Each property gets one vote. Both property owners need to sign the petition. The majority of odd-numbered property owners would need to sign the petition in order to say yes.

Q: Do we only owe \$27,000 in 20 years or do we pay tax on top of that?

A: There is a 3% interest rate. The petition includes the total amount you are going to pay with interest.

Q: You said if the LAS votes no some areas still want it they can still get sewer. What happens if a section of the LAS voted no? Are they exempt from the service or included with the other areas?

A: Some properties who may vote no will be grouped with larger areas in the same catchment areas. If an area which can be serviced separately there may be some options.

Q: What was the cost to property owners in the other areas?

A: Phase 2 voted on approx. \$28,000 and final cost was under \$25,000. Phase 3 voted on approx. \$24,000 and is currently on track to be under that amount.

Q: We don't have any grade problems. Am I paying for someone else in another area?

A: The costs are averaged in a large neighborhood. Installing a short sewer to service a few properties will be very expensive. The provincial legislation is very specific on how costs are divided.

End of Meeting.