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Erin residents opposed to wastewater treatment plant begin to mobilize

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ERIN – The Town of Erin says a wastewater treatment plant is coming.

The purchase of property for the plant, at the corner of 10th Line and Wellington Road 52, is being negotiated, engineers are working on a design, and the town hopes to put the project out to tender in the new year.

But it's not a done deal yet, says Erin resident Amanda Elias.

She is preparing to do everything she can to get council to put the brakes on the project – even just temporarily.

The town held a telephone town hall meeting on Oct. 13 and some 80 people dialed in to hear Mayor Allan Alls field questions from residents about the wastewater treatment plant.

Elias was one caller and in a phone interview the next day, she said she was not satisfied with what she heard.

“People are not for this, especially at this time,” Elias said.

Financially and physically, COVID-19 has had a negative impact, she said, and the consequences are still not known.

The town should hold back on spending until residents are back on their feet financially, she said.

The town has not received federal or provincial funding for the project, and while development charges are expected to cover the cost of building the plant and hooking up new development to the system, existing homeowners will bear the cost of connecting their homes to the system.

The cost to individual homeowners is expected to be in the range of \$20,000 to \$30,000.

The town has said residents will be able to pay over time.

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As well, emergency measures call for physical distancing during COVID-19, while the Town of Erin is hell-bent on intensification, she said.

“This is not the time to be promoting intensification and population density,” she said.

“We don’t want crowds here. That’s why we’ve been able to keep our numbers down.”

But more than that, Elias said communication about the project has been poor and unclear, leading to fear and uncertainty among residents.

Elias said she went to 16 properties in the Town of Erin that back onto the west bank of the Credit River, “and 12 of the 16 didn’t have current or relevant information” about the wastewater treatment plant.

“Nobody along that stretch wants it. Discharging into the Credit River is not appropriate,” she said.

Elias said these land owners have allowed access to the river from their properties for an environmental study that she and a group of like-minded residents are prepared to undertake.

Elias said the Environmental Assessment that was done did not include the impact on these particular properties.

She expects further study will indicate the wastewater treatment plant will have a negative impact on the river.

“I hope they find an endangered species. That could halt the project, at least until the next election,” she said.

Elias said developers are pushing for the plant more than existing residents.

“They haven’t even built it and it stinks already,” she said.

Jessica Spina, communications officer for the Town of Erin, said the telephone town hall was well-attended.

“Key highlights and themes from the questions were about cost to the homeowner, time line of the project and further explanation of how bringing 5,000 septic tanks and sewage holding tanks offline would reduce the pollution of nitrates and phosphorus to the existing ground water,” she wrote in an email.

Spina said town officials were not able to answer every question during the two-hour town hall, so they are encouraging residents to visit www.erin.ca/town-hall/corporate-initiatives/wastewater (<http://www.erin.ca/town-hall/corporate-initiatives/wastewater>), where questions will be answered.

Anyone with further questions is invited to email
communications@erin.ca.

Councillor Michael Robins filed a notice of motion at the Oct. 6 council meeting seeking a detailed report to council on the costs to date of the wastewater treatment plant and the anticipated costs to homeowners to hook up.

Council will decide at its Oct. 20 meeting whether to give staff that direction.

“I have heard from constituents along the way,” Robins said in a phone interview.

“A number of their concerns led to the notice of motion. And I also want clarity on some of these issues.

“With complex deals like this, we want everyone on the same page as far as facts.”

Robins’ notice of motion also asks for:

- plans to acquire provincial funding;
- payment options for homeowners;
- funding options for the town; and
- clarification on how wastewater costs will be separated from general expenses.



Joanne Shuttleworth

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