

Erin residents opposed to official plan amendment that would allow for the decommissioning of household septic systems

Paige Peacock March 9, 2022 @ 5:40 pm News

ERIN – Residents here have submitted a letter of objection, equipping them with the opportunity to appeal an amendment to the town’s official plan, should councillors vote to accept it.

In a December meeting, council reviewed several amendments to the town’s official plan as the municipality prepares for the construction of a controversial wastewater treatment plant.

One of the amendments, if approved, would require residents to pay for the sewage pipe running through their property in addition to any connection costs and the decommissioning of their current septic tanks.

In an email, the town’s director of infrastructure services Nick Colucci confirmed the town currently does not have any cost projections for what decommissioning fees will look like for residents.

The purpose of the residents’ letter is to object to the third paragraph of section 2.17 of the amendment, which states, “Where, and as, local municipal services become available along property boundaries, adjacent owners shall connect to municipal services and decommission any existing wells and septic tanks. Adjacent owners may be subject to service area charges.”

Residents are asking the town to remove the paragraph from the proposed amendment.

Colucci noted that currently municipal services, as listed under Section 3.6.4 Extension of Services, includes water, wastewater and storm sewers.

“Staff are proposing an amendment to include the decommissioning of septic tanks,” he explained.

“[Official plan amendment] 13 has simply sought to address this statement by introducing the words ‘and septic tanks’ to the end of the first sentence of paragraph 3 of Section 3.6.4.”

As part of the Provincial Places to Grow policy, the urban population of the town is expected to grow to between 7,000 to 10,000 residents by 2041, Colucci noted.

“The wastewater treatment facility is required to meet these growth projections, and the official plan amendment is necessary to update the official plan policies related to growth management,” he said.

After reading the amendment, Erin Citizen Action Committee member Bob Pearson said he started the letter petition.

Given the town doesn't have an official plan updated to include growth for a sewage treatment plant, the County of Wellington requested the town undergo an amendment process.

"Because I've seen some of the other [things] that this administration has done ... in amongst bylaws, I thought I'd better read through this pretty thoroughly," Pearson explained.

"And sure enough, there was that one paragraph in there that would give the Town of Erin the authority to arbitrarily charge homeowners ... for a portion of the cost of the pipe collection system and force them to connect to it, including decommissioning of their perfectly good existing septic systems."

Pearson requested letters be submitted to the town by Feb. 22.

Colucci confirmed the town had received approximately 25 comments as of March 3.

"The collection system to the existing residents is supposed to be paid for by funding from two levels of upper-level governments and the taxpayer, the property owners," Pearson noted.

"The town does not have any funding for that," he explained. "So that means if they decide to go ahead, that the taxpayer could bear the full burden of what the collection system costs.

"And that bylaw that they're trying to pass with this amendment would allow them to do that."

Currently, on the town's website under "Project costs," it is noted that developers are paying for the costs associated with growth, including the costs of building the wastewater treatment plant and main trunk lines, as well as an additional \$7,000 per new single detached unit in Erin and \$10,000 per new single detached unit in Hillsburgh.

The costs currently anticipated for urban residents in the Village of Erin and Hillsburgh include construction, connection and annual costs.

The average capital cost for the construction will range from \$15,000 to \$18,000 per household, which can be paid to the town in a lump sum or financed through the town for up to 15 years.

Each existing house in the urban area will also be required to pay to connect their home to the pipeline. The cost, which will fluctuate depending on the distance from the house to the pipe, is estimated to be around \$4,000 to \$8,000 per household.

As for annual costs, once the facility is built and the home is connected, user fees will be applied. As noted on the town's website, the average costs are based on a review of wastewater rates in nearby municipalities.

The annual average user cost will range from \$500 to \$600. Information on

potential costs can be found on the town's website at wastewater.erin.ca/costs.

The exact cost to each household will be determined by the additional funding grants received by the federal and provincial governments and each specific property.

However, the town has not obtained or confirmed any federal or provincial funding assistance with the project at this time.

Pearson noted the reasoning behind submitting the letter is that if residents don't send a letter voicing their concerns and council approves the amendment, "the right to appeal it is non-existent.

"So the more people that say 'we don't want this,' the more the town has to recognize that this should not be part of it," he explained.

Colucci said council's decision will come only after full consideration of the matter, including public input.

"When council makes a decision, should any resident disagree with the decision, the Planning Act provides them with an opportunity to appeal this application to the Ontario Land Tribunal," he explained.

As required under the Planning Act, Colucci said any person providing oral or written submissions to the clerk will be notified.

Right now, Pearson is laying the foundation for an appeal should the amendment be approved by council.

"If you don't do this, you don't get the right to appeal what the council is putting forward," he said of submitting the letter of objection.

As for the wastewater treatment plant and connection costs, Colucci said the timing and execution of any municipal wastewater lines is yet to be determined, as council and staff are seeking financial assistance from multiple levels of government.

Asked what financial assistance the town has received to date to subsidize the costs for residents, Colucci responded "financial agreements with the developers include subsidies of up to \$10,000 for each existing property that will have to connect to the wastewater system. Advocacy for further subsidies from higher levels of government continues."

There are approximately 1,500 septic tanks within the urban boundary that will be decommissioned once the treatment plant is commissioned.

"There will be no cost to rural residents as they will not be connecting to the new system," Colucci explained.

"The exact terms of wastewater connection and payment have not been decided and will be brought to council at a later date."

