

Erin residents putting up a fight as town plans to decommission septic systems



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ERIN – Town residents have submitted a letter of objection to Erin council to appeal an amendment to the town’s official plan regarding the controversial wastewater treatment plant.

The letter, drafted and distributed by the Erin Citizen Awareness Committee, objects to an amendment that would require those currently on wells and septic tanks hook up to municipal services once they become available.

“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.

Ken Cowling, an Erin urban boundary resident and an advocate against the sewage treatment plant, signed the letter of objection and petition.

“I’ve been against this sewage shitshow since it was proposed. I organized a car rally against the sewage treatment plant early last year and have been marching along the river almost every week to object to the plant,” said Cowling in an interview.

“This is the most ludicrous place to put a sewage plant because Erin and Hillsburgh is such a beautiful place and it’s one of the last pristine south producing brook trout populations in Southern Ontario. This proposed sewage plant is proposed to put in 7.2 million litres of sewage. This council is just pro-development without thinking about the environment and its residents.”

The proposed sewage system will be available only within the urban boundary which includes

approximately 4,500 residents. Rural residents will not be financially contributing to the construction of the project.

If the amendment is approved, then property owners within the urban boundary of Erin and Hillsburgh will need to pay for the sewage pipe running through their property.

In addition, any costs related to construction and connection to the pipes as well as the decommissioning of their current septic tanks must be paid by the property owner as well.

The average capital cost of the construction of the pipes that will run through the road and associated repair work to the road will be around \$15,000 to \$18,000. The approximate cost of connecting the home to those pipes is around \$4,000 to \$8,000.

Developers are paying for the costs associated with growth. Developers will cover 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.

Nick Colucci, town's director of infrastructure, stated in an email that the exact terms of wastewater connection and payment have not been decided and will be brought to council at a later date.

"The current residents will not be affected immediately by the sewage treatment plan as the Town of Erin is seeking financial assistance from multiple levels of government in the pursuit of alleviating costs to our residents," said Mayor Allan Alls on the phone.

"Last I heard we received 25 letters and petitions from residents about this. Current residents will not be affected with this right now. The sewer lines will not be built now but rather later in the future because we don't have the financing."

Alls noted the Town of Erin couldn't borrow enough money to hook up the old infrastructure to the wastewater plant to help alleviate the costs from residents. He said council is trying to get additional funding and grants from all levels of government.

"Right now, on paper, the whole project, that's the four trunk lines and the wastewater plant, is roughly \$126 million," said Alls.

"However, between the supply chain problems with the pandemic and the Russian-Ukraine conflict, costs are escalating. The more we delay this thing, the more expensive it's going to get. People are concerned about costs and I don't blame them; I would be too."

The tender award contract deadline is on Friday and council will deliberate which company will

build the plant on Mar. 24. So far there are five pre-qualified bidders, the town confirmed.

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