

CORE AREA WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Results of the Capital Regional District's Public Education and Consultation Initiatives November 2006 – June 2007

Background

In July 2006, the Capital Regional District (CRD) was instructed by the provincial government to provide options for a fixed schedule for sewage treatment for the core area of the region by the end of June 2007. Part of this initiative included amending the existing Core Area Liquid Waste Management Plan (LWMP). Public education and consultation is a key part of this process. As a result of this requirement, coupled with the CRD's strong commitment to open communications on this major initiative, a strategy was developed and implemented. The CRD has been diligent in providing an open and transparent process of public information and will continue to do so as the project progresses.

Public Consultation Strategy

In an effort to provide the most comprehensive public information, numerous methods were used to offer a range of options to the public. Categories for information dissemination were:

- interactive website
- paid media – newsprint
- earned media
- public/stakeholder meetings and presentations
- open house
- public outreach/educational tour
- public enquires/correspondence management
- informational brochures/materials

This multi-pronged approach was developed, based on an Ipsos Reid research report commissioned by the CRD during November 2006. Its aim was to determine public levels of understanding of the project, as well as preferences for educational materials, information and consultation. These results helped to shape the direction of the CRD's communication plan.

Seventy-six per cent of those polled in the core area indicated that sewage treatment was the top priority for the region. The final research report was posted on the CRD website. The overall public relations strategy was developed using both the research findings and the consultation requirements needed to amend the Core Area LWMP. The public consultation strategy is attached as Appendix 1 and the sewage treatment excerpts from the Ipsos Reid report are attached as Appendix 2.

Interactive Website

A sub-site of the CRD's main website was developed for the wastewater treatment program. A link was highlighted on the CRD main page to easily draw the attention of the public who visited the site for information.

The website has been used to post the following:

- all relevant reports
- public research polls
- general information on sewage treatment
- media releases
- information on public information tours and open houses
- all related advertising

In addition to reports and other documentation, the site has been used to both encourage and gather public comments, as well as answering questions. All advertising and information relating to the project listed the website as a further means of information and communications. This has proved to be a most effective communications tool. During the period of January 1 to May 31, 2007, the site was viewed 3,654 times by 1,794 individuals. Screen shots of information posted on the website are attached as Appendix 3.

Paid Media

Newspaper inserts was the method used for paid media. The first advertisements were timed to reflect the release of the series of consultant documents. The aim was to provide the public with information as soon as it was made available to the CRD Board. This transparent process continued with a series advertising a public education tour. The newspapers used were the Times Colonist, Black Press and Monday Magazine. The advertising program is outlined below:

- "Toward a Treatment Plan", which outlined the public information strategy and introduced the website, was present in newspapers from February 9 to 14, 2007
- "Toward a Timetable", which promoted the release of the consultant's documents one to four, was present in newspapers from February 15 to 21, 2007
- "Next Steps Towards Sewage Treatment", which promoted the release of the consultant's documents five to eight and included estimated costs, was present in newspapers from March 24 to 28, 2007
- "Wastewater Management Report Available", which promoted a public information tour, was present in newspapers from May 5 to June 7, 2007
- "Information Open House", which promoted an Open House with CRD technical staff, was present in newspapers from May 25 to June 2, 2007

Copies of advertisements that have run between February 9 and June 2, 2007 and the advertising schedule are attached as Appendix 4.

Earned Media

News releases were developed and circulated to all media groups in the region. These releases coincided with public releases of information documents, the costs associated with wastewater treatment and any other relevant information. This was followed with numerous interviews by both CRD staff and Board members that helped to further inform the public. As well, responses to the CRD's public information efforts elicited letters to the editor and editorials. In April, 13 editorial letters appeared in the local media; in May, there were 22; and to date in

June, there have been 14. All media releases have and will continue to be posted to the main CRD website. Copies of media releases are attached as Appendix 5.

Public Presentations and Stakeholder Meetings

There have been numerous public presentations made by CRD staff at the request of stakeholder groups and as part of a CRD informational plan. A complete listing of these presentations is attached to the report as Appendix 6. In addition to this, a Technical and Community Advisory Committee (TCAC) was struck to provide further input to the Core Area Liquid Waste Management Committee (CALWMC). The CRD made the decision to broaden the scope for public input by establishing the TCAC. This committee includes representation from technical advisors, stakeholder groups and members of the community, while the CALWMC is comprised of members of the CRD Board.

See Appendix 7 for a membership list, terms of reference, list of meeting dates, agendas and minutes of the Technical and Community Advisory Committee.

See Appendix 8 for a membership list, agendas and minutes of the Core Area Liquid Waste Management Committee and the CRD Board.

The CRD will continue to meet with both of the advisory committees, stakeholder and community groups as required throughout the duration of the project.

Public Consultation and Analysis

Public input on the consultant's report is key to the overall final June submission to the provincial government. A series of informational brochures was developed to reflect the consultant's report, as well as general information on sewage treatment. This information was made available through the CRD, the educational tour, the household mailer and the open house. The CRD invited comments from the public. Statistical information on the comments received is attached as Appendix 9.

Public Enquiries

Public enquires have been encouraged in a number of ways through:

- the CRD website
- the educational tour
- the public open house
- written correspondence
- a direct mail drop to all households in the relevant municipalities

CRD staff have been dedicated to answering all enquires within five business days and have personally contacted members of the public to answer more detailed questions, where appropriate. As of June 22, 2007, 183 people have written to the CRD with specific questions on wastewater treatment. All enquires received by June 15 have been answered.

Analysis

The following analysis provides a summary of the outcomes for the public consultation process undertaken by the CRD's Wastewater Treatment Public Education Program. These findings reflect the period from February 2 to June 22, 2007 and include results across a range of initiatives. The statistical information derived from the public consultation process is shown in Appendix 9.

Household Mailer

In late May 2007, the CRD distributed a four-page mail piece to the 125,624 residents on the region's sewage line, as well as those who will soon move to the system (see Appendix 10). The mailer provided the following information:

- general information on the wastewater treatment initiative
- top questions and answers asked by the public to date
- a postage-paid feedback card for residents' comments and suggestions
- a link to the CRD website for further information or to electronically submit comments and suggestions

This proved to be a very successful initiative with 30% of public feedback stemming from this source. See Appendix 9, Chart B. It also acted as a catalyst to increase website activity and related public input. Approximately 300 people replied using the comment cards while approximately 200 used online methods.

Open House

An open house, targeting the general public, was held at CRD headquarters on June 5, 2007. The purpose of this event was to provide more technical details of the project and answer questions in this regard. A range of information was made available to participants including, brochures, posters, displays and the consultant's report (Appendix 11). Technical staff in attendance were:

- Dwayne Kalynchuck – General Manager, Environmental Services
- Seamus McDonnell – Senior Manager, Engineering Services
- Bob Warman – Manager, Environmental Engineering
- Dan Telford – Manager, Construction Engineering
- Malcolm Cowley – Senior Design Engineer
- Celine Larose – Supervisor, Marine Programs
- Rick Corbett – Associated Engineering Group

Approximately 65 people attended the open house or 7% of the total participants in the public consultation process. See Appendix 9, Chart B.

Public Outreach and Educational Tour

A public information tour was developed for the purpose of providing general information on the project itself as well, as the consultant's report on wastewater treatment. Over a period of six weeks in May and June 2007, the tour was located at major malls and recreation centres in each key municipality. This allowed for high traffic volumes throughout the region. A daily average of 20 people asked for information and/or provided feedback. (Copies of the display panels, schedule and material provided to the public are attached as Appendix 12.) The display was staffed by CRD employees. Public feedback was recorded directly into a computerized system which fed the responses to the CRD's main tracking system. This was an excellent opportunity to make contact with many members of the community and proved to be the most successful initiative with 42% of the responses stemming from this method.

General Findings

Throughout 2007, the CRD encouraged public comments on both the project itself and the consultant's final report. More than 1,000 people provided comments. Although they were not specifically asked, 133 participants objected to sewage treatment being implemented while 259 people support the project. The majority of respondents did not state their position on treatment but had specific comments on particular areas.

Overall, the comments on the consultant's report drew the most response at 18%, followed by green solutions and environmental impact at 14%. Public-private partnership followed at 12% with site location at 11%. These represent the key areas of interest with other issues, such as traffic, costs, timeline and construction only representing small percentages of the overall feedback. (See Appendix 9, Chart D.)

Conclusion

The CRD is committed to a transparent, open communication process which utilizes a wide range of methods and tools. This commitment will continue and extend to the life of the project as further information becomes available.

Attachments: 13