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**REPORT TO ELECTORAL AREA SERVICES COMMITTEE  
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, 03 SEPTEMBER 2008**

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**SUBJECT      ONSITE SYSTEMS EDUCATION PROGRAM AND SURVEY**

**PURPOSE**

To report on results from the questionnaires sent to residents in the three electoral areas.

**BACKGROUND**

The core area municipalities of the Capital Regional District are implementing a program for management of onsite systems (septic systems) and other small onsite wastewater treatment systems that discharge to ground. The program requires owners of septic systems to pump out their septic tank every five years, and for owners of package treatment plants to have their system maintained by a qualified service provider at least once per calendar year.

To assess community support, for participation in a modified program that targets watersheds that are a source of drinking water and community well capture zones, the directors for the electoral areas authorized an education/outreach program for specific areas with a feedback program to solicit comments. The program included community "Septic Savvy" workshops, mail-out of pamphlets and questionnaires and analysis of the returned questionnaire.

This report provides the final results of the survey, updating information numbers reported on 06 August 2008.

**METHODOLOGY**

Administration of the survey began June 2, 2008 and the survey response deadline was set for 04 July 2008. However, given mailing complications, the survey remained open until 20 August 2008. Surveys were mailed with a letter of introduction, other educational materials and prepaid self-addressed envelopes. Residents could submit completed surveys by mail or complete the online survey.

A survey package was mailed to all households with a septic system on Salt Spring Island, the Southern Gulf Islands and selected areas of the Juan de Fuca electoral area. A postal failure on Mayne Island led to a second distribution of surveys through the local press.

**SURVEY RESULTS AND STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

Results are attached in Appendix A.

Smaller populations require proportionately higher sample sizes to provide statistically valid information. When individual service areas are considered independently, the responses provide less statistically valid information about the total population. To determine the number of responses required to provide a statistically valid survey, parameters were set at the standard 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error (results considered accurate to within 5%, 19 times out of 20). The actual statistical reliability (margin of error) was then extrapolated based on the number of responses received.

**Salt Spring Island:**

Of the 5,331 households, a total of 770 responses were received. Given that the sample size significantly exceeded the required sample size for a statistically valid survey, this response qualifies as a statistically

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valid public opinion survey. The survey results indicate that 57% of households on Salt Spring Island support the proposed onsite management program with a 3.3% margin of error, or between 53.7 to 60.3%.

**Juan de Fuca:**

Of the 192 households in the **Willis Point** area, a total of 23 responses were received. This sample size does not provide statistically valid information. Nonetheless, one can be 95% certain that the range of support for a program is between 28.8 to 67.2% ( $48 \pm 19.2\%$ ).

Of the 928 households in the **Kemp Lake** area, a total of 117 responses were received. This sample size provides more statistically valid information than the Willis Point area. For the Kemp Lake area, one can be 95% certain that 41.5 to 58.5% ( $50 \pm 8.5\%$ ) of residents support the proposed program.

When considered as a whole, for the selected Juan de Fuca areas, at 95% certainty, 42.2 to 57.8% ( $50 \pm 7.8\%$ ) of residents support the proposed program.

**Southern Gulf Islands:**

Of the 1,042 households surveyed on **Galiano Island**, a total of 69 responses were received. This sample size does not provide statistically valid information. Nonetheless, with 95% certainty, 26.6 to 49.4% ( $38 \pm 11.4\%$ ) of residents support the proposed program.

Of the 440 households surveyed on **Saturna Island**, a total of 41 responses were received. This sample size does not provide statistically valid information. However, one can be 95% certain that 19.4 to 48.6% ( $34 \pm 14.6\%$ ) of residents support the proposed program.

Of the 1,270 households surveyed on **Pender Island**, a total of 219 responses were received. This sample size provides much more statistically valid information than Galiano and Saturna Islands. For Pender Island, with 95% certainty, 25 to 37% ( $31 \pm 6\%$ ) of residents support the proposed program.

As a result of mailing difficulties, the number of responses received from **Mayne Island** is very low. Of the 1,028 households on Mayne Island with a septic system, only 22 responses were received. With 95% certainty, the range of support for a program is between 29.3 to 70.7% ( $50 \pm 20.7\%$ ).

When considered as a whole for the Southern Gulf Islands, at 95% certainty, 29 to 39% ( $34 \pm 5\%$ ) of residents support the proposed program.

**SUMMARY OF RESPONSES**

A summary of the responses received have been included to provide more detailed information about residents' sentiment toward the proposed program (Appendix B). Graphical results for the three electoral areas is presented in Appendix C. Comments received from respondents are available upon request.

**ALTERNATIVES**

None.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Funding from the electoral areas feasibility reserve fund has been approved for the \$20,000 project.

**SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS**

Interim results from the returned questionnaires show there is definite support for an onsite management program from residents on Salt Spring Island. However, the survey results for the remaining electoral areas are less conclusive.

Although a statistically valid number of responses were not received, the survey in the Kemp Lake watershed area shows support for the management program, while there is marginal support from the small proportion of residents who responded to the survey from the Willis Point area.

Although a statistically valid number of responses were not received, the Galiano, Saturna and Mayne surveys show marginal support for the proposed program. However, with strong statistical data, the Pender survey shows much less enthusiasm for the proposed program.

**RECOMMENDATION**

That the Electoral Area Services committee accept the results from the survey/questionnaire.

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Jerry McIntosh, PEng  
Manager, Environmental Engineering

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Dwayne Kalynchuk, PEng  
General Manager, Environmental Services  
Concurrence

**COMMENTS**

JMcl/cl  
Attachments: 3

**APPENDIX A**

**ONSITE SYSTEMS EDUCATION PROGRAM AND SURVEY**

Service Area	Number of Dwelling Units	Responses		Statistically Valid Sample Size Required*	Margin of Error**	Support bylaw "Yes"	Support Bylaw "No"
		Number received	Per cent				
Willis Point	192	23	12.0%	128	± 19.2%	11 (48%)	12 (52%)
Kemp Lake	928	117	12.6%	272	± 8.5%	59 (50%)	58 (50%)
<b>Juan de Fuca</b>	<b>1120</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>12.5%</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>± 7.8%</b>	<b>70 (50%)</b>	<b>70 (50%)</b>

Galiano	1042	69	6.6%	281	± 11.4%	26 (38%)	43 (62%)
Saturna	440	41	9.3%	205	± 14.6%	14 (34%)	27 (66%)
Pender	1270	219	17.2%	295	± 6.0%	67 (31%)	152 (69%)
Mayne***	1028	22	2.1%	280	± 20.7%	11 (50%)	11 (50%)
<b>Southern Gulf Islands</b>	<b>3780</b>	<b>351</b>	<b>9.3%</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>± 5.0%</b>	<b>118 (34%)</b>	<b>233 (66%)</b>

<b>Salt Spring Island</b>	<b>5331</b>	<b>770</b>	<b>14.4%</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>± 3.3%</b>	<b>436 (57%)</b>	<b>334 (43%)</b>
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\* Number of responses required in order to achieve 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error.

\*\* Margin of error determined at the 95% confidence level based on percentage of responses received.

\*\*\* Mayne Island mail-out failed. Newspaper insert on August 1 selected as alternative method.

**SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESPONSES**

**Reasons for Supporting the Proposed Program**

- The majority of respondents supported the program on an environmental and health related basis.
- Many residents in support of the program indicated that it was “long overdue.”
- Some residents encouraged the CRD to take a leadership role on water quality and watershed protection.
- The high cost of pump-outs was recognized as prohibitively expensive, explaining why some homeowners become delinquent in their maintenance duties.

**Reasons for Opposing the Proposed Program**

- The majority of respondents who did not support the program did so on the grounds that they were already maintaining their systems on their own and did not need to be made to do something that is already in their best interest.
- Given that it is to the owner's benefit to maintain properly, some respondents emphasized that homeowners maintain their systems on their own and are in “no need of assistance.”
- Some respondents argued that rural areas have a much better sense of responsibilities and thus environmental protection is already accomplished by residents’ diligence.
- Many respondents indicated that they had been maintaining their systems for many years and “have never had a problem.”
- Some respondents emphasized that septic system maintenance is an individual household responsibility and recommended that the CRD focus on education.
- In some cases, disbelief was expressed that a malfunction of a septic system will cause environmental and water quality damage. In these cases, there was a general belief that only the homeowner would be affected, and for this reason, it was argued that septic maintenance is not within government jurisdiction.
- Many respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with another bylaw, complaining of too much government regulation and taxation.

**Suggestions/Comments**

- Some people in opposition to the suggested program expressed their concern over the injustice of a standard five-year requirement given the differences that can exist in usage (i.e. one person living in a three-bedroom home). It was recommended that the number of persons using the system should be a factor in required frequency of pump out.
- Many of those in opposition to the bylaw, and some of those in support, recognized the increased need for the program in nearshore areas around water sources.
- Several respondents suggested developing a rebate/incentive program to encourage proper maintenance instead of a regulatory framework.
- A sliding cost scale was suggested for responsible septic owners and those who attend the “Septic Savvy” workshops.
- For the Islands, it was noted that there is a limited choice of pump out operators and consequently, costs are very high and inconsistent. It was suggested that the CRD assist in facilitating easier, more cost effective pump outs.
- Many respondents commented on the high cost of administration for the proposed program. Some suggested incorporating septic companies into the process to cut costs.
- It was suggested to include inspection criteria with pump-out history on property land titles.