

CRD has 45 days to tally costs on sewage treatment

Rob Shaw, Times Colonist

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Greater Victoria residents will finally learn how much their taxes will go up to pay for the region's new sewage treatment plants after politicians gave engineering staff a 45-day deadline yesterday to produce a cost breakdown.

"I am still struggling to get any answers on how much this is going to cost the taxpayer," Oak Bay Mayor Christopher Causton said at a meeting of the Capital Regional District's sewage committee, which is planning the \$1.2-billion treatment project. "I am surprised we still haven't got it yet. ... I've waited too long."

Causton asked for numbers from CRD engineering staff, saying municipalities need the data to plan their budgets.

Dwayne Kalynchuk, CRD general manager of environmental services, said a report on costs per household should be done within the 45-day time frame.

The sewage committee also voted yesterday to borrow \$10 million for the next stage of planning. It will be spent on such things as investigating plant locations, consulting with First Nations and the public, conducting environmental and social reviews and starting a slew of reports on engineering criteria and performance standards.

The planning costs were not unexpected and the CRD believes the provincial and federal governments will each contribute one-third funding, said Kalynchuk. The amount represents one per cent of the project's total budget, a typical rule of thumb in engineering, he said.

The provincial government ordered the CRD to start planning for treatment in 2006. It wants to see a business plan by June 30 and specifics on the type of treatment, plant locations and estimated costs by Dec. 31.

In order to meet deadlines, the CRD committee voted yesterday to spend \$1.5 million -- out of the \$10-million borrowing fund -- to extend the contract of its engineers.

However, some committee members expressed concern over how quickly the project was progressing. Saanich Coun. Vic Derman and View Royal Mayor Graham Hill said they were concerned the type of plants had already been decided by engineers, leaving little room to explore new technologies and small-scale decentralized systems.

The CRD said questions would be answered in the next few months as planning continues and the province releases a study on recovering resources from sewage.

rfshaw@tc.canwest.com