

To: Wainfleet Lakeshore Community

There are two committees currently active in representing the community in the development of a water and wastewater servicing plan for Wainfleet's lakeshore area. You recently received a letter from one of them – Betty Konc's anti-pipeline group – requesting a \$100 contribution toward hiring a lawyer to fight the Region on your behalf.

As chairman of the other group, the Public Advisory Committee (PAC), I want to respond to Betty's letter, and her recent letters to the editor and various other public comments.

Both groups share the goal of ensuring that the chosen solution is the best available; that it not lead to the destruction of the existing community through future development; and that it be affordable for all concerned. Beyond that however we have clear differences.

Betty has described her group as "a community committee that is opposed to the water/sewer pipeline proposed by the Region". The Public Advisory Committee is an impartial group willing to consider all possible solutions, including municipal services.

The anti-pipeline group believes that the problem has been overstated – they refer frequently to "the few faulty systems", "the few who are at fault", and so on. It is difficult to reconcile this view with the fact that the available evidence points to the opposite conclusion. For example, a recent follow-up study, intended to address Betty's concerns about one of the original studies, and designed with her input, showed 68% of the wells tested exceeded the allowable "total coliform" standard, and that 49% did not meet the legal setback requirements between wells and septic systems. Barring new evidence to the contrary, the PAC considers it proven that septic system failure in our area is both common and widespread. (There is a great deal of information available about "the problem" which has not, in our view, been adequately communicated to the public. The next newsletter will address this.)

Similarly we disagree on 2 issues relating to alternative solutions. The first is whether alternatives were adequately addressed at the Value Analysis Exercise in February. In a recent letter to the editor Betty states:

"The Mayor and the Region would have us all believe that alternatives to the pipeline were looked at...Not so. I was there for 3 of the 5 days, so I believe I can say with confidence that a minimal amount of time was spent on alternatives."

Well, I was there for 5 of the 5 days and spent the better part of 3 of them working with the 3 consultants who spent about 4 days looking at alternatives, so I believe I can say with confidence that this issue was adequately addressed. Other members of the PAC were also present for 4 or 5 days; they too believe that alternatives were sufficiently explored.

The anti-pipeline group also argues that on-site solutions are appropriate and available in most cases. Once again the facts suggest otherwise. A site-by-site study of all 1244 residential lots in our area shows that 67% fail to comply with the basic requirements of the Ontario Building Code, and only 8 ½% are suitable in all respects for septic system usage.

Finally, it is on the question of how to proceed from here that the two groups differ most profoundly. The Public Advisory Committee advocates a continuation of the existing cooperative effort involving all the concerned parties. Monthly meetings bring together the PAC members, the Region's project manager (Bob Steele), Chado Brcic (Director, Water and Wastewater Services Division, Niagara Region), Wainfleet's mayor and town planner, Bill Hunter from the Health Department and others as required. The public representatives are free to add agenda items as they see fit; nothing is out of bounds. We have access to all the studies and reports; the authors are available to us for further discussion and explanation. There is a great deal of ongoing communication as well. Additional studies have been conducted in response to PAC requests – 2 of them are referred to above. Over the past few months we have made real headway on most of the public concerns about the project. (I should note here that while I believe we have done a reasonably good job at representing the community's concerns to the project team, we have not put enough effort into communicating progress back to the community; this will increasingly be our focus over the next few months.)

I fail to see any reason at this point to abort the current process and replace it with a confrontational approach. The situation we find ourselves in will not be resolved by trivializing the problem, or by insisting that better solutions exist although we have no idea what they might be, or by treating as the enemy all those who are currently working with us to fix the problem.

If you have questions or concerns about this project please contact any member of the Public Advisory Committee.

Colin Pilmer
Chairman, Public Advisory Committee