

Developers to push for water, sewage systems at Sauble Beach; Group plans to 'turn up the heat' as election nears

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Local News - The developers of a planned 480-unit gated community in Sauble Beach say they hope the municipal election and private-sector influence will jump-start the area's controversial water pipeline and sewer system proposal, a project they need to start building.

"We're turning up the heat on the project right now, meeting with other consultants and professional lobbyists to help it along," said Fab Lucchese, a principal with Jaymor Group, which acquired the 80-hectare site two years ago.

"It's not really feasible with private sewer and water. We'd really like to see and use municipal services."

Situated on the east side of Carson Lake, about five kilometres from the heart of Sauble Beach, plans for the resort-style development were approved in the mid-1990s when developer Brian Kelly owned the land and secured a site plan. Jaymor Group took over the project two years ago and is now pushing to make it a reality.

"It's a fabulous area in Southern Ontario with huge growth potential and it's detrimental to the area not to have sewer and water services," Lucchese added. "I know there is a large group of people (in Sauble Beach) who don't want this and don't see the long-term benefit, but I think they are being a little short-sighted."

Opposition to the pipeline that would service both Hepworth and Sauble Beach with water from Wiarton and give each community a sewer system has been strong over the years due, in part, to the high cost and alleged secrecy and mishandling.

Mayor Carl Noble, who's been a stalwart supporter of the project, said this week he's aware the developers are itching to move forward with their plans.

"I know they are hoping to get water and sewer for their project and they're already wanting to build three model homes," said Noble.

"There are several groups in that area wanting municipal services, including a group that wants to build a seniors home in Sauble Beach," he added.

Three years ago, the price tag for a dual-service project serving upwards of 4,000 customers came in around \$62-million, with a request for the federal and provincial governments to cover two-thirds of the cost.

The project was significantly scaled back at the suggestion of the minister of public infrastructure to a \$17-million plan that gave up sewage collection and treatment and focused mainly on providing piped water to about 1,600 customers in Hepworth and Sauble Beach. Again, senior levels of government were expected to pick up a portion of the tab.

Throughout that process and immediately after the 2003 municipal election, residents cried foul when they learned of invoices totalling \$407,000 from the Toronto law firm Power Budd, hired to lobby the provincial government for funding. The previous council had originally approved

spending \$80,000 for the cause.

Shortly after that, more than 500 people turned out to a meeting in Hepworth to sign a petition against the pipeline and sewer system project and call for a referendum on the issue.

Despite all of the hoopla, allegations and apparent missteps, Noble still maintains the original idea is the best idea. Today, the project as originally proposed is estimated to cost \$78-million.

"The price has increased \$16-million in three years," said Noble. "We should have gone about it three years ago."

The issue promises to resurface this fall as candidates campaign for council and voters prepare to mail in their ballots for the November municipal election.

All of this talk isn't scaring off the developers at Jaymor Group, however, whose plans include a clubhouse, swimming pool, tennis courts, a small golf course with a water feature and other resort amenities.

"From what we can tell there's been a lot of wheels spinning and smoke in the air and I don't think the council got the bang for their buck," said Lucchese, referring to the Power Budd contracts. "It's complicated by who you know in this business.

"We've decided to look internally and see what happens."

Sauble Beach has a population of 3,500, about half of which is seasonal.