

Town to look at maintaining well water, groundwater quality at Sauble Beach

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By Rob Gowan

With municipal sewers in Sauble Beach now a dead issue, South Bruce Peninsula is moving forward with recommendations that came following a pollution study of wells, shallow groundwater and surface water at the beach last year.

South Bruce Peninsula council on Tuesday accepted a report detailing how the town is proceeding on the recommendations the Sauble water and sewer report ad-hoc committee made in January.

"It's a long process and it is something we have to do right when we do it," said Coun. Jay Kirkland, who was also a member of the ad-hoc committee. "The manager of public works (Tom Gray) came into the process near the end, so he had to take time to get his feet wet and he has a lot of work to do this year."

Council heard Tuesday that costing and solutions for storm water management at the beach will continue to be investigated and staff will continue to work with the Saugeen First Nation, the Grey Bruce Health Unit and others with respect to water quality and storm water management.

Council was also informed of the education program the town has implemented, including a page on the town's website.

The town is also almost through the first year of its septic re-inspection program, with a report on how it is proceeding expected after inspections wrap up for the year, expected to be in November.

Staff is also exploring the costs to implement DNA and microbial source tracking of the beach drains, which is expected to be ready for budget deliberations for council to consider.

"We look forward to what (Gray) brings back for what kind of testing he wants done, how our inspection program results are coming back and hopefully we can proceed forward," said Kirkland.

The pollution study, conducted last year by Hutchinson Environmental Services Ltd. and released in January, sampled wells as well as shallow groundwater and surface water in the beach drains. Low levels of E. coli bacteria were found in two of the 100 wells tested. Shallow groundwater in the beach drains contained measurable concentrations of caffeine, but no E. coli.

E. coli was found in the surface water of the beach drains, but the source wasn't determined, though the presence of caffeine suggested the water had been in contact with human sewage effluent. Potential sources of the E. coli included bacteria brought to the beach through surface runoff from storm water, non-human sources such as pets or waterfowl or from Lake Huron wave action, the report stated.

Clerk Angie Cathrae told council Tuesday that DNA testing of the water in the beach drains could cost anywhere from \$200 to upwards of \$1,200 per sample, depending on what is found and the extent of testing required. There would also be costs involved with collecting samples and getting them to the lab.

Kirkland said it is important that testing the beach drains proceed.

"We have a lot of the public that play in those beach runoffs . . . it would be nice to know everybody is going to be safe and Sauble Beach is still a nice, clean, sandy beach," said Kirkland.

The pollution study results were enough to convince council sewers weren't needed and in March the town voted to kill the Sauble sewer proposal and return more than \$400,000 in grant money that had already been spent on the project to the federal and provincial governments. The town is also in the process of trying to have grants designated for the Sauble project redirected to an upgrade of the sewer system in Warton.