

Koers' valley wide water proposal incomplete; Alberni Valley still in holding pattern

PORT ALBERNI, B.C. – The long awaited Koers Engineering presentation of their draft proposal for a valley wide water system was held Thursday, April 23, but those most wishing for good news came away disappointed.

Trustees from the Beaver Creek and Cherry Creek Improvement Districts left the Alberni Clayoquot Regional District offices with not much more to tell their constituents than the meeting was cordial and informative. That's because the draft is not complete and the ACRD doesn't want details released at this time.

Mike Irg, Manager of Planning and Development for the ACRD says it's premature to give out details when key issues in the draft need an overhaul. As the client commissioning the study, it's their prerogative to say when it can be made public.

Both improvement districts were looking forward to sharing the news at their Annual General Meetings this week. Cherry Creek's AGM began only hours after the presentation Thursday afternoon. Beaver Creek is slated for Monday evening.

It's particularly upsetting for the Beaver Creek trustees who have been frustrated for months by mixed messages from the Vancouver Island Health Authority about timelines for submitting plans to meet the new 4-3-2-1 water standards.

Following last year's AGM – when Beaver Creek constituents demanded a third-party review of governance options for the improvement district – VIHA extended deadlines pending results of that review, which came out in October, 2009.

VIHA had also advised the BCID board that any plan they submitted might well be changed by findings of the valley wide water study – still ongoing – and signaled their willingness to wait for this information. At the same time, the BCID was to continue working toward a plan for submission by the extended deadline.

That deadline has now passed and Beaver Creek has been informed they are in non-compliance. At Thursday's meeting BCID Trustee Ed Walcot raised this issue to emphasize the urgency of completing the Koers project so all jurisdictions in the valley can meet VIHA's looming deadlines.

Both Tony Koers and City Engineer Guy Cicon agreed that VIHA has been inconsistent in some of their recent decisions. For example, Koers says VIHA told him they would be willing to wait for a Beaver Creek plan for “up to two years, if they wanted to explore a groundwater option” and that the letter citing non-compliance is surprising.

Cicon says he's found VIHA cordial to work with in general and advised those growing anxious over the mixed messages of late to “stay tuned for more.”

All participants showed support for the BCID trustees, recognizing the difficult position further delay in completing the valley wide proposal has placed them in.

As well, many expressed awareness of political issues surrounding questions of governance in Beaver Creek and particularly about misinformation circulating regarding grants that would flow like water from a tap should Beaver Creek opt to become a service area under the Regional District.

Glenn Wong, ACRD's Director for Cherry Creek quipped, "I can tell you, if any of that were true, we'd all be moving out to Beaver Creek." Penny Cote, Director for Sproat Lake, reminded the group that both Bamfield and Bell Road have applied annually for grants and have never once received any.

In general, the meeting provided the opportunity to share common problems faced by all valley jurisdictions and to work toward shared solutions. For those hoping to share those solutions with their anxious constituents it's little comfort knowing they are not alone when some are quickly running out of time while the valley continues on in a holding pattern.