

Grand Bend Sewage Treatment Facility Project – Speaking Notes - August 04, 2007

My name is Paul Mennill and I am speaking on behalf of the Board of the Bluewater Shoreline Residents' Association concerning the Grand Bend Sewage Treatment Facility Project.

1.1 BSRA is an umbrella federation of 54 residents' associations on the shoreline north from Highway 83 to the southern edge of Bayfield. Of the 54 associations, about 17 will be directly affected by the sewer proposal.

1.2 The BSRA Board understands that there may be a variety of opinions within the BSRA territory ranging from those living north of St. Joseph to those living in denser subdivisions in the south

1.3 We have talked informally with many people on the shoreline, and recognize that there are differing views on whether Bluewater should join the Grand Bend sewer project

1.4 There are some residents who legitimately see the sewer project as an unneeded expense. Some people have recently installed new, up-to-date, and expensive septic systems. Others believe that the costs would simply outweigh the benefits.

1.5 On the other hand, there are many residents – perhaps a majority - who are strongly in favour of buying capacity now and hooking up to the system some year in the future. They tend to look at the project in environmental terms and in terms of long term planning and issues of economic development.

1.6 We have not had an opportunity to formally poll our members on this issue.

1.7 We thank the municipality for setting up this meeting today

2.1 The BSRA Board, recognizing that not all property owners in the different subdivisions see the issue in the same way, has met and taken a strong stance and that is what I will speak about today. Our stance is that Bluewater should buy the capacity to join the sewer project.

2.2 We have tried to view today's situation from a future-oriented view – what will we wish we had done when we look back on this decision 10 or 20 or 30 years from now?

3.1 BSRA over the past 10 years has taken a strong stance on environmental issues and has done substantial work on these issues.

3.2 For example, we have been involved in measuring water quality for many years – together with the Municipality, ABCA, and the Huron County Health Unit. We have had on-going dialogue with Ministry of the Environment (including the Minister) and with other government offices. We have played a role on the Huron County Water Protection Steering Committee. And recently we have published a 28 page report on surface water quality issues in Bluewater – a report which is being read widely.

3.3 Therefore it only makes sense that we should look at this issue from the point of view of the environment.

3.4 There is a very significant water quality issue that has not been addressed satisfactorily. We have repeatedly stated that we believe there are three elements in our area that need to be improved – septic systems, faulty lagoons, and agricultural run-off. This emphasis on the three-pronged approach to cleaning up Lake Huron and the ravines was adopted by BSRA more than 3 years ago.

3.5 It is only logical, then, that BSRA believes that we should seize this opportunity to address one of the three causes of surface water pollution.

3.6 Bill Boussy has made it very clear that the Province has a real drive to move away from

septic tank and leaching bed systems and into larger municipal treatment systems. Only advanced treatment can deal with the nitrates, phosphates, and other toxic chemicals that we use every day.

3.7 We need to help clean up the Great Lakes.

3.8 What is the best long-term planning for the future of our community? Joining a modern sewage treatment system is part of the answer. This will be a sewage treatment system that can be improved as required to deal with future standards. And the opportunity to join it is now.

4.1 Missed opportunities of the past have come back to haunt us – water line to Bayfield, sewer in Crediton.

4.2 When the water line for Highway 21 was first proposed, it also met with some opposition. In parts of the community, the conflict between proponents and opponents of the water line was substantial. But now the water line is regarded as a critically important part of life on the shoreline. Others are just getting it now. And still others wish they could get it.

4.3 When we have gone ahead with other utilities, like natural gas, it has made a big difference for the better.

4.4 Apparently, South Huron has seen the sewer line as an opportunity for them, which they do not wish to miss. We should do the same and join them.

4.5 Perhaps the day will come when the province decides that septic systems will no longer be allowed in the more densely populated areas. If that does happen, we will have to build a sewer system then – and the costs will be much higher.

5.1 We believe that the sewer line will increase property values.

5.2 That is a mixed blessing: many people like to think they are gaining on their property value – but it will also cause increases in assessment and therefore in taxation.

5.3 The increased taxation will increase the coffers of the municipality. That is part of the reason why we believe the sewer line will benefit the whole community of Bluewater.

6.1 The issue of costs is very significant. We understand that the sewer project will go ahead on a “user pay” basis. Perhaps in a perfect world, Bluewater would consider paying for most utilities from general tax revenues. The sense of a unified community would be greatly enhanced if our municipality as a whole could ensure that all parts of the community paid for upgrading the lagoons, building the sewers, delivering the water, and paying for recreational facilities. But at the present time, we recognize that we do not live in a perfect world, that money is short and taxes are high, that there is a great deal of history in paying for utilities in the past, and that a sense of equity dictates that “user pay” is the best approach at the present time.

6.2 Some leaders in Lambton Shores believe that senior levels of government are prepared to cover a large proportion of the initial costs. The Province is more likely to contribute significantly if all three municipalities work jointly on this project. If Bluewater simply waits and lets Lambton Shores and South Huron go ahead without us, we will likely be the losers in the long run.

6.3 We ask the Municipality to help property owners to spread the initial costs over time. Later we will ask the Municipality to allow property owners to spread the costs of hook-up to the system over time.

7.1 Connecting to the Grand Bend sewer will actually benefit the whole community of Bluewater, not just part. The areas on the sewer line will benefit directly, but the other areas within Bluewater will benefit indirectly.

7.2 Significant economic development is much more likely to take place if the sewer line is in

place. If not, that economic development might simply go around Bluewater.

7.3 If the hook-up results in improved water quality in the lake, then all beach-goers can benefit, and ultimately our role as “Ontario’s West Coast” can be more fully realized.

8.1 The Bluewater Official Plan lays out “goals” which can be interpreted to support the concept of a sewer system.

8.2 For example, in section 2.2 of the Official Plan, it sets out the following 2 goals:

- “To improve the quality of water in ground water, rivers, streams, gullies, and Lake Huron”;
- “To ensure clean ravine and lake water for residents through the appropriate management of service and land use.”

8.3 When the Official Plan was in preparation in 2004-05, BSRA objected to the designations of “Seasonal” and “Year-round” within the Lakeshore Residential section. Council was told by the senior planner that the main rationale for including the “seasonal” designation was that there could be a massive septic failure in the Lakeshore Residential region and residents would have to find another place to live. Now we have an opportunity to solve the problem that he thought he saw – by connecting to the Grand Bend Sewage Treatment plant.

9.0 In summary, the Board of BSRA believes that the best option for the Municipality of Bluewater, from the environmental viewpoint and the long-term planning viewpoint, is to purchase capacity on the Grand Bend Sewage Treatment Project.