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Item No. 08
Halifax Regional Council
January 12, 2016

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed by Director

Bob Bjerke, Chief Planner and Director, Planning & Development

DATE: October 22, 2015

SUBJECT: Options for Contaminated Well Water

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

On June 16, 2015, regional Council requested a staff report outlining options available to residents on private wells in dealing with contaminants in their well water including but not limited to uranium and arsenic.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

There is no direct authority for the Municipality to deal with contaminants in existing private water supplies.

Section 281 (3) of the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter provides that a subdivision by-law may include with respect to subdivision applications that are located outside the serviced area and that are for the creation of ten or more lots, requirements for hydrogeological impact assessments including an evaluation of the quality, quantity and sustainability of water supply within the proposed subdivision and an evaluation of the cumulative impacts on water supplies outside of the proposed subdivision.

BACKGROUND

Approximately 35% of Nova Scotians rely on private wells for their domestic drinking water supply.

The majority of private wells provide clean, safe drinking water. However, contamination can occur through a variety of means, including naturally occurring contaminants in the soils or surrounding bedrock.

DISCUSSION

Managing water resources is a complex undertaking that involves many parties, including private residents and businesses, municipalities and the Province. Notwithstanding the Province of Nova Scotia has regulatory control over water resources, including ground water. The Province regulates well construction standards, licenses well drillers and installers, has standards and protocols for testing, but the water quality of small scale private wells is not subject to current Provincial regulations. It is the responsibility of the owner of a home or business to ensure that there is an adequate supply of potable water to the occupants or customers.

Regional Council has adopted a set of policies in the Regional Plan to help Council consider requests to extend piped services. These local extensions are often cost prohibitive, and extending a central wastewater system with a central water system may need to be considered if the existing homes are not able to upgrade private on-site septic disposal systems.

However, it is more often the case that extending central services is not viable, and residents must explore other options.

Although the Province does not regulate water quality from small private wells, Provincial expertise is available at no charge to help interpret water quality tests, in terms of whether or not a sample meets the Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality. In addition the Province provides several excellent booklets that provide advice to private well owners including how to determine if well water is safe, how to fix bacterial quality, understanding and treating chemical quality, and how to maintain water quality. The series of booklets are entitled `Your Well Water` and can be found at the following address:

<http://www.novascotia.ca/nse/water/privatewells.your.wellwater.asp>

The Province also has a number of programs to assist low income homeowners maintain safe, adequate affordable housing, which may be able to assist with the cost of repairing or installing wells or, where there is a health risk, water disinfection systems. Grants to a maximum amount of \$6,500 or forgivable loans to a maximum of \$16,000 are available depending on household income. Information on Housing Nova Scotia's Financial Assistance and Grant Programs for Homeowners can be obtained by contacting 902-424-5110 and can be found at the address below:

<http://housing.novascotia.ca/programs/financial-assistance-and-grant-programs-homeowners>

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no Financial Implications

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Not Applicable

ATTACHMENTS

None

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.php> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

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