



**The Corporation of the
City of Sault Ste. Marie**

C O U N C I L R E P O R T

April 12, 2021

TO: Mayor Christian Provenzano and Members of City Council
AUTHOR: Karen Fields City Solicitor
DEPARTMENT: Legal Department
RE: Appendix B 2021 04 12 - Update on Pointe des Chenes -
Potable Water.docx

Purpose

The purpose of this Report is to provide Council with an update on the issues of the provision of potable water at Pointe Des Chenes Park.

Background

In 1964 Transport Canada constructed a firefighting training area on the southwest portion of the airport property. Firefighting training was then conducted from 1964 to 1992. In 2002 the City built a water treatment plant at the campground to be operated by the PUC. In 2003 it was detected that one of the supply wells contained benzene concentrations.

By the spring of 2008 the benzene concentrations greater than the Ontario Drinking Water Standard was detected in both the raw and water samples collected from the water treatment plant on site at Point Des Chenes ("PDC"). From 2008 to June 2015, additional monitoring wells were installed and groundwater samples were taken for analysis.

In June 2015 in a meeting with the Ministry of the Environment, and Climate Change ("MOECC" now MECP), the MOECC confirmed not only the presence of benzene in their samples but now also confirmed the presence of PFAS, leading to the conclusion that the airport firefighting activities had resulted in offsite contamination. PFAS are found in the foam used to fight fire.

At that time Transport Canada was asked to:

- 1) Provide a timetable for restoring the water supply at the campground to potable conditions. This was set as an immediate priority;
- 2) Prepare a project timeline for preparing a sampling plan to further delineate the nature and extent of the contamination resulting from the airport; and

3) Prepare a project timeline to develop a remediation plan to restore the natural environment.

To date, items 1 and 3 have never been achieved and to the City's knowledge not addressed by Transport Canada to MECP.

From 2015 to date, (six years) there has been various samplings, changes to samples, bi-weekly sampling, new filters, new filter systems, meetings, ongoing monitoring, multiple Transport Canada team leads, various Transport Canada consultants, reports, new wells, and one year plans but there is still no timetable for restoring the water supply in this area to potable, nor a remediation plan to restore the natural environment.

The City has also pushed to be provided with a timetable for restoring the water supply in this area to potable. The City has continually asked for a long term solution for the drinking water contamination. The latest proposal from Transport Canada is yet another filtering plan this one stated to be a "semi-permanent" solution involving another type of filtering. As past filtering plans have not been consistently successful, Staff question whether this is the path forward and question what "semi-permanent" means. Beyond this latest plan, Transport Canada has no other plans for how to clean up the water they have contaminated.

Health Canada released guidelines for the maximum acceptable concentrations of PFOS and PFOA (two PFAS) allowed in water. From June 2020 to October 2020, bi-weekly PFAS sampling results provided exceedances. The City has been and continues to be under a Directive from Algoma Public Health because the water being supplied to the former PDC campground is not potable.

Residential Sampling

When asked what was being done with respect to residential sampling in the area, Transport Canada advised that a program was developed with Algoma Public Health and the MECP. They advised that the residential sampling program was initiated in August 2019 and remains ongoing. We were advised that property specific results were being provided directly to participating residents as they become available. They stated that the results to date demonstrated that all sampled residences met the Ontario Drinking Water Quality Standards for benzene, met the Health Canada Maximum Acceptable Concentrations for PFOS and PFOA, and Health Canada Drinking Water Screening Values for other PFAS parameters.

COVID-19

In 2020 the PDC Campground was delayed in opening due to restrictions from the Provincial Regulations regarding the Pandemic. In the Spring of 2020 Regulation 82/20 provided the Rules under that shut-down. Under the Schedule of Businesses that may open in a shutdown zone – Seasonal Campgrounds were allowed to open if they met certain conditions. One of those conditions was that the campsites were supplied with electricity, water service and facilities for sewage disposal. And the campground did not open as usual in May 2020.

The Lyons club reported the following for their 2020 season report:

“2020 brought us challenges which made keeping the park open very difficult. As it was made clear to the Lions Club, we were responsible for ensuring rules at the campground kept campers and employees safe. It was decided that it would not be possible to open the comfort stations as we were not in a position to pay staff to clean the comfort stations every half hour. We implemented restrictions on visitors. No travellers were to be allowed and campers were only allowed to have visitors to their campsite if said visitor was a member of their own household. We installed a Plexiglass shield on the counter of the office and made masks and hand sanitizer available for staff. These conditions were made clear in a letter to seasonal campers that was sent to inform them that we would be opening the part on June 19th, 2020. We lowered the site fee by 20% and extended the season to the Thanksgiving weekend.

As the result of the restrictions, many campers decided that they were not going to camp at Pointe Des Chenes during the 2020 season. We lost 27 campers immediately as they did not want to camp at Pointe Des Chenes due to the restrictions. We lost a few more during the season as we would not change the rules so they could bring in visitors (grandchildren) from outside the Algoma District (from Michigan and Sudbury for example). We had some interest expressed by new campers part way through the season but decided that it would not be fair to the current campers to bring in new people when we were not allowing visitors to the park”.

In February 2021, there was no Transport Canada plan in place for achieving a potable water supply to the City’s campground property. To the City’s knowledge there were no planned operational/mechanical changes to Transport Canada’s existing filtering system which would address the exceedances for the 2020 camping season. There was also no site remediation plan in place. With a substantial outlay of money that would be needed to replace the City’s old pressure tank the decision was made to close the campground to the public. Even had the tanks been replaced and the money spent, that would not have supplied potable water to the campground.

The City, has, on multiple occasions expressed the need to Transport Canada to see a final resolution to this issue. In November 2019, Staff expressed that issue

to Transport Canada again and in return was provided with Transport Canada's two-part approach to address the benzene and PFAS in the groundwater at PDC.

In that report, they suggested yet another approach to filtering the water. Given how many years and filtering systems that have been recommended and tried, we are not confident that this will end up in a potable water result. Transport Canada had proposed to have this new plan in place by the end of September 2021, which would result in Transport Canada, once again, going through the process of continual monitoring for this camping season. Secondly, Transport Canada proposed to address the source of benzene and PFAS in the soils that remain at the Sault Ste. Marie airport, but they have not yet come up with a plan. We are advised that "An evaluation of potential options is currently underway and when completed will be shared with the Sault Ste. Marie Airport and Development Corporation (SSMADC)."

Currently, Transport Canada continues to test the water every (two weeks) and large filters weighing approximately 500 pounds are changed out and replaced at regular intervals. Even with this ongoing filter change, the sampling has resulted in exceedances. Transport Canada continues to ask for time to deal with the concerns but given the time already spent on this matter, Staff feel that a new approach is needed.

Analysis

Staff continue to work with Transport Canada for a sustainable solution to the provision of potable water at this site.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Strategic Plan / Policy Impact

This is an operational matter.

Recommendation

It is therefore recommended that Council take the following action:

Resolved that the report of April 12, 2021 concerning the former Pointe Des Chenes campground be received as information.

Respectfully submitted,

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