

Village of Val Marie

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To: Village of Val Marie Ratepayers, Sewer Utility Users, and properties requiring Waste Collection

Well it was a busy year here in Val Marie with the first ever “Grasslander Classic”, a busy tourism season, and we were reminded about hot dry summers again for sure! With fall wrapped up and winter on its way the Council and I have been planning for next year’s budget and projects. There are two important items I would like to update everyone on with this letter those being the Sewer Utility and Waste Collection.

Sewer Utility

The Village is required to submit a written plan to the Ministry of Environment on how we will upgrade our sewage treatment system to become compliant to the *The Waterworks and Sewage Works Regulations* set by the Province before December 31, 2018.

The Council has approved a plan to do this. That plan is to build two new lagoons, a new force main, and upgrade the lift station to meet current guidelines. The Council has submitted a request to the Saskatchewan Municipal Board to borrow above its debt limit the amount of \$700,000 and that request was approved in principle (pending permits issued from Water Security Agency). The next step will be to finalize design of the system and tender the project to confirm pricing. At that point I will update you again as to how we will proceed.

In anticipation of this project moving forward, Sewer Rates will be increased. Council approved a change in the rates at their December 2017 meeting and the new rates can be implemented once approval from the Saskatchewan Municipal Board has been received. Provided timing goes as expected those rates may be implemented on January 1, 2018. The new rates will be \$105.00 per month per residential property, and \$105 per month for all other types of properties as well. The rate categories have been eliminated based on not enough supporting documentation to justify the difference in rates. Properties with two types of assessment (ie: residential and commercial) will receive two bills, same as previously.

The new rate structure will provide the revenue needed in order to make payments on the long term debt, cover operating expenditures, as well as plan for the full life cycle cost of the asset. We appreciate all the feedback, concerns, and interest that was raised as a result of the public information session. I think the discussion and direction you had with Council was worthwhile and productive in moving forward.

Waste Disposal

The Village operates its landfill under a “Permit to Operate a Waste Disposal Ground” issued by the Ministry of Environment. A new permit – with new conditions – was issued on November 3rd, 2016. The permit outlines the following requirements in order to confirm site suitability and protect groundwater:

- *Submit an environmental assessment confirming site suitability of the waste disposal ground and implementing ground water monitoring controls if required **due November 3, 2021***
- *Submit a decommissioning and reclamation plan that is satisfactory to the minister **due November 2, 2021***
- *No further expansions or major alterations may be undertaken at the waste disposal ground without approval from the Ministry. Those requests must be made with detailed design plans prepared by an engineer.*

Further investigation into the costs to continue operating our landfill under these conditions has been done. Quotes for an Environmental Assessment ranged from \$15,000 and up, a decommissioning plan (based on the environmental assessment) quote was \$7,500 and up, and Ministry staff have informed us that there hasn’t been a compliant landfill in Saskatchewan constructed for less than \$500,000. Being as the soils at the landfill are not clay based, this may prove to be a site with less than ideal conditions for a landfill. When soils are not clay based synthetic liners are to be installed, leachate management systems implemented, and monitoring to ensure the liners are performing as expected.

With the wastewater treatment system upgrades already on the table, attempting to manage costs at this level seemed unmanageable for a community of our size. Most small communities in Southwest Saskatchewan have chosen not to manage their own landfill under similar permit conditions. Groundwater contamination is a concern in Val Marie, due to everyone using sand points for their water source.

As of March 1, 2018 we will be switching to a contracted waste collection and disposal system which will include stream 1 recycling. The remaining capacity at the landfill will be used to clean up old debris piles and prepare for decommissioning. The Multi-Material Stewardship program provides a small amount of funding (\$11.75 per residential household per year) towards municipalities that implement recycling programs. This is a small portion of the cost to operate this service.

Council will be implementing a Waste Collection and Recycling Utility Fee beginning March 1, 2018. The cost will be \$30 per residential household per month (minimum charge). That cost will be for two carts provided to your property and the hauling to Swift Current. The garbage will be disposed at the Swift Current Landfill and the recycling sorted and baled in Swift Current for further processing elsewhere. You will receive a garbage and recycling cart. Those carts will be emptied on a rotating basis – one week garbage, the next week recycling. For those that will need more than two carts, additional carts can be provided for \$15 per cart per month.

For example: you can request another recycling cart (for an additional \$15/month) and have one garbage and two recycling carts. All properties must start with two carts (one garbage and one recycling) and additional carts can be added after that. When needing to dispose of larger amounts of waste, 4 and 6 cu yd bins will be available to rent from the contractor. Those will be your own responsibility to request and pay. There will be much more information sent out regarding the phasing in of this utility service as we get closer to the date so please stay tuned!

Previously waste collection was funded as part of the general levy, untaxed properties did not contribute to the operation of the landfill or waste collection - but did have access to the service. Providing this service and billing it as a utility requires all users of the utility to pay regardless of the tax status of the property. In 2017, \$22,222 was budgeted to be spent on waste collection and landfill operation. In 2018 the cost of waste collection and recycling will be covered by the monthly fee, and \$10,000 will be allocated from the general levy towards clean-up of the landfill site and preparation for decommissioning. The aim of a utility is to be priced so that they are self-sustaining. The contracted collection and disposal fee will cover the cost of the contractor and how decommissioning will be allocated is yet to be determined.

An interim budget has been approved in order to allow for 2018 projects to get underway, however a final budget with levy details will be set once the provincial budget and revenue sharing amounts for 2018 have been confirmed in the spring. There may be funding decreases from the province in 2018 based on current economic conditions.

There isn't anyone who enjoys getting a letter informing them of increased fees. I understand that. You are welcome to call or stop in to discuss your concerns with me anytime – or schedule to attend a Council meeting to discuss your concerns with Council. The next meeting is set for January 16, 2018.

Sincerely,

Cathy Legault, RMA