

# NG assumes septic tank responsibility

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Memories of a septic tank mess in Dunvegan swayed North Glengarry council to seize authority for local sewage systems in the new year.

The decision comes after the Eastern Ontario Health Unit informed area municipalities in August it would no longer oversee Part 8, or the sewage system section, of the Ontario Building Code after Dec. 31.

In a lengthy discussion held during a special meeting Dec. 1, council ignored a recommendation from CAO Daniel Gagnon - by a 3-2 vote - that would have steered the township away from jumping into uncharted waters.

The CAO told council it was wise to leave Part 8 with South Nation Conservation Authority, which has worked shoulder-to-shoulder with the health unit on the responsibility over the last number of years.

Mr. Gagnon felt bringing the extra duties in-house would overload North Glengarry's taxed chief building official Gerry Murphy, and expose the township to possible mishaps.

He advised council to go with a known entity for the upcoming year, then review the subject in the summer.

"It is a lot more prudent to take the time to do it right," Mr. Gagnon said, "than it is to do it at the 11th hour with January looming..."

"There is a risk of a drop in customer service and there is a risk of (people) getting (things) wrong with the files and making mistakes."

But Councillor Jamie MacDonald and Deputy-Mayor Chris McDonell both felt it was important to have the township assume local command over Part 8 sooner than later.

They each referred to a situation in Dunvegan.

And while neither mentioned names, several years ago the township had trouble resolving issues with a malfunctioning system on the property of Michel Lacombe and Carole Gareau.

"We had some problems in Dunvegan getting people to go look at that septic system," Coun. MacDonald said. "We didn't have the control."

"I personally would like to have the ultimate control because we are the people who hear the complaints and I would rather be able to deal with (them) somehow."

The deputy-mayor told the CAO he was in favour of bringing authority in-house even if it meant hiring more staff.

"I think we should take it on ourselves," Deputy-Mayor McDonell said. "We may as well start now as start down the road in a year's time."

"If Gerry needs some help, we will have to find him some help..."

The deputy-mayor added he didn't think it made sense sending residents out of the township to get their septic system paperwork handled.

Both councillors Eric MacSweyn and Carma Williams supported the CAO's recommendation to leave the work with South Nation Conservation.

Coun. MacSweyn recounted going through septic system approval for his home recently. Despite the headquarters being in Casselman, he never left the township.

"I just faxed the paperwork," Coun. MacSweyn said. "Everything came back (and) I set up my inspections."

"It was effortless. I don't think anybody would have to be driving anywhere else when there is access to fax machines."

Coun. Williams was concerned about causing strain on employees with a quick transition.

"I could see it could make sense to hold off," Coun. Williams said, "and not put too much extra pressure on staff at the current time..."

She was in favour of bringing Part 8 in-house over time.

But Mr. Gagnon's recommendation to enter into a 12-month contract with the South Nation failed after councillors Jim Picken, Gary Shepherd and Jamie MacDonald voted in opposition.

Councillors MacSweyn and Williams supported the recommendation.

Coun. Picken then entered a motion to have North Glengarry assume control over Part 8, while outsourcing sewage inspections to a third party.

This passed by a 4-2 vote; Deputy-Mayor McDonell and councillors MacDonald, Picken and Shepherd supported the motion.

Earlier this month, South Glengarry chose a similar path.

Alexandria-based Lakeside Green Environmental Consulting made presentations to both North and South Glengarry councils in the fall stating it was interested in tackling the inspection portion of Part 8 for the two townships.

The firm showed it would offer the service for less than South Nation.

At the Dec. 12 meeting, Mr. Gagnon told North Glengarry council he was preparing a joint tender, with South Glengarry officials, in order to find a third party to do the inspection work.

If all goes well the tender should go out in the next week or so.

North Glengarry chief building official Gerry Murphy started a course earlier this week to become trained and certified to do Part 8 work for the township.