

COUNCIL RECEIVES PETITION ON NATURAL GAS

By **Hilary Thomson** - September 4, 2019

Merrickville-Wolford council received a petition at the last council meeting from residents wanting them to be proactive in getting natural gas to the north side of the river in Merrickville. The petition, signed by about 50 residents, addressed a motion put forward by Councillor Timothy Molloy at a council meeting in May, which asked council to approach MP Steve Clark and MPP Michael Barrett to lobby Enbridge to invest in providing natural gas services to the north side of the river. The motion was defeated 3-2. "It appears that those who voted against Councillor Molloy's motion were more concerned about Enbridge's bottom line than the concerns of their constituents," the petition says.

Mayor Struthers said that is "not the case." The municipality is currently looking into an old pipe that runs under the river which may be used as a conduit to bring natural gas to the north side. He has also had conversations with Steve Clark and Michael Barrett, both of whom see the need and value of attracting Enbridge to invest in the area.

"We continue the conversation, as the Mayor should, on behalf of the residents with our senior officials, but more important is finding out the state of that pipe, because that may be the route to be able to bring natural gas to the north side," he said. "There are many steps left to be done; but crucial steps are being taken at the beginning to see if we do, indeed, have the ability to have natural gas on the other side of the river."

Councillor Molloy, who has been a staunch advocate for the project for several years, says he is curious about the fixation on the pipe, as there are many other ways to bring natural gas to the area. "If we sit here and wait to find out the condition of the pipe, we are just spinning our tires and not moving forward," he said. "We should be engaging in conversations with Enbridge and we should be engaging in conversations directly with both Mr. Barrett and Mr. Clark to see what they can do to assist us in that matter."

Mayor Struthers told Councillor Molloy that he objected strongly to the statement that they are just sitting and waiting. "The municipality is being proactive in finding out about the pipe under the river," he said. "That seems to be, at this particular time, the only avenue for bringing natural gas across the river."

Resident, Paula Muntean, who signed the petition, came forward at the public question period to ask whether the municipality was aware of any grants that might help in the process. "I'm curious about the infrastructure program from the government of Ontario for rural areas," she said. "Would the north side qualify for a grant to help us with the natural gas?"

Mayor Struthers said staff is aware of the program as an avenue to pursue. "There is a new intake being offered and staff are looking into that," he said.

Paula also asked when they might hear something concrete about getting natural gas to the north side.

"I would be hesitant to suggest a date," Mayor Struthers said. "I can just assure you that it is something that is being pursued and, as information becomes available, we will certainly be sharing it through council to the members of our municipality, particularly on the north side of the river."

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