



CITIZEN PHOTO BY BRENT BRAATEN

‘Tis the season

The kindergarten/Grade 1 class at Sacred Heart school rehearse Wednesday morning for the school’s Christmas concert which will take place Thursday evening at 7 p.m. in the Sacred Heart Cathedral.

City residents against new utility fee

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The majority of residents who offered input on the city’s proposed new storm water utility are against paying a new separate fee for the service, according to the results of a city survey.

More than 91 per cent of the respondents to an online survey soliciting feedback on a new separate utility fee to manage drainage from snow and rainwater indicated they would not be willing to pay the proposed fee that would amount to about \$90 for the average single-family home.

In late 2012, city council approved the creation of a separate storm water utility to collect money exclusively for maintaining existing infrastructure, fund necessary capital projects, manage flooding and erosion control and support reinvestment in the aging system.

The utility fee would be used to reach a projected five-year average requirement of \$3.85 million.

To achieve this, staff have worked on developing a tiered model where properties are charged according to their amount of impervious (or hard) surface area such as driveways, roofs and parking lots.

The average single-family home has about 313 square metres of impervious area, as measured by

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— City report

the consultants at AECOM. That base rate would be about \$83.16 per year, with properties categorized as small charged \$58.21 and large properties \$116.42. Non-residential and mixed-used properties would be charged the average rate of \$83.16 per 313 square metres of non-impervious area (or \$26.57 per 100 square metres).

As part of the public consultation process on the new fee, an online survey was available between Oct. 18 and Nov. 15, and collected 545 responses. Two public meetings were held on Oct. 17 as were follow-up meetings with those who requested them. School District 57 and the Prince George Chamber of Commerce were the only two groups to take advantage of that opportunity.

When asked about a preferred

method for funding storm water infrastructure, almost 57 per cent of respondents indicated they would rather stick with the current method of funding through the tax levy. Twenty per cent supported an annual flat fee charged for each property and 24 per cent were in favour of the proposed annual fee based on impervious surface area.

Eighty-one per cent of respondents also said \$90 per year is not a reasonable amount to pay for the utility if it were requested.

If the fee is put in place, 73 per cent of respondents also said there should be a discount for property owners who implement measures to reduce the volume or improve the quality of drainage leaving their site.

“Many responses demonstrated a general concern over the city’s current expenditure and allocation of tax dollars,” said a report from the operations department presented to the city’s finance and audit committee. “Survey respondents do not believe that the creation of a storm water utility fee would result in a corresponding reduction to their current tax burden.”

A draft bylaw has been created, effective Jan. 1, 2015, but it has not yet been presented to council. During the 2014 budget process, council approved \$350,000 to do the necessary work to set up the new utility.

Hearings move to Prince George

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Ridington also said band members valued the northern section of their traditional territories – the part that would be most impacted by Site C – because the southern reaches have been more impacted by roads, pipelines and other industry.

During their presentations to the panel, elders stressed their society’s stewardship of the land and how they believe it’s unfair for the government to come in and flood their lands.

“You guys are ruining everything from our traditions,” Zepheria

Isadore said. “We look after the land.”

Many of the elders also expressed concerns about what will be left for future generations if the dam is built and game hunting and other activities are further impacted.

“How can you call it an opportunity if it’s destroying our way of life?” Chingee said.

The hearings move to Prince George today with a morning session scheduled for the Ramada. The panel will then take a break and return with the final set of hearings in the Peace region in the new year.

Die already cast: Orr

MCLEOD LAKE — McLeod Lake Indian Band members spent Wednesday telling a panel reviewing the proposed Site C dam about their concerns, but chief Derek Orr expressed skepticism about how well they’ll actually be listened to. Orr pointed to the provincial Clean Energy Act, which he said will make it easier for projects like Site C to get regulatory approval because it removes barriers to development.

“Basically in my mind the government paved the way for that and in my mind [stopping it] is going to be challenging for sure,” Orr said.

Members of the community expressed opposition to Site C during hearings to a joint review panel on Wednesday, in large part citing the harm they believe it will do to their traditional way of life. Orr and other community members expressed concerns about the cumulative impacts of the proposed Site C dam, given two other major hydroelectric installations are already on the river. The panel heard from witnesses who said the baseline data BC Hydro should be taken into consideration when it comes to species diversity and habitat should be from before any dams were built rather than the current species distribution. “The Peace River has two other dams on it and this [third] dam is only going to leave a small amount of free river flowing, which is essential for wildlife habitat, fish and all the other species,” Orr said. “This just adds to challenges out there in the ability to practice our traditions



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— Chief Derek Orr

to hunt and trap.” Some members of the community criticized the timing of the hearings in McLeod Lake, given the community was also holding a referendum, a school Christmas concert and some members of the community who will be most impacted were out hunting and trapping. Panel chairman Harry Swain blamed “distant bureaucrats” in Ottawa and Victoria for the timing of the meeting.

Orr said it’s too early to say what his band will do if the project is given the green light to proceed, despite his community’s objections. Other First Nations groups in the province who have opposed other resource projects like mines or pipelines have threatened possible legal action or civil disobedience. Orr said he wants to see how the situation plays out before deciding how to proceed next. “That’s a hypothetical question, we won’t know until we cross that road,” he said. “We’ll just see what happens... we’ll take actions and develop a plan after that.”

— JAMES, Citizen staff

Canada wide warrant issued for Simpson

Citizen staff

RCMP have issued a Canada wide warrant for a man with an extensive criminal record after he failed to return to his designated home in Prince George on Dec. 9.

Neil Robert Simpson, 38, is described as a First Nations man, five-foot-seven, weighing 190 lbs., with black hair and brown eyes. He has tribal tattoos on his neck and right hand, as well as a tear drop tattoo by his right eye.

He has local contacts, but may be traveling to the Chilliwack area. He is originally from the Northwest Territories.

Simpson is considered violent and should not be approached, RCMP said.



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