

Benefits of a Municipal Sewer System

There are many reasons for developing a piped sewer system, with the most important reasons being the public health issues and the mitigation of environmental problems.

Public Health Issues:

There have been numerous instances, in Manitoba, where leaching or “break outs” from septic fields and/or older holding tanks has discharged untreated sewage into the roadway ditches within residential neighbourhoods where children play. Many of these areas are also where residents use private wells. These breakouts will contaminate the groundwater supply and eventually being declared as being under “boil water advisory”. Although people may be using bottled water for their drinking water use, children coming in contact with the contaminated water in ditches could result in serious consequences.

Environmental Concerns:

Gimli being a destination/ recreational area, protection of the environment, especially Lake Winnipeg is the primary goal of the Province and the Municipality. All of the area municipalities, including Gimli would like to see the Lake “cleaned”. This is not a task for people in Gimli alone, but for all of the residents on the Lake Winnipeg watershed to collectively do their part to stop the “eutrophication” or dying of the lake, which is important to all permanent and seasonal residents.

In December 2006, the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board, co-chaired by a former Mayor of Gimli and with membership of stakeholders in the watershed, released a report identifying issues that needed to be implemented. The report acknowledged that the task of cleaning Lake Winnipeg was a shared task, by all levels of government and the people in the watershed. One of the main concerns about breakouts from septic fields and old leaky tanks is the release of nutrients, especially phosphorous in the wastewater, which foster the growth of algae in the lake. One of the report’s recommendation states that, “... A comprehensive sewage management plan is adopted where septic fields and tanks are releasing excessive nutrients”.

The RM of Gimli, along with all of the neighbours in the watershed has accepted the findings of the 2006 report. As a first step, Gimli was one of the first places in Manitoba to incorporate nutrient reduction at the wastewater treatment plant.

Other issues to consider:

Septic Tank and Fields

Many of the Septic tanks and fields developed prior to the current Environment Act, where in unsuitable soils and small lots. Manitoba has a new guideline, which approves fields on properties of 2 acre size or larger. Septic Fields are not suitable in many areas along the red river and Lake Winnipeg, due to soils and high groundwater.

Holding Tanks

Many of the holding tanks will eventually leak and will need to be replaced. The cost of replacing a tank is about \$5,000. Many municipalities now have by-laws for inspecting and replacing leaky tanks.

Life Cycle Costs

Most municipalities who have developed sewer systems to replace aging tanks and fields have found that in the long term, paying for a sewer system over a 20 year period is more cost effective than tank replacement and pumpout costs.