
TO: Electoral Area Services Committee **MEETING:** March 12, 2019

FROM: Paul Thompson
Manager, Current Planning **FILE:** Policy B1.21

SUBJECT: Revisions to Policy B1.21 Groundwater assessment requirements for rezoning un-serviced lands and for development permits

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board endorse the revised Policy B1.21 to improve clarity and streamline requirements for groundwater assessments for rezoning un-serviced lands and for development permits.

SUMMARY

Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) Policy B1.21 pertains to groundwater assessment requirements for rezoning un-serviced lands. The current policy came into effect February 22, 2011. Since that time, there have been advancements from the Province in terms of updating the Water Sustainability Act and in terms of providing guidance on groundwater assessments. The current Policy has generated confusion among many applicants and would benefit from a revision to improve clarity.

BACKGROUND

The un-serviced areas of the RDN rely on groundwater as the primary water source to support development. Groundwater conditions vary across the region and site-specific assessments are required to determine if water needs for proposed parcels or uses can be met, while minimizing impact on existing groundwater users, hydraulically-connected streams and the long-term health of the aquifer.

The RDN's existing Policy B 1.21 requires an update to improve clarity and to incorporate new Provincial guidance and requirements under the Water Sustainability Act.

The groundwater assessment referenced in this Policy must be performed by a qualified professional with competency in hydrogeology. Generally, a desktop assessment reviewing all available relevant information is sufficient, unless the professional deems a pumping test is needed in order to satisfactorily provide an opinion on minimum year-round water supply and anticipated impacts or lack thereof.

The RDN's Drinking Water and Watershed Protection (DWWP) program works to improve data availability in our region, pertaining to water resources including groundwater and surface water, through monitoring and scientific study. The information available through the DWWP helps to expedite the assessment process as there is increased background data available to inform desktop reviews.

This policy revision has received the input of the RDN Drinking Water and Watershed Protection Technical Advisory Committee (sub-committee specifically tasked with this review met 3 times), Development Services staff (worked through 9 revisions), and three professional hydrogeologist reviewers.

Key revisions to the policy include:

- Re-ordering of items in the Policy to improve readability and clarity of sequence;
- Flow charts that show when in the zoning amendment process hydrogeological related information is required;
- A checklist based on Provincial guidance documents to outline what is expected to be reviewed in a hydrogeological (groundwater) assessment. This provides clarity for the applicant, the professional and for RDN staff reviewing the report;
- Checklist also applies to development permit applications that require hydrogeological assessments for added consistency;
- Links to information sources to support desktop assessments.

ALTERNATIVES

1. That the Board endorse the revised Policy B 1.21 to improve clarity and streamline requirements for groundwater assessments for rezoning un-serviced lands and for development permits.
2. That the Board provide alternate direction.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this policy update.

STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLICATIONS

This revised policy helps to achieve several strategic priorities:

We will ensure our processes are as easy to work with as possible.

We recognize the importance of water in supporting our economic and environmental health.

We will have a strong focus on protecting and enhancing our environment in all decisions.

We will include conservation of resources as a planning factor.



Paul Thompson
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February 21, 2019

Reviewed by:

- J. Pisani, Program Coordinator, Drinking Water and Watershed Protection
- G. Garbutt, General Manager, Strategic and Community Development
- P. Carlyle, Chief Administrative Officer

Attachments

1. Policy B 1.21 Hydrogeological assessment requirements for rezoning unserviced lands and development permits