

Presentation to the CEC panel at the Public Hearing for the Pembina Valley Water Coop Supplemental Groundwater Supply Proposal

Thursday, November 9, 2006 - Friedensfeld Community Hall

Hello Mr. Chairman, Members of the Panel, Hearing participants, and Ladies and Gentlemen. My name is Patrick Watson and I'm the Manager at the Seine-Rat River Conservation District.

I'd like to thank you for this opportunity to present, on behalf of the Seine-Rat River Conservation District and the residents of Steinbach and surrounding communities, some concerns with the project under discussion and some suggestions for the CEC panel to consider prior to making their final recommendations to Manitoba Conservation and Manitoba Water Stewardship.

What is actually under review?

In the letter sent to the Director, Environmental Approvals at Manitoba Conservation, dated December 12, 2005 from UMA Engineering it states that the Pembina Valley Water Coop's current water supply may not be able to provide the required volumes of water during periods of drought, and in order to address THIS concern, the Water Coop is proposing to construct a groundwater supply system within the Sandilands Provincial Forest. Somehow between the time this application letter was submitted and Tuesday, November 7th the Water Coop has changed their request. They now seem to want the additional water to supplement their existing supplies irregardless of what is occurring within their area, and to better prepare for anticipated population growth and development.

We have some serious concerns about the Water Coop's long-term plan; also know by many as "the hidden agenda". During the very limited and relatively ineffective public consultations that Mr. Schellenberg undertook in March 2005, he verbally promised the RM of Stuartburn, RM of Hanover, RM of De Salaberry and the RM of Franklin that the Water Coop would make some of THEIR pipeline water available (at the wholesale price paid by other municipal members). The point here is that, while the existing Pembina Valley Water Coop distribution network members claimed to be concerned about securing new sources of potable water, Mr. Schellenberg was already trying to drum up some new business and expand the coop's distribution network. If what is really under review here is the question of "should the Pembina Valley Water Coop be allowed / licensed to take water from the proposed Sandilands well in order to reduce the local area risks of water shortage during times of serious drought or emergency", I think most people would say "Yes". There are likely many people in this room, or other people who have heard about this project in the media, that have friends, relatives or business associates living in the Pembina Valley Region, and, of course, want to see them thrive and prosper. In general, it's fine and dandy to respect the desire of people to build a community, but surely NOT if it comes at the cost to others. With all due respect to Mr.

Schellenberg, one has to be completely naïve to believe his statement that he'll agree to turning off the tap if there are some issues that arise or negative impacts that occur as a result of this water extraction project. We are talking about the Water Rights Act here. If a rural landowner dug a new drainage ditch without a Water Rights license and was told to fill it back in or block it because it was causing flooding and erosion problems downstream, and he apologized and promptly did what he was told, I'm quite sure it would be a first in Manitoba.

I'll now list some suggestions for the CEC panel to consider in making their recommendations, with the assumption that the licenses may be issued:

- 1) In order to address the real issue of adding security to Pembina Valley Water Coop's existing water distribution system, pumping from the well should be limited to a maximum of four months per year, have a maximum allowable volume per year, and be operated only under drought or emergency situations, as clearly defined by Manitoba Water Stewardship, and agreed upon by the RM of Piney, RM of Stuartburn, RM of La Broquerie, and RM of Hanover. Relating to Mr. Schellenberg's comments that the pipeline should have a constant flow of water, is interesting. It is, of course, possible to have no water in the pipeline at certain times. The argument that there must be a constant flow of water within the pipeline so that the water doesn't become stagnant and that it will meet the Canadian Drinking Water Quality Standards doesn't make sense. The water is all going to the Morris water treatment plant and any quality improvements are done there, as required, prior to further pipeline distribution.
- 2) Pumps should be approved by Manitoba Water Stewardship and the Manitoba Water Services Board and only have the ability to pump the groundwater, once at ground level, at just slightly above a rate of 50 liters/second, not a larger 150 liters + per second pump initially set at a lower 50 liters/second flow rate. For some additional information for the CEC panel relating to the actual pipeline, I had a recent conversation with a water pump and pipeline installation professional and he reported that the maximum flow rate a 12" PVC pipe should experience is in the neighborhood of 2200 US gallons/minute or 140 liters / second. Since this pipeline has a potential to flow 140 liters / second, there should be some other restriction, such as a 50 liters / second pump, in order to ensure that, if licensed, the project extraction rate adheres to the actual licensed limit.
- 3) The Water Rights license should expire after 10 years, after which time the Water Coop be required to participate in a full public review of the extraction activities and groundwater monitoring results. If the review proves to be entirely successful with no negative impacts, a 10 year extension to the license, including any modifications, could be issued. It seems to us that this is more in line with the Guidelines provided in the Sustainable Development Act. A lifetime license should not be considered or issued.

- 4) We understand that the Provincial Groundwater Management Section has reviewed this proposal and obviously has no objections to the project. We have to trust that these professionals are capable of collecting, and interpreting the information required to make a responsible decision in the best interest of all Manitobans. With that, we have certain expectations that need to be addressed.

Firstly, a scientifically approved number of continuous groundwater level monitoring stations should be monitored over the lifespan of the withdrawals. The technical aspects and design of the monitoring program should remain the responsibility of our Groundwater Management branch at Manitoba Water Stewardship while the long-term monitoring expenses should be the responsibility of the Pembina Valley Water Coop (A User-Pay system). We are not indicating that all water users in the Province should be fee-based, but because of the uniqueness of this project, new money for monitoring will be required. The groundwater monitoring network needs to be fully established prior to the pumping and Manitoba Water Stewardship should not be simply expected to have the additional money available within their budget.

Secondly, all of the groundwater monitoring stations should be installed, including the collection of relevant baseline levels, prior to the initial operation of the well.

And last but not least, that the Pembina Valley Water Coop is required to create and distribute a Progress Report on all of the activities related to, and details of, the long-term monitoring program prior to the initial operation of the well. The Progress Report should be approved by Manitoba Water Stewardship and subsequently distributed to all of the rural municipalities that were contacted during the initial public consultation process, the Seine-Rat River Conservation District and be available online at the Manitoba Conservation website.

- 5) The collection of the long-term monitoring data should directly involve the Seine-Rat River Conservation District, and be paid for from an annual grant or fee from the Pembina Valley Water Coop towards all of the related monitoring expenses. Manitoba Water Stewardship would provide technical support, related training and orientation and would remain the primary owner of the data. The Seine-Rat River Conservation District has a genuine interest in the impacts that this project may have on existing users and in the long-term protection and sustainability of the water resources within our Watersheds. We feel that due to our location, operational structure, and resource management responsibilities to our District residents, it makes us the best suited organization to involve.
- 6) Who may be put at risk?
- City of Steinbach – They obtain all of their water from the ground. Population and development is increasing each year. Water requirements

are increasing each year. Steinbach may eventually need to supplement their existing water source and it will likely be with groundwater.

- The Livestock Industry – We can't overlook the fact that they are currently HUNDREDS of millions of dollars invested in the Livestock industry (Hogs, Dairy, and Poultry) in southeast Manitoba. They are all significant water users and play a huge role in the socioeconomic prosperity of southeast Manitoba.
- Rural residential water users - There is not one rural resident that will be OK with having to spend a few thousand dollars to have a new well drilled or new pump installed because their water source has changed to the point it is no longer usable. Even though the Pembina Valley Water Coop says that the existing users are protected, there is no money for this available, and you can bet that the Pembina Valley Water Coop will argue for proof that their activities are the cause.

What guarantees do the local residents and existing water users have to ensure that the Water Coop will provide mitigation if, and when, their existing groundwater sources or other things are negatively impacted? The Water Rights Act is not effective at protecting downstream residents. There are very, very few instances when Drainage officers have enforced the Act. Once again, we're being extremely naïve if we think that we're OK simply because a situation may be a violation of the Water Rights Act. We are wondering who will make the decision as to a negative impact that has occurred. If a resident calls the Water Coop and explains that they have had a "strong, flowing" well for the last ten years which has now stopped flowing and requires a new pump. Will the Water Coop send a truck out the next day to mitigate the situation? No one here should feel any comfort thinking that they are protected by the Water Rights Act.

I would just like to reiterate to the panel that in no way is the Seine-Rat River Conservation District in favor of this Water Coop project. The no pipeline option is still an option!

We do believe in the sharing of the natural resources within our great Province, but NOT if there are many unknowns, potentially unmanageable risks or no opportunities for mitigation. If our senior Provincial representatives from Manitoba Conservation and Manitoba Water Stewardship do decide to approve these applications, are they adhering to the guidelines within the Sustainable Development Act and the recently proclaimed Water Protection Act? The purpose of the Water Protection Act is to provide for the protection and stewardship of Manitoba's water resources and aquatic ecosystems, recognizing the importance of applying scientific information in decision-making processes about water. If we all agree that more information regarding the potential impacts of this groundwater extraction project can be obtained, albeit at time and expense, is there not a loss of trust that they have violated what is stated within their own Act.

In regards to the issue of providing potable water to areas within the Pembina Valley that do not have sufficient long-term and stable water supplies. As previously mentioned, if there are serious water storage issues that exist, the Province should assist with locating and providing potable water, but what about in low population and chronic water deficient areas? Is it worth the investment and worth the potential negative impacts in other areas? I can only hope that the people in charge of land use and planning understand that development should not be allowed everywhere, especially if the cost of providing potable water is outrageous.

I hope we all realize that if the Pembina Valley Water Coop receives the licenses they are asking for, and starts pumping the 50 liters / second, their appetite will absolutely continue to increase. What is essentially being licensed is a land use and population development plan, with water being the essential and most important ingredient.

Do the population growth and development statistics in the Pembina Valley Region equate to allowing the pipeline project to proceed? Yes, they have good growth within the area, but what about Steinbach and surrounding communities?

The population growth and development that members of the Water Coop board have mentioned can be equally compared to the growth and development statistics for the City of Steinbach and surrounding communities. At the Chamber of Commerce meeting yesterday in Steinbach, Mayor Chris Goertzen's main focus during his presentation was on the tremendous growth and development presently occurring in Steinbach. There was no mention of ensuring a long-term sustainable supply of potable water. No, because we tend to take it for granted. We are what some people say "Blessed" with an abundant supply of fresh water. The thing that bothers some people is the fact that just because we have water now, doesn't mean we will have it forever. If this project is licensed it will then be very clear to everyone that the Steinbach and surrounding communities have more than enough water to go around! When will the next application for groundwater be submitted? Probably a lot sooner than you all think.

I obtained some current information from the Census Canada website which stated the following:

City of Steinbach - 1996 to 2001 Population change = + 8.8%

Current population (2006) of Steinbach is just under 16,000 people. The growth rate has continued at a steady increase since 2001 and is expected to continue with influx of immigrants and increasing business opportunities.

RM of La Broquerie - 1996 to 2001 Population change = + 16.1 %. The growth rate has remained relatively constant since 2001 and is expected to continue at the current growth level. Housing developments in the Marchand area is the highest it has ever been. Population in 1996 was 2,493 and 2006 is more than 3,300.

RM of Hanover – 1996 to 2001 Population change = + 9.7%. The growth rate has remained constant and is expected to continue at the current growth level. Population in 1996 was 9,833 and for 2006 is more than 12,500.

So, in comparison to some areas within the Pembina Valley Region, you can see that the City of Steinbach and surrounding communities are generally both experiencing the same kind of growth and development.

I'm curious as to why there are no provincial or federal funds being sought after in the development of this project related to addressing a public health and environmental health issue? The Mandate of the Manitoba Water Services Board is to assist rural residents in developing safe and sustainable water supplies and ensure that public health and / or environmental concerns are alleviated. They also provide technical and financial assistance in this regard. It is surprising to us that the Manitoba Water Services Board, as far as we know, did not provide any input or comments on the project and is not in attendance here today.

If these licenses are issued for the project to proceed, it will be a great day for some Manitobans and a sad day for others. What we really are dealing with here is a "hope for the best" or "let's see if it'll work" guessing game, and as far as I'm concerned, it shouldn't be just "passed along".

Thank you.