

Darwell Lagoon Commission Open House, May 7, 2026

Summary Notes

The following notes are a summary of the questions, comments, and responses shared during the Open House. They are not intended to be a verbatim transcript. The recording secretary has exercised discretion in consolidating, clarifying, and organizing the discussion to best reflect the themes and information presented.

Attendance:

Darwell Lagoon Commission Representatives Present:

- B. Knysh, Lac Ste. Anne County Councillor
- E. Gifford, Lac Ste. Anne County Councillor
- G. Horne, Summer Village of Silver Sands Councillor
- G. Ward, Summer Village of South View Councillor

Lac Ste. Anne County Councillors Present:

- J. Preugschas, Reeve
- D. Johnson, Deputy Reeve
- J. Stoney, Councillor
- M. Derksen, Councillor

Absent:

- B. Voltner, Councillor

Lac Ste. Anne County Administration Present:

- B. Hartman, General Manager of Infrastructure / Darwell Lagoon Commission Manager
- C. Suter, Legislative & Support Services Supervisor
- D. Choma, Enforcement Services Supervisor
- J. Campbell, General Manager of Corporate Services
- T. Court, General Manager of Community & Protective Services / Acting CAO
- T. Lesko, Communications Coordinator

Guests

- L. Haynes, Evolve Surface Strategies (Moderator)
- B. Otway, Associate, Project Engineer, Stantec
- S. Weninger, Senior Principal, Water, Stantec
- R. Sharpe, Project Manager, MPE Engineering
- 39 members of the public were in attendance
- 9 members of the public participated via the Zoom virtual platform

Prior to the start of the Open House, members of the public were invited to meet with project team members, who shared visual materials (poster boards) and were available for informal conversations.

Opening Remarks:

Lac Ste. Anne County Reeve, Jurgen Preugschas, opened the Open House with a welcome to attendees and introduced the members of the Darwell Lagoon Commission and Lac Ste. Anne County Council who were in attendance.

Moderator Lowell Haynes, Evolve Surface Strategies, provided an overview of the presentation and public input process, emphasizing the importance of respectful discussion and expressing the intent that enough time would be available for everyone to ask questions and gather information.

Presentation:

Breagh Otway and Stephan Weninger of Stantec delivered a project overview using a PowerPoint presentation, which is available at [LSAC.ca/our-county/regional-priorities](https://lsac.ca/our-county/regional-priorities).

Question & Answer Period:

Following the Stantec presentation, attendees were invited to ask questions.

Question / Comment:

- Request to confirm pump capacity.
- Do the pumps turn on/off automatically, or is the system manually controlled.
- Who will be responsible for day-to-day pump management, and what will the associated costs be?
- Are the pumps diesel or electric?

Response:

- Pump capacity is 1900 m³/day with a single pump. (Multiple pumps may be used).
- The current license at Northeast Lagoon permits a volume of 386 m³/day into the lagoon.
- A SCADA system will be used to provide automatic operation and monitoring of the pumps.
- Lac Ste. Anne County operations staff will likely conduct day-to-day monitoring.
- Pumps will be electric, with three-phase power supplied to the site.

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Question / Comment:

- Can the pumps sit idle for weeks or months at a time?
- Has there been experience with pumps sitting unused for extended periods?

Response:

- Yes, the pumps are designed for both idle time and heavy operation.
- If operations choose to shut the system down over the winter, the pumps would likely be removed and stored in a warm dry environment.
- There is flexibility to operate the system through the winter if desired.

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Question / Comment:

- The speaker expressed caution to Council regarding the potential maintenance costs to taxpayers.

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Question / Comment:

- There is room for seven tie-ins, but infrastructure will continue to age. How long will the system last with future residential and commercial growth?
- Is there appropriate planning for future capacity needs?

Response:

- The pipes do not just expire, specific lifespan or “expiry date” cannot be provided, the system has been planned with long-term use and future development needs in mind.

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Question / Comment:

- Typically, there is a 25-year growth horizon for infrastructure projects, correct?

Response:

- Yes. Based on the funding model by Alberta Transportation, a 25-year population growth curve is used to design sewer systems (population based projection data).

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Question / Comment:

- So, are the lagoons expected to last 25 years?
- What is the life expectancy of N43 lagoon?

Response:

- By drawing the lagoon down, its operational life can be extended.
- The berms are in good physical condition and structurally sound.
- While the lagoon is currently full, its structural lifespan could reasonably extend to another 30, 50 or even 100 years.
- For accounting purposes, pipes are typically assigned a 100-year lifespan.
- Pumps generally last 10-20 years; although they represent less than 1% of the capital cost, they require more frequent replacement.
- (Population design is different from lifespan of the pipes.)

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Question / Comment:

- Please confirm the diameter of pipe (is it 9")?
- Please confirm that the original plan was only for treated effluent from Darwell Lagoon to the Tri Village Lagoon, with no full-strength effluent?
- Would a grinder pump be required?
- Is there capacity in the future to add other summer villages?

- Response:

- The pipe diameter is confirmed at 8".
- All pumps installed at Darwell Lagoon Commission are grinder pumps to ensure any solids can be processed.
- The North 43 Lagoon pump will also be a grinder pump.
- Currently, there is no intent for full strength effluent to be in the pipe.
- The intended purpose is to draw down the Darwell Lagoon to support ongoing operations by pumping treated effluent into the Northeast Lagoon.
- Future flexibility may exist to connect summer villages and other county residents/subdivision.

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Question / Comment:

- In the MOU for the grant, it states that the County is responsible for replacement and maintenance in the future. Typically, a replacement reserve fund is established. Has such a plan been completed?

Response:

- The system will transition into a utility model, and a formal plan for operating and replacement costs will be developed as part of that process.
- There is already revenue coming into the system. The Darwell Lagoon Commission currently receives approximately \$120,000 in revenue / year.

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Question / Comment:

- Does the discharge license expire, or is it subject to being rescinded?

Response:

- The license does not have an expiry date.
- While future regulatory changes are always possible, there has been no precedent for rescinding such licenses in the past in the province of Alberta.

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Question / Comment:

- Lagoon is going to be full and shut down. Is there any plan to extend its use.
- Has hauling to another facility been considered?

Response:

- Hauling to another facility is possible; however, it would create impacts on other infrastructure and roads.
- Any such approach would need to consider transportation logistics, costs and the effects on surrounding systems.

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Question / Comment:

- What happens when the North East Lagoon is full, and how long will that take?

Response:

- The North East Lagoon has a permitted discharge into Pembina River; the Darwell Lagoon does not.
- As a result of the discharge license, the North East Lagoon is not an evaporative system, it can be pumped down.
- The North East Lagoon also has large cells for storage, which allows for scheduling of the discharge.
- The North East Lagoon discharge license also provides flexibility should expansion be required in the future, for new larger storage cells.

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Question / Comment:

- Is there a license in place now?

Response:

- Yes, an approved license is in place.
- This license is transitioning from a Code of Practice Registration to an approval based on the connection of Phase B – Part II also requiring a Receiving Water Body Study.

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Question / Comment:

- Are the downstream users aware that this will occur?

Response:

- There is no change in the volume or nature of the discharge.
- All activity remains within the existing license allowance, so downstream conditions are not changing.

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Question / Comment:

- The expansion of the Darwell Lagoon was considered when I was on Council several years ago. At that time, it couldn't be discharged into the environment due to high sodium levels. There was good clay, and we were told it would hold for 30 years, remain contained, and evaporate, which was acceptable.
- With the high sodium content, hauling it to another location and releasing it into the environment raised concerns.
- This is being presented as a done deal. Is it?

Response:

- Irrigation of the effluent was also considered but due to high sodium levels due to bioaccumulation and other constituents, it was determined that it wasn't a viable option for land application.
- No, it is not a done deal.

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Question / Comment:

- Lakes will continue to see increased pressure and development grow.
- Lac Ste. Anne has not been developing because we could not handle the increased effluent or infrastructure demands.
- If we are looking at this reasonably, we should listen to the engineers but also use common sense.

Response:

- No comment provided.

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Question / Comment:

- What is the timeline for the system to come online?

Response:

- The estimated timeline is approximately one year from the approval date to proceed with tendering.

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Question / Comment:

- I'm in favour of the project, but what are the alternatives?

Response:

- Options for lagoon expansion have been explored but not approved.
- Previous cost estimates were approximately \$5 million, and grant approval for such an expansion is unlikely.

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Question / Comment:

- Has the work completed to date been on time, on budget, or have there been overruns?

Response:

- Phase B, Part 1 was completed with approximately \$800,000 under budget.
- Phase B, Part 2 is currently on hold while Council debates the borrowing bylaw for \$1.6 million.

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Question / Comment:

- Are there potential “gotchas” or risks down the road?

Response:

- Stantec has included a contingency allowance.
- Three major factors contribute to pricing volatility: diesel fuel, pipe costs, and the contracting marketplace.
- The project has not been tendered yet, so these variables will be assessed at the time the tender is issued and/or upon the review of the actual bids received to ensure cost controls are in place.

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Question / Comment:

- If there are over-runs in cost, will it be the taxpayers that pay?

Response:

- If the bids come in above the current approved budget, there will be opportunity to consider alternative options before moving forward. These changes will have to be approved by both the Darwell Lagoon Commission and Lac Ste. Anne County Council.

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Question / Comment:

- The big “gotcha” is the risk of not receiving environmental approval. Phase B, Part 1 wasn’t approved because of issues related to the Sturgeon River, and that was a significant setback. What assurances do we have that his project can move forward?

Response:

- The province has committed to funding 90% of the project, which demonstrates a strong level of support and provides confidence that Alberta Environment will issue the necessary approvals.
- A receiving water body study was completed to confirm that the North East Lagoon System could accept the discharge, and that study was submitted to Alberta Environment.
- In addition, the municipality currently holds an active license for the North East Lagoon, which provides a regulatory foundation for the project.

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Question / Comment:

- How many companies have prequalified?
- What will the qualifications be?

- Response:

- The Darwell Lagoon Commission will determine the final number of pre-qualified contractors.
- A draft pre-qualification package has been prepared, although it may still be refined.
- Stantec will provide oversight throughout the tendering and construction process.

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Question / Comment:

- Is there consideration to adjust tender dates based on market conditions?
- When will the project start?

Response:

- The project start date depends on two factors: Council approval of funding and receipt of environmental approvals. Until those are secured, an exact tender or construction start timeline cannot be confirmed.

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Question / Comment:

- CN permits can take a long time. Where are we at in that process?

Response:

- The permitting process with CN has been initiated but was paused.
- Initial contact has been made, and CN is aware of the project. At this stage, it's considered a procedural step and therefore no issues have been identified.

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Question / Comment:

- A resident said that MLA Getson indicated the project is going ahead no matter what.
- There is always a requirement for consultation with First Nations, but is this considered consultation with the ratepayers?
- A big gotcha has happened before, like at Mameo Beach, where the sewer system was completed and people are paying for a system that doesn't exist.
- Is this the extent of ratepayer consultation, and what happens if the majority are opposed?

Response:

- Yes, this public open house is a component of the consultation process. There has been ongoing communication and information shared over time. The previous Council approved the project, and the current Council is now taking a fresh look. Hosting this open house is an intentional step to ensure ratepayers have an opportunity to express concerns, ask questions, and provide input. Council will consider all feedback gathered, along with the technical and financial information, before making any decisions.
- MLA Getson may speak on the level of provincial support, but he does not speak on behalf of County Council. Council is independently reviewing all information and will make its own determination based on the facts, approvals, and community input.
- The first reading has been completed. Two readings remain. There is still opportunity to ask additional questions or provide further comments. We are listening to you.

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Question / Comment:

- As a follow-up to a previous question, I contacted the County and was told that what happened at Mameo Beach "doesn't matter."

Response:

- The situation at Mameo Beach involved a low-pressure system that required individual property connections.
- Our project is different: it is a high-pressure transmission line, installed below the frost line and in different soil conditions. It does not require connection to individual properties.
- It is a transmission system, not a local collection system; the risks and challenges are not comparable to Mameo Beach.

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Question / Comment:

- It's a high-pressure transmission line now, but if properties connect in the future, won't that require a low-pressure system?

Response:

- Yes. If individual properties were ever to connect in the future, a separate low-pressure collection system would be required at that time. That would be a future phase, designed and evaluated independently, and not part of the current transmission-only project.

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Question / Comment:

- Based on maps, the project will predominantly benefit the summer villages. Only 16% of homes that were able to connect, hooked up. You talk about utility, but with the limited interest – how do you plan to make the Summer Villages contribute their share of the money.

Response:

- This pipe extension has two components to benefit residents. The first goal is to allow the Darwell Lagoon to pump its treated effluent into the Pembina watershed, allowing it to continue to treat incoming sewer close to the Darwell area.
- The second benefit is future tie-in ability for both Lac Ste. Anne County residents and the Summer Villages.

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Question / Comment:

- Asked again: How do we ensure Summer Villages pay for their share rather than the County? For example, there are approximately 7,000 residents, and 1,372 have holding tanks that would directly benefit from this system; the majority have their own septic fields. How do we ensure that only the users pay, predominantly those around the lakes. It does not appear that the Summer Villages are on board yet. Should there be an MOU to commit them to contributing? What studies have been done to determine how many Lac Ste. Anne County residents will benefit versus how many Summer Village residents will benefit?

Response:

- The Darwell Lagoon Commission sets the user fee and is required to operate with a balanced budget; therefore, user fees will be charged accordingly.
- The benefiting residents are those that can have their sewer removed from their private property and treated in a lagoon.

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Question / Comment:

- Is the Darwell Lagoon Commission paying back the loan?

Response:

- Phase B line is currently owned by the Darwell Lagoon Commission, and the plan is for that ownership of the line to be transferred to Lac Ste. Anne County as payment.
- A long-term strategy is being developed to determine asset ownership and to move toward a unified utility model.

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Question / Comment:

- What is being requested is a comprehensive long-term cost analysis that can be made public.

Response:

- This can be provided publicly, however the utility model will have to be in place and approved.

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Question / Comment:

- Has the Darwell Lagoon Commission discussed hauling to Parkland County?
- There may be opportunities to reduce costs for residents if systems closer to the western side of the County could be accessed.

Response:

- Typically, sewage hauled within the County remains within the County's own systems.
- No discussions have taken place with Parkland County or Barrhead County. However, intermunicipal partnerships could be explored in the future if there are interest and mutual benefits.

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Question / Comment:

- Yes, that should be encouraged.

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Question / Comment:

- There are seven tie-ins planned. Which municipalities are involved?

Response:

- The exact list would need to be confirmed by reviewing the project figures, but most of the tie-ins are within Lac Ste. Anne County.
- The intent was to connect nearby subdivisions as part of the system.

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Question / Comment:

- So, would that require low-pressure systems tying into a high-pressure line?

Response:

- Yes, that would require a pump station to make the connection.

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Question / Comment:

- Few County residents would benefit from this project, and for them to benefit, additional investment would be required to build out the system and tie-ins.
- The County's responsibility is to County residents; while cooperation with the Summer Villages is important, ultimately the County should prioritize County needs and not act as the service provider for the Summer Villages.

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Question / Comment:

- I don't believe that the project will solely benefit the Summer Villages; County residents will also benefit. The speaker expressed support for the project.

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Question / Comment:

- Three Summer Villages use the Darwell system; the remainder of users are County residents. There is a solution – the Tri-Village Lagoon could take the treated effluent. This option has been discussed before, but no action was taken.

Response:

- The receiving water body study was submitted to the Alberta Environment.
- The Tri-Village Lagoon system is grandfathered, but any discharge (treated or not) would still require new regulatory approval. Based on the receiving water body study, new connections will not be permitted to empty into the Sturgeon River.
- Stantec is not opposed to exploring this option further, but based on previous receiving water body analysis, the understanding is that Alberta Environment was not supportive.

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Question / Comment:

- There was a memo indicating that approval had been given to take treated effluent to the Tri-Village Lagoon. The speaker indicated that she had consulted Alberta Environment and was provided with the applicable clauses. From the information I have, I believe the arrangement fell apart on December 19, 2023, during a meeting between the Darwell Lagoon Commission, the Tri-Village Lagoon Commission, and Lac Ste. Anne County.

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Question / Comment:

- Was the Phase B pipe installed on the premise that it would operate as a low-pressure system initially and later be converted to high-pressure?

Response:

- The design has not changed; it has always been designed as a transmission line to reduce the effluent volume at the Darwell Lagoon.

Closing Remarks:

It is acknowledged that there are ongoing concerns regarding the amount of money being spent on the project. The key themes raised by attendees included:

- What are the benefits for Lac Ste. Anne County ratepayers,
- Whether or not the project is necessary, and
- What alternative options exist for funding.

All comments and questions brought forward will be taken into consideration and further discussed.