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Marina Bay homeowners charge town damaged fish habitat

By PAUL COWLEY

Advocate staff

SYLVAN LAKE — The town broke federal and provincial regulations by failing to protect local water bodies and fish habitats from buildups of silt, garbage and harmful nutrients a representative for **Marina Bay** homeowners charged on Tuesday.

Marina Bay homeowner Alan Taylor told town council that failing to undertake a storm water management plan to fix problems in the **bay**, the creek feeding it, and the lake would be an example of "gross negligence."

Taylor, who was part of a delegation appearing before council, said new developments in town led to increasing amounts of storm water being directed into the creek without treatment or volume control measures in place.

That caused silt to build up that has found its way into **Marina Bay**. Taylor estimated that in the last two years about 30,000 cubic metres of silt has been dumped into the **bay**, making it more shallow and reducing visibility from one to two metres to a few centimetres.

Taylor said the amount of plant growth under the docks has soared and green and black slime has appeared that was not seen before. As well, divers reported a big increase in the amount of garbage finding its way into the **bay**.

To restore the creek, **bay** and lake to their previous conditions, homeowners want a task force established to prepare a storm water management plan, build whatever facilities are needed and develop a monitoring program.

Myron Thompson, the town's assistant chief administrative officer, rejected suggestions the town was contravening federal and provincial legislation.

Every development must include plans to handle storm water and those are reviewed by the town and submitted to Alberta Environment.

Thompson said he understands the concerns of **bay** residents. The town is also trying to improve storm water management and expects to line up funding for a \$2.4 million project for the lakeshore area to begin next year.

Town administration will review the **Marina Bay** residents' presentation and data, and will report back to council, he said.

Taylor said it is the town's responsibility to restore the **marina** to its previous condition with regular dredging and bottom and shoreline cleanups. Regular water testing, including temperature measurements, should be undertaken and the results passed on to the homeowners association, Alberta Environment and the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

In the shorter term, homeowners want the town to ensure silt and sediment controls are in place at new developments and land is graded to stop water running directly into creeks.

All new projects under review or in the planning stage should be put on hold until storm water management plans have been reviewed and approved.

Craig Schell, a Fisheries and Oceans fish habitat biologist, said the department would support the development of a storm water management plan.

"I think that's a good idea."

Schell said he could not address whether the town was negligent or broke fisheries regulations. That is something that would have to be determined in court.

How much of the silt buildup can be traced to development is unclear. Natural erosion also causes silt to collect in water bodies and to build up where creeks empty, he said.

Any plan to dredge the **bay** must be reviewed by the department.

Contact Paul Cowley at pcowley@reddeeradvocate.com
