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Homeowners charge town's negligence responsible for marina problems

by **Steve Dills**
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Marina Bay homeowners charged the town with negligence and have demanded immediate action to prevent further silt build up in their marina and restoration of the marina to its original depth.

"The marina has suffered significant and severe damage from silts, sediments, debris and other polluting materials transported into the marina via the large creek, which as a result of the actions and/or negligence of the town, has become a storm water drain for the residential areas to the west and south of the marina. The marina has, in essence, become a 'wet settling pond'," said Alan Taylor during a presentation at Monday night's meeting.

He estimated 30,000-31,000 cubic metres of silt has entered the marina, primarily in the past three years. Homeowners began to notice changes in 2005 and by this summer it was pretty much filling in under the docks with the depth about four metres. When originally constructed, about 20 years ago, the marina's depth in that area was 10 metres. A sophisticated aeration system was installed, at that time, to ensure adequate oxygenation and water quality. As a result of the silt the aeration lines have become buried and compromised, a report to council indicated.

"The Marina Bay Homeowners Association has suffered significant and severe damage, and as such, is looking for the town to forthwith initiate such measures as may be necessary for the prevention of further damage, and, to restore the bottom of the marina to its original profile, all in accord with, but not limited to, the requirements of Alberta Environment and the federal department of Fisheries and Oceans."

Further, Taylor pointed out, "Marina Bay is the 'Canary in the coal mine', the micro-environment that has shown us what happens to a body of water with respect to the impact of the heavy silt and nutrient load carried by the creek into the marina. As these loads worsen without positive intervention, as has been evidenced over the past two years, we will surely realize the significant deterioration of the lake water to the point that Sylvan Lake will follow in the footsteps of Pigeon Lake, suffering all the ramifications of a polluted lake."

Taylor indicated the document "highlights the dramatic, negative impact the town, their engineers, the developers and their engineers, and contractors, have had

on the marina as a result of the residential development along the major creek valley to the west of the marina without regard for any silt control and proper storm water management plans and facilities in place.

“This unchecked development to the west and south, extending out to Range Road 15, is destroying an important freshwater fish habitat and a prime recreational site. The large creek has now become a major unchecked transport system of residential pollution, silt and debris directly to the marina and Sylvan Lake.”

Further in the report, Taylor noted, “Enormous silt deposition into the marina at Marina Bay and the quickly changing water quality has caught the attention of all the area residents. Town land directly to the west within the creek valley have been subject to grand scale clearing, removal of trees and vegetation, topsoil removal, clay excavation stock piles while digging basements and the Range Road 15 upgrade. All storm runoff waters have been diverted by the Town of Sylvan Lake et al, directly to the creek unchecked, without treatment and without volume control.”

He provided a series of pictures and stated, “You can see how the soil spills over the sidewalks and down the storm sewer which discharges directly to the creek. No attempt has been made to try and prevent silt from entering the storm sewer, no attempt has been made to stop the silt from entering the creek, and no attempt has been made to stop the silt from entering Marina Bay.”

Divers employed by the homeowners association have noticed changes in the marina during the past three summers, he noted. “These dramatic changes are absolutely, and without a doubt, the direct result of the heavy silt and sediment loads and other pollution and debris coming from these developing areas.”

Other concerns were the nutrient loading and temperature of the water. On June 1 the marina water temperature hit 70°F, “a temperature which encourages algae bloom and a temperature at which some of our fish species will struggle.”

Taylor attributed the high temperature to dark water colour, diminished depth, and warmer water runoff coming from paved areas as well as the smaller overall volume of water in the marina.

High levels of phosphorous, chlorophyll, ammonium, calcium, sodium, potassium, sulphate and chloride were among those recorded during water quality sampling.

“Aggressive algae growth was very evident for most of the summer of 2007, and more pronounced at the surface at the stagnant ends of the marina, and coating and adhering to dock floatation equipment and boat hulls in quantities never seen before.”

To correct the problems, the association suggested the town implement a series of short term preventative, remediative and mitigative measures within the next few weeks to be in place before spring runoff 2008. They also called for a series of longer term measures.

In the short term they want silt and sediment controls on all land under development that is not fully landscaped; storm water diverted away from direct discharge into the creek; silt control on the entrances to all storm sewers; regular

street sweeping and cleanup; storm sewer silt trap clean out after each heavy rainfall; a moratorium on all projects currently under review until a Storm Water Management Plan (consisting of volume control, dry ponds, and/or wet ponds for silt control, erosion control, silt retainage and site grading requirements consistent with the town's long range goals) has been submitted and approved; continuous water monitoring in and around all sensitive areas that feed the creek, marina and lake; and development of an educational program alerting public of the dangers of pollutants entering the storm water systems followed by town bylaws to enforce the same.

In the longer term, the association wants a task force established to prepare a Storm Water Management Plan for the whole town with the priority on a plan for the creek entering the marina; construction of storm water management and treatment facilities; a continuous water monitoring program and regular feedback to the association.

Under the heading of restoration and responsibility, the association wants the marina restored to its original profile and a permanent solution established to deal with storm water handling and treatment.

Until that's done the association wants the town to assume full responsibility for the marina and regularly monitor the water quality, collect garbage along the shoreline, dredge the marina bottom, clean up subsurface garbage and debris and post timely notices and warnings advising swimmers and fishermen with regard to water quality and inherent dangers of contamination.

Council accepted the report without comment.

Mayor Susan Samson said, "We will take it into consideration and go forward from here."