



LAM Water

February 2024 Open House Review

March 12, 2024

Purpose

The County of St. Paul hosted three Open Houses for the LAM Water project. Because of the extent of the project, resident support is crucial to the project's success and financial feasibility. Therefore, it was important to provide a platform to engage residents for their feedback on the project's progress.

The Open Houses were a chance for residents to speak to their Council about their concerns, as well as ask engineering consultants about the technical aspects of the project. Council determined there would be three sessions throughout the week of February 19, 2024.

January 12, 2024 – Council Meeting

8.3 Dates for Open House for Hamlet Residents - Lottie Lake, Ashmont & Mallaig - Infrastructure Replacement Project for Water Distribution & Wastewater Collection Systems

Resolution CM20240109.1027

Moved By: Councillor Maxine Fodness

to schedule Open House stakeholder engagement sessions for residents of Lottie Lake, Ashmont, and Mallaig the week of February 20-22, 2024, in the evenings at 7:00 p.m.

Project History

In the past decade, the County made use of provincial funding under the “Water for Life” strategy, building pumping facilities and pipelines to switch from a low-quality groundwater source to more reliable water that is treated in EPCOR facilities in Edmonton.

The County is now focusing on replacing the ageing water and wastewater mains and pumping facilities in Lottie Lake, Ashmont, and Mallaig, which we are calling the LAM WATER project. Fully replacing the systems is a proactive approach that will improve residents' service experience while reducing the long-term costs of operating and maintaining the systems, ensuring reliable access for today and generations to come.

Advertising

In preparation for the Open Houses, a new page was added to the County's website. The [LAM Water](#) page (under 'For Residents') is intended to be the housing area for project information and communication as the project develops. The page's launch included a project history, an FAQ, letters for residents to send to MLAs, information on the Open Houses, and maps outlining the project phases in each community. With the Open Houses now past, this page includes the slides that were posted during the sessions and will continue to share project updates as the County progresses.

The Open Houses were advertised by radio, newspaper, and on the County's Facebook page. Residents were also notified by mail, with an invite included in their January utility bill (mailed on February 15).

Newspaper

¼ page ad on February 6 and February 13

Lottie Lake, Ashmont, Mallaig

LAM WATER OPEN HOUSES

Join the County of St. Paul No. 19 and Councillors Maxine Fodness (Division 4), Dale Hedrick (Division 5), and Louis Dechaine (Division 6) to discuss the **water and wastewater infrastructure replacements** proposed for Lottie Lake, Ashmont, and Mallaig - called the **LAM Water** project.

- Ratepayer impact
- Project phases
- Provincial support

Submit your questions ahead of the Open Houses to LAMwater@county.stpaul.ab.ca and visit our website for more.

FEB 7 P.M.

Ashmont
February 20
Ashmont Legion

Lottie Lake
February 21
Cork Hall

Mallaig
February 22
Mallaig Legion

Radio

Stingray Radio, Real Country 97.7

30-second ads, twice a day, from February 7-19

Facebook

Cover photo change on February 6

Lottie Lake, Ashmont, Mallaig

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with the County of St. Paul and Councillors Maxine Fodness (Division 4), Dale Hedrick (Division 5), and Louis Dechaine (Division 6)

Join us to discuss the **water and wastewater infrastructure replacements** proposed for Lottie Lake, Ashmont, and Mallaig - called the **LAM Water** project.

Refreshments provided!

- Ratepayer impact
- Project phases
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Ashmont
February 20
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Lottie Lake
February 21
Cork Hall

Mallaig
February 22
Mallaig Legion

Email your questions ahead of time to LAMwater@county.stpaul.ab.ca

One design per session, shared 1 week before their date and reshared the afternoon of the same day.

Lottie Lake, Ashmont, Mallaig

LAM WATER OPEN HOUSE

with the County of St. Paul and Councillor Louis Dechaine

Water and wastewater infrastructure for Mallaig in the LAM Water project

Ask Us:

- Ratepayer impact
- Project phases
- How to get involved

FEBRUARY 22
Starts at 7 p.m.
Mallaig Legion
Refreshments provided!

Lottie Lake, Ashmont, Mallaig

LAM WATER OPEN HOUSE

with the County of St. Paul and Councillor Maxine Fodness

Water infrastructure for Lottie Lake in the LAM Water project

Ask Us:

- Ratepayer impact
- Project phases
- How to get involved

FEBRUARY 21
Starts at 7 p.m.
Cork Hall
Refreshments provided!

Lottie Lake, Ashmont, Mallaig

LAM WATER OPEN HOUSE

with the County of St. Paul and Councillor Dale Hedrick

Water and wastewater infrastructure for Ashmont in the LAM Water project

Ask Us:

- Ratepayer impact
- Project phases
- How to get involved

FEBRUARY 20
Starts at 7 p.m.
Ashmont Legion
Refreshments provided!

Open House Conversations

Open House Summary

February 20	February 21	February 22
Ashmont Legion	Cork Hall (Lottie Lake)	Mallaig Legion
6:30 p.m. – 8 p.m.	6:45 p.m. – 8 p.m.	7 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
Attendees: 15	Attendees: 3 (including media)	Attendees: 24
MLA Letters Taken: 17	MLA Letters Taken: 7	MLA Letters Taken: 13
Council: 6 members	Council: 6 members	Council: 3 members
County Staff: 5 (including CAO)	County Staff: 4 (including CAO)	County Staff: 3 (including CAO)
Consultants: 3	Consultants: 3	Consultants: 3

We were happy to see attendees take MLA letters for those who were unable to make the Open Houses.

Some residents who couldn't attend the open houses, provided their comments via email using the project email lamwater@county.stpaul.ab.ca or contacted the County office by phone.

From the conversations at the three Open Houses and correspondence with residents, we have been able to categorize the questions, comments, and feedback into categories with overarching concerns:

Project Support

- There's an overall understanding that this is a project that needs to get done because the infrastructure is reaching its end of life.
- Few comments were made about "fixing it once and for all" and not putting "band-aids" on it as it will prolong interruption and further worsening of the roads and pavement conditions.
- There was a general understanding of the poor quality of the original construction of the systems and the problems they have been causing.
- In Mallaig, there were comments about their Sewer System being more in need of fixing than their water system.
- Generally, it felt like there was excitement around the idea of upgrading/replacing the current Lottie Lake water system (paired with some trepidation about the cost). The residents would be happy to have full pressure from the water system with no sediment in the lines.
- There is a general understanding of cost increases and inflation impact on the project cost.

Cost Concerns

- Unease about not knowing definite project costs.
- Questions posed about the project cost continuing to increase due to inflation and what would occur then. Residents fear their rates would continue to increase to account for it.
- Concerns about what would happen if there was no provincial funding available.
- A resident heard rumours that the County would cut off water access if they did not pay \$25,000.
- Residents are wondering if there will be an additional financial cost to lot owners now or in the future that is over and above the current monthly payments.
- Concerns about water bills increasing after the water distribution lines are replaced.

- Comments were made about how the Capital Replacement Contribution on their utility bills will never be discontinued.
- The most comments we heard about utility rates were objections to capital replacement contribution rather than the slight increase in the fixed service charges. *There seems to be an understanding that the increase in fixed service charges was not unreasonable due to inflation and cost increases post-pandemic.*
- Shocked over the recent increase in the utility bill, they didn't feel they were not given enough advance notice or eased into it. *It was unclear how many had read the notices of planned increases in previous bills.*
- Concern over utility bills continuing to increase year over year. Concern that utility bills would increase, and they would see no upgrades to their system.
- Some concerns about recent utility bill increases and questions about how much the planned water system replacement will cost.
- Residents were frustrated with the increased bills and the County's approach to managing the situation. *When asked about other alternatives or solutions they would like, common responses were the rates just need to be lowered.*
- Some residents commented that the utility rate increase could make living in the hamlets less affordable and result in people moving out and prevent people from moving in, which could have negative economic impacts: "No one will come here to live and it's just going to get worse!"
- One resident expressed confusion and frustration that their water bill could not remain at \$22/month as it had been when they first moved to the County.
- Multiple residents indicated they would have to either sell or move because of the increased utility rates. The cost of living in Mallaig is too high and no longer affordable.

Cost Allocation

- There is a general feeling that the whole municipality should be paying for this project.
- Since the water infrastructure is County infrastructure, there is a feeling that more money for the project should be coming from General tax revenue.
- Feeling that the County had known about these issues and should have done more and therefore it is justified for more of the project to be funded by the general taxes.
- "We need to see more of our current taxes used towards this project. I believe our tax mill rate is in the top 80% of the Province, and it is the responsibility of our taxes to give us water and sewer. More of our current taxes need to go towards this project."
- Fear about the Province not providing any funding, wondering how the County would manage the situation and how it would affect residents.
- Mallaig wondered, if they were the last hamlet to be addressed and all the \$23 million budget had been spent, would they still get the required upgrades?
- Lottie Lake wondered if any consideration would be made for seasonal residents.

Current Conditions

- Some residents could remember when the waterlines were installed and could remember the number of times they were without water when breaks were repaired.
- Residents initially believed the regional line was planned for rehabilitation and were confused as to why it had to be redone after such a short period. Confusion and anger at why the regional line would be failing so soon.

- Residents shared concerns about their community's reliance on Edmonton Water as the source. Residents wanted to know what backup options exist, and if they have any safeguards in place.
- Limited awareness of the condition of the water distribution system or pumping facilities.
- Little-to-no awareness about the poor condition of the sanitary collection system, how old the lines are, that breaks were even possible, and that the condition of individual services is the resident's responsibility.
- Residents wondered why this was the first time they heard of the planned upgrades or heard any message about the condition of the system being shared.
- Residents were surprised about the poor condition of the system, and how low the water pressure was in some houses.
- Lottie Lake residents mentioned they often have sediment in their water.
- Frustration that breaks and repairs keep happening which interrupts their service frequently.
- Residents questioned the quality of work of the existing lines and commented about the poor quality of material for the existing lines, which become exposed when breaks are repaired.
- Residents in the new Mallaig subdivision are confused about why their lines are bad already and need replacement.
- Question regarding the condition of the sanitary lines, if camera work had been done over the years, and how it showed the change in condition.
- Some residents remarked that the water system needs more valves for greater control and operation. Some residents were tired of the whole community having their water shut off when only one area had a water main break.
- Concerns shared about rates continuing to increase yet may not see an improved service provided to the residents.

Project Scope

- There were questions about the project construction schedule and completion timeline.
- There was an understanding that the timing of the project is dependent on funding availability.
- Curious as to who the contractor in charge of this project is.
- Asking how the work will affect road traffic while the work is being done (i.e. will there be road closures).
- Concerns from residents about not having access to water services during construction, especially residents that live in Ashmont Beach. *Worries that the water main construction will interrupt water service for many weeks.*
- A few residents asked if the rest of the homes in Ashmont Beach would be connected to the piped water system. They are currently trucking water from St. Paul since some water trucks don't fit/want to use the Ashmont truck fill.
- Questions about if a sewer collection system would be installed in Lottie Lake when the water replacements are completed.
- Questions about fire protection (fire hydrants) being included in the design for system upgrades as this would reduce property insurance costs for residents. Also asking if there is any way to make it easier for fire trucks to fill up.
- Questions about whether the waterline replacement will include replacements up to the house. If it doesn't and the resident is responsible for the cost – when would the resident have to decide to go ahead with paying for it or not? Comments about their jet pumps and how they would have to remove and reconfigure their private operations.
- Residents wondered about the direct effects of construction on their property: how it will affect land and trees and if they have a say in where any water lines through their property can run.

- Question regarding a rumour that existing water lines are the used water lines that were replaced in the Town of St. Paul. If this was the case, would lot owners receive compensation for the needed replacements now?
- Wondering if the existing water lines are going to be removed completely.

Construction and Material Quality

- There were specific comments about selecting the right experts and contractors to install the pipes and build the roads. It seems there's a concern that the County is planning to do this in-house and build the project.
- Concerns were shared about past work done to replace or repair the water or sanitary systems that weren't to a standard or quality that residents would expect. *Upon further discussion, quality seemed to represent how long something lasted before it failed or needed to be repaired.*
- One resident expressed hope for a qualified contractor to complete the work (instead of the lowest price, *implying that the lowest price was bad*) with appropriate oversight/inspection to ensure conformance with industry standards/specifications.
- Residents shared anger over past jobs the County has completed and done poorly. *It was unclear if they meant County crews performing work, or Contractors hired by the County.*
- Questions regarding the quality of the work, and if it would be a similar situation as they currently face the same things being repaired over and over.
- Few comments were made about ensuring the quality of material used for construction and selecting the right contractors to avoid ending up with a less-than-optimal product.
- Many concerns were shared over how quality would be managed for the proposed replacements, and that if it was going to be fixed/replaced it needed to be fixed correctly.
- Wishes for oversight (inspection) to be provided during the construction.
- Looking for assurance that the lines being installed are new.