

Administrative Report May 25, 2023

Parkland County Wastewater Transfer Station Fees & Charges 2023 Update

Parkland County disposes of sewage (wastewater) via gravity sewers to the Alberta Capital Region Wastewater Commission (ACRWC) for the residential areas near Big Lake and the Acheson industrial area, along with the City of Spruce Grove and the Town of Stony Plain. In addition, the County has two truck haul sewage discharge transfer stations; the Villeneuve station located near Hwy 44 and Hwy 16 and the Stony Plain Transfer Station located within the Town of Stony Plain industrial area that also connect directly into ACRWC's gravity sewage system.

These two sewage transfer stations accept residential, commercial and industrial wastewater from truck haulers from the surrounding area, within and outside of the County including summer villages. ACRWC charges the County for the transmission and treatment of this wastewater and the County, in turn, charges the waste haulers to dispose of their wastewater. Wastewater haulers are issued key cards to access these fenced facilities 24/7.

Over 10 years ago, the ACRWC developed their Source Control Program to manage discharges into the sanitary sewer system to protect their infrastructure, public health and safety, the environment and the North Saskatchewan River. This program included updating their bylaws to identify and control prohibited and restricted waste and to charge additional fees for two tiers of overstrength wastewater being released into their sanitary sewer system. ACRWC also had member municipalities change their bylaws in a similar manner so that both ACRWC and the member municipalities could deal with this wastewater jointly¹.

The historical overstrength charges to the County from ACRWC are attached². The total overstrength charges for the County in 2023 are estimated at \$417,031 subject to changes in ACRWC's charges from July 1 to December 31, 2023, which could increase this number to over \$500,000. Because these overstrength charges have surged over the last few years, this has impacted the County's budget significantly and has resulted in some necessary increases on rates charged to existing haulers to try to reduce the losses incurred through the operation of these two wastewater transfer stations. Administration believes that the increase in charges over the years has been a result of the rate increases from ACRWC, the volume of wastewater increasing and the overstrength quality of the wastewater.

The County currently pays ACRWC a disposal rate of \$1.50/ m³ for sewage, similar to the other members of the Commission plus an additional \$9.63/m³ currently for overstrength charges for sewage collected at these two wastewater transfer stations (blended rate based on different rates for each station). The County's January 1, 2023, charges for wastewater disposed of at these two transfer stations was \$7.77 m³, however, the current estimated costs (excluding any capital depreciation or

¹ See Attachment No. 1, Schedules C, D & E from County Wastewater Bylaw 2020-08

² See Attachment No. 2, ACRWC Overstrength Charges to Parkland County

replacement for the existing infrastructure) is approximately \$11.47/m³ ³. Therefore, as per the clause in the 2023 Fees and Charges schedule ⁴ whereby any additional overstrength charges may be levied, the County sent a letter⁵ on March 7, 2023, giving haulers notice that rates would be increased to \$10/m³ effective May 1, 2023, to help offset some of this additional cost. Haulers were also informed that the rate would be going to \$11.50/m³ on January 1st, 2024, to fully recover the County's operational costs. Currently the County's Utility Restricted Surplus Account is funding the shortfall.

In light of the significant overstrength charges from ACRWC that were not being collected from users of the two transfer stations, Public Works took a more pro-active role to deal with this issue. In the Fall of 2022, staff determined how to program the existing automatic samplers at the wastewater transfer station sites to only test specific haulers when they dumped periodically at the stations. Wastewater samples were taken over several weeks for specific haulers to gather enough sewage for testing each hauler. Prior to this, it was difficult to pinpoint which hauler was responsible for overstrength sewage. Once testing results showed that overstrength sewage was being received from our larger residential haulers, discussions and meetings were held with haulers to inform them of the County's test results, the costs of running the stations, get their feedback on the current charges, the use of the sites, manifests, customers who may be impacted by a rate increase, options that could be looked at, etc. Upon subsequent testing, it appears that all haulers tested to date have overstrength sewage, with some haulers having a higher degree of overstrength sewage than others. Due to the difficulty and resource constraints in trying to identify the degree of overstrength for each hauler and not to delay the elimination of this shortfall in funding every year from overstrength charges, Administration has simply increased the rates for all haulers.

The County will continue to individually test wastewater haulers but this takes considerable time to complete. Public Works is considering the merits of further testing including periodically hiring a contractor to collect samples of all haulers in a one- or two-day campaign set up at both transfer stations to test each truck using the facility. Based on the results, the County could potentially charge haulers individual rates depending on their overstrength wastewater quality. The approximate cost for this testing would be about \$12,000 for all haulers and this fee could be included in the rates. This may better incentivize haulers to help reduce their individual overstrength charges. If prohibited or restricted waste is found, then fines or removal of their access for some period of time initially with a permanent ban for repeat offenders could be implemented. Another option to consider is using an outside consultant to look at various options on how to address these issues such that rates for haulers, and therefore their customers, are more reasonable⁶.

Of note, in the Fall of 2022, the ACRWC did a grab sample at the Villeneuve station and discovered a serious case of prohibited and restricted waste that had been disposed of. Upon ACRWC investigating with the help of the County and reviewing manifests, the hauler was identified and found to have omitted recording a load with extremely toxic and possibly explosive liquids. Rather than fining the hauler under our Bylaw, Public Works banned the hauler from the waste transfer stations for two

³ See Attachment No. 3, 2023 Budget Deficit and Pricing

⁴ See Attachment No. 4, Schedule J.2, from 2023 Fees and Charges Bylaw

⁵ See Attachment No. 5, March 7, 2023 Letter to Wastewater haulers on rate increases

⁶ See Attachment No. 6, Options for the Wastewater transfer stations

months. After working with the County to ensure future such events did not reoccur, the hauler was allowed back to dispose after one month.

There are alternate sewage waste transfer stations within the other Counties surrounding Edmonton in addition to the City of Edmonton's site on the west end, close to Anthony Henday Drive. In addition, there are private commercial waste disposal stations available to handle non-sewage waste disposal at much higher disposal rates.

Also, after the letter to haulers was issued in March about the fee increase to use the waste transfer stations from \$7.77/m³ to \$10/m³ on May 1, 2023, some haulers called to express their concern about the haulers out west near Entwistle that could 'poach' clients from haulers just west of Edmonton due to the price differential of the current \$10/m³ at the Villeneuve and Stony Plain Transfer Stations vs the existing Entwistle lagoon dumping fee of \$4.13/m³. In light of these real concerns, Public Works made a decision to increase the Entwistle dumping rate the same 28% increase May 1st as the two wastewater transfer stations. Therefore, on May 1, 2023, the Entwistle truck sewage disposal rates were increased to \$5.32/m³.

With regard to impacts on County residents from 2023 to 2024, for those residents with 3000-gallon (13.6 m³) holding tanks that get emptied once per month, an additional (\$11.50/m³ - \$7.77/m³) x 13.6m³ = \$51 additional would be incurred by a resident per month. Those residents with a septic field system with a 10m³ tank emptied on a yearly basis would pay an extra \$3.11 per month and those with treatment systems and a 13.6m³ tank emptied every 2nd year would incur an additional \$2.11 per month.

Attachments:

1. Schedules C, D & E from County Wastewater Bylaw 2020-08
2. ACRWC Overstrength Charges to Parkland County
3. 2023 Budget Deficit and Pricing
4. Schedule J.2, from 2023 Fees and Charges Bylaw
5. March 7, 2023 Letter to Wastewater haulers on rate increases
6. Options for the Wastewater Transfer Stations
7. ACRW 2023 Charges
8. ACRWC Jan 1, 2023 to June 30, 2023 Load Based Charges, July 1, 2022 to December 31, 2022 Load Based Charges and Jan 1, 2022 to June 30, 2022 Load Based Charges
9. ACRWC Email May 4, 2023 with latest test results