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South Cooking Lake Residential Water Fill Strathcona County

What We Heard Report September 26, 2019

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1.0 Project Background

Strathcona County commissioned a third-party public engagement firm to lead a public engagement process with residents in the South Cooking Lake area to get their input on a residential scale water fill station to be located at the fire station in the hamlet of South Cooking Lake.

A Citizen Input Panel was created to help inform the public engagement team on how to best engage with people in the community. This group of people, who lived in the catchment area in Ward 7, provided insight on the project and ideas on how to best reach citizens in the community.

Strathcona County's public engagement on a residential water fill station in South Cooking Lake first began in 2010. A previous engagement process was conducted through an open house, customer conversations at existing County water fill stations (Ardrossan, Half Moon Lake and Sherwood Drive) and the Beaver County-owned truck fill as well as an online questionnaire.

On October 25, 2016, administration presented Council the results of the South Strathcona County Truck Fill resident needs and satisfaction survey. As a result, Council passed a motion to cancel the South Strathcona County Truck Fill project.

In October 2017, a municipal election was held and a new ward councillor was elected. Glen Lawrence, met with residents who live in South Cooking Lake and supported the water fill station, resulting in a desire to proceed with an additional public engagement process.

In July of 2018 Council passed a motion to determine the community support for a residential water fill to be located in the hamlet of South Cooking Lake. Strathcona County administration reviewed six possible locations within the hamlet and recommended that the South Cooking Lake fire station to be the most suitable location.

A Request for Proposal was issued to ensure that the public engagement process conformed to Strathcona County municipal policies and guidelines.

The public engagement process focused on a community-driven approach to determine community support for a residential water fill station to be located at the fire station in the hamlet of South Cooking Lake.

2.0 Methodology

The public engagement process relied on members of the South Cooking Lake area to develop the process for public engagement. A Citizen Input Panel (CIP) was formed to:

- bring the viewpoints of the community forward

- design a public engagement process that would attract residents and encourage them to discuss those viewpoints and determine the level of community support for a residential water fill station at the fire station in the hamlet of South Cooking Lake.

2.1 Citizen Input Panel

“Nothing about us without us” was a theme that guided the public engagement process.

The people who are impacted by the decision were invited to be involved in a Citizen Input Panel (CIP) that would participate in three ways:

- being actively engaged in providing background material on the views of the community,
- assisting with developing the process design for public engagement,
- demonstrating leadership in the community.

Residents were invited to apply to be on the CIP at a Ward 7 Town Hall with Mayor Frank and Councillor Lawrence. Applications forms were available at the meeting, at the fire station and on line. Nine residents in the South Cooking Lake area applied and were accepted, six of whom participated throughout the entire process. They all had an interest in the project and held diverse views. The CIP was not a decision-making body but rather, provided local knowledge, insight and advice. CIP members agreed to a Terms of Reference and Statement of Agreement.

The CIP was shown the other potential locations that were reviewed for the water fill station within the hamlet of South Cooking Lake boundary with explanations as to why the fire station was recommended. The CIP discussed the locations and validated the recommended location by voting in favor of proceeding with the public engagement for the fire station location.

Incorporating a CIP ensured that the engagement process was connected to a cross section of the community. The group served as a sounding board, providing insights on the history of the project and the thinking of community members. They also designed the main public engagement session and offered input and feedback on preliminary data analysis.

2.2 Drop in Event

The CIP determined that a drop-in event would be an effective way to achieve community input. The event was held at the South Cooking Lake fire station on July 23 from 4:00-8:00 p.m. The purpose of the event was to gauge citizen support for a residential water fill station located at the South Cooking Lake fire station.

The event was intended to attract families and those people who normally do not attend public engagement events.

3.0 Communications

There was extensive communications outreach for the event including:

- posters throughout the community
- hand-delivered letters to residents in the hamlet
- e-mails to those who get water from other locations
- ads in the newspapers
- social media.

4.0 What We Heard

Approximately 90 participants attended the engagement event which was family-friendly and included activities such as mini-golf, face painting and balloon art, popcorn and hot dogs. Most participants were residents of the hamlet, with the remainder of participants spread throughout the catchment area. Participants appreciated the friendly tone of the event, suggesting that it assisted in easing tensions that may have lingered from previous attempts to determine community support for a residential water fill station.

“This is great - a community event with a good purpose.”

“I like the friendly atmosphere of this approach. I can talk freely.”

The following engagement tools and techniques were incorporated at the event and will be described in detail below:

- Feedback Frames
- scribed conversations and sticky notes on concept boards, including two drawings depicting location on the fire station site
- perceived risk and mitigation comment sheets

The data, from written notes, sticky note comments and Feedback Frames, showed majority support for the residential water fill station to be located at the fire station. Participants commented on convenience, access and cost savings as the benefits of a water fill station at the fire station which would improve their quality of life in the South Cooking Lake area.

*“Yes! We need this fill station! South Cooking Lake hamlet is large enough to warrant its own station! Easier both in summer but most of all in the winter!
Saves \$\$\$”*

“We all pay taxes. Give the residences of rural Strathcona this. Need fulfilled.”

A small group of attendees residing in South Cooking Lake strongly opposed Strathcona County revisiting the need for this residential water fill station.

“This is a pile of crap. Will not listen to no. Keep bringing this back.”

“Sherwood Park has everything.”

4.1 Feedback Frame Results

Feedback Frames are a group decision making tool that allow participants to confidentially vote on their preferences. Participants drop one token per frame on a scale of agreement to record his or her opinion, and sign to validate it.

Votes are anonymous. Each participant’s vote remains confidential which avoids intimidation, the bandwagon effect and groupthink of sticker voting or town hall ‘raising of hands.’



Two different colours of tokens were used: one for residents in the catchment area and another for people who lived outside of it.

One token was given for each property for those who chose to vote for a total of 79 properties represented. Of these 79 properties, 10 were from outside of the identified catchment area. The majority of the properties were in the hamlet.

The Feedback Frames were used to track participants’ level of agreement on three questions:

- To what extent do you agree with building a residential water fill station at the fire station?
- To what extent do you think that the residential water fill station should be visually pleasing?
- To what extent do you think that the residential water fill station should complement the look of the fire station?

The Feedback Frame tool also had a section where participants could comment on strengths, opportunities, concerns and challenges related to the question.

Here are the detailed results of the Feedback Frame questions:

To what extent do you agree with building a residential water fill station at the fire station?

Strong Agreement	Agreement	Neutral	Disagreement	Strong Disagreement	Not Sure
51 + 3 outside of the area	5 + 7 outside of the area	0	3	10	0

Strengths and Opportunities

Great for efficiency and close to home
 Great idea! Needed for awhile now!
 We have waited a long time! 100% support
 Its about time that this area of the county has this
 GREAT IDEA!! ABOUT TIME!!
 Anywhere—to service this SE area
 Lower entire SCL road speed to reduce the risk of speeding through the area.

Concerns and Challenges

More traffic, ice in winter, more noise in area.
 Totally disagree. Too close to school and active fire station and ambulance service
 Ridiculous spot to put it
 Child safety
 Increased traffic
 We voted against it 5 years ago
 Put it somewhere all residents could agree on
 Shall exclude commercial water hazards
 Not happy about proposed location. Too many people driving on SCL roads like it's a highway already. Traffic safety for kids walking, on bikes, etc. is already a huge concern

To what extent do you think that the residential water fill station should be visually pleasing?

Strong Agreement	Agreement	Neutral	Disagreement	Strong Disagreement	Not Sure
30 + two outside of the area	16	14	1	0	0

Strengths and Opportunities

Fill station to be treed in, not fenced

Yes! Blends into what's already been, but not a big change to land or roads

That is a tall order to make it appealing to look at

If attached to the fire station it would blend well

Concerns and Challenges

If you are putting in the station one way or the other, I should be able to choose an option whether I want the station or not.

Whose responsibility is it to maintain the area/roads surrounding the water fill station?

To what extent do you think that the residential water fill station should complement the look of the fire station?

Strong Agreement	Agreement	Neutral	Disagreement	Strong Disagreement	Not Sure
29	15 + one outside of the area	10 + one outside of the area	0	0	0

Strength and Opportunities

That would be perfect

Concerns and Challenges

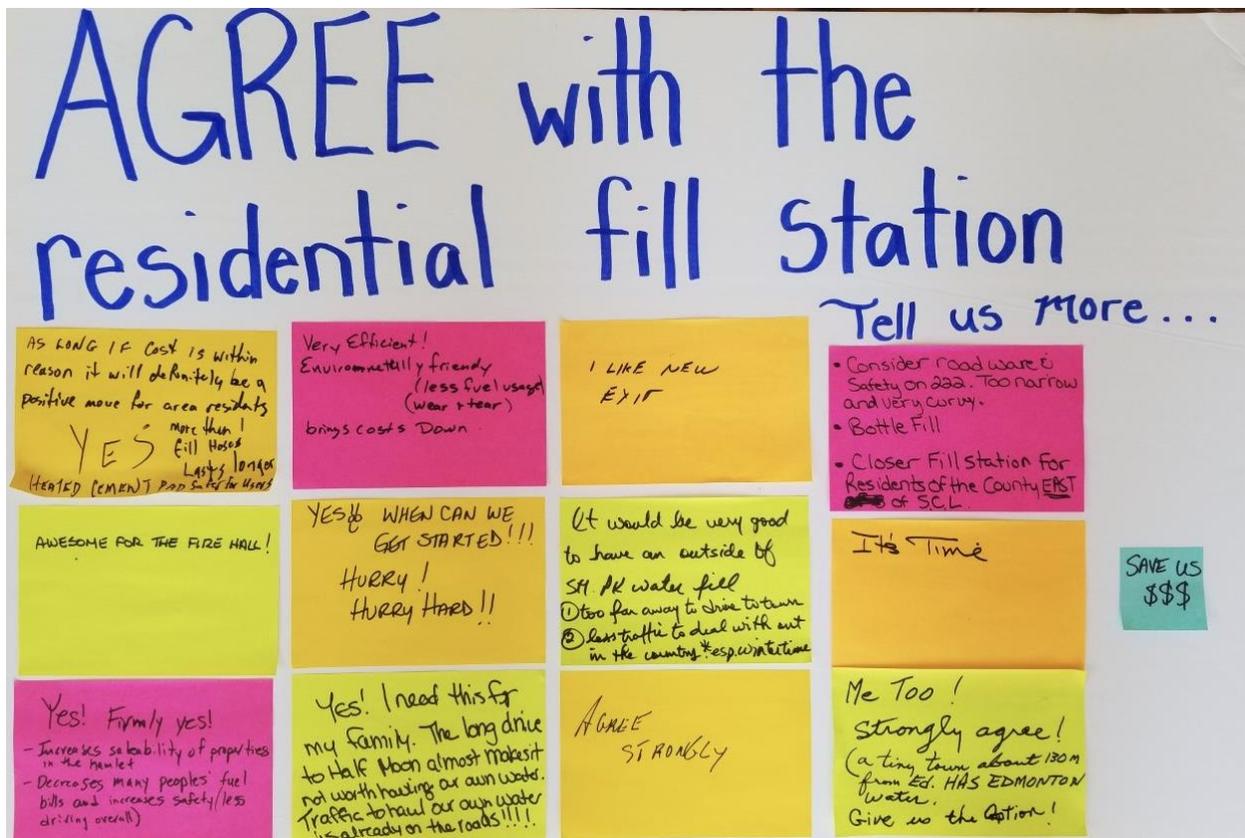
Ice, noise, proximity to the school

The support for the residential water fill station was decisive. The results indicate that 81% of property owners who attended the event support the residential water fill station, while 19% are opposed. This provides clear direction on the decision to be made.

4.2 Scribed Conversations and Sticky Note Results

Verbal comments were recorded verbatim by independent scribes. Participants were also invited to write their views on sticky notes.

A strong majority of conversations reflected overwhelming support for the residential water fill station at the South Cooking Lake fire station, although a small group was also vehemently opposed to the location.



One of two 'Agree' boards

4.2.1 Agree with the residential water fill station at the South Cooking Lake fire station

Three common themes emerged from those in favor of the project:

- the community needs the residential water fill station
- it is 'about time' to have a residential water fill station in South Cooking Lake
- like the proposed fire station location within South Cooking Lake

The community needs the residential water fill station

The majority of participants expressed a strong need to have a residential water fill station located at the fire station. They thought that access to water in the hamlet was essential for quality of life, convenience, property value, and reasonable financial costs.

Participants also thought that a residential water fill station located in their community would reduce the numbers of commercial haulers driving through the community, thus reducing noise and heavy truck traffic through a residential neighbourhood.

“Priority right now-this is needed. We needed the water here yesterday. Solutions are in abundance. Please let’s go forward without delay.”

“Yes! Finally, yes! First, it increases saleability of properties in the hamlet. Second, it decreases many people's fuel bills and increases safety”

“Less driving overall.”

“Yes! This residential fill station is long overdue for the benefit of all the residents. Because of the proximity of the fill station to most houses, people can fit the fill procedures into their regular tasks and errands, minimizing increased vehicular traffic, plus reducing the noise and road deterioration from the commercial haulers coming into the hamlet (which have had tremendous rate increases in the past few years).”

“This water will bring it close to home. The County is listening to us.”

It is ‘about time’ to have a residential water fill station in South Cooking Lake

Participants felt that this decision was long overdue and urged Strathcona County to move forward quickly with the project. Their comments reflected their frustration with delays in getting a residential water fill station in South Cooking Lake.

“It is almost inconceivable that we still don’t have this option in our hamlet. Let’s get the shovels in the ground. “Build that tap!!”

“Enough – this has been going on for too long. Just do it.”

“I am annoyed with taking all this time to make a decision. Just do it.”

Others felt that the lack of access to a residential water fill station in ‘this day and age’ was a reflection on their community and that the time had come to address that shortcoming.

“To me this is a great idea and a necessity. We are not a third world here.”

“I hope this thing goes ahead. I have lived here for over 50 years.”

Proposed fire station location within South Cooking Lake

Participants that were in favour of the residential water fill station supported the fire station location. They felt that because the location was on the “outskirts of the community” and in a “semi-industrial” area, that the disruption to the community would be minimal. They also thought that the location was conveniently situated and would result in less fuel emissions and travel time.

“Yes! I need this for my family. The long drive to Half Moon almost makes it not worth hauling our own water. Traffic to haul our own water is already on the roads.”

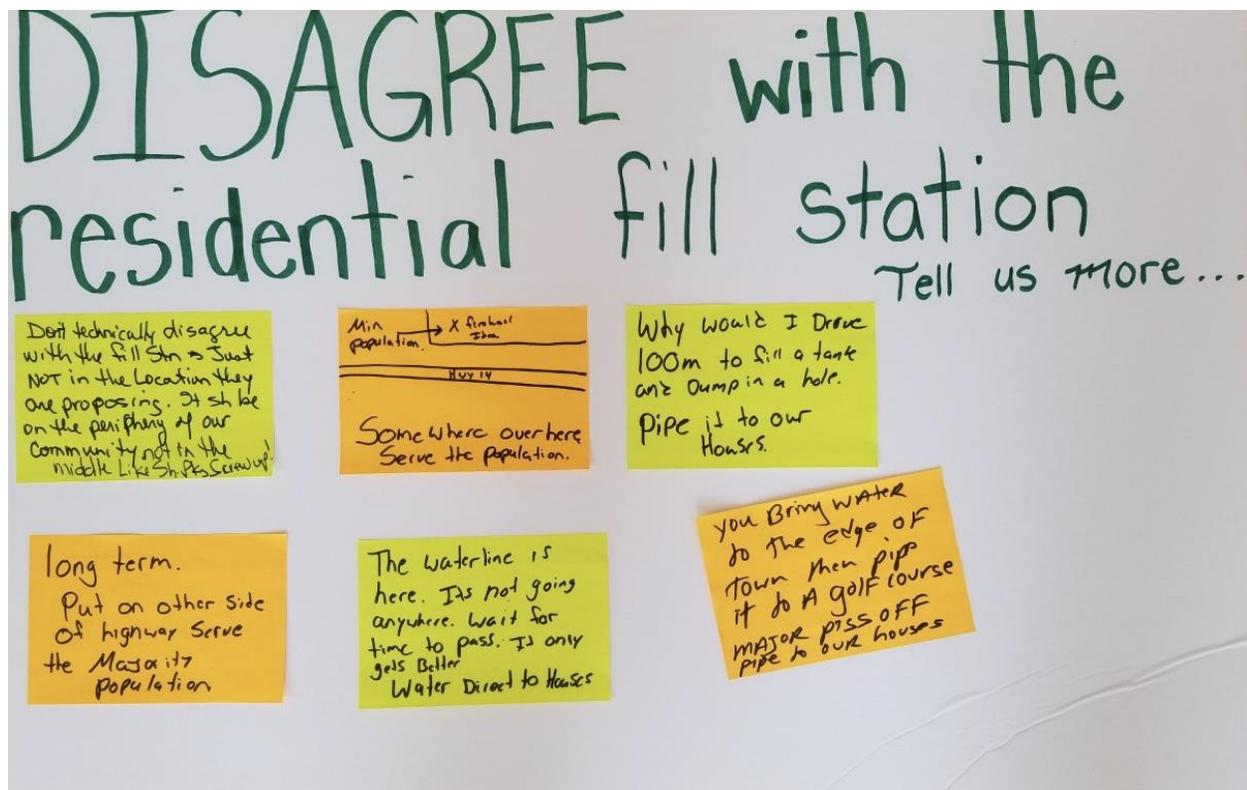
“Right now, I am spending 2 hrs. going to get water.”

“I drive 26 km to get to and from Half Moon. This would be 26km. I am not driving anymore.”

Participants also thought that having the water fill station located at the fire station would benefit the Emergency Services Department and their ability to respond to fire calls.

“Fire department will have better access to water.”

“It doesn’t really affect us, but it’s great for the community and especially the fire station.”



'Disagree' Board

4.2.2 Disagree with the residential water fill station at the South Cooking Lake fire station

A small number of participants opposed the water fill station at the South Cooking Lake fire station.

Two common themes emerged from those opposed to the project:

- proposed fire station location within South Cooking Lake
- mistrust of Strathcona County and the public engagement process.

Proposed fire station location within South Cooking Lake

Those who opposed the residential water fill station agreed with the need for a residential water fill station but disagreed with the location of the facility.

"Don't technically disagree with the fill station just not in the location they are proposing. It should be on the periphery of our community not in the middle like Sherwood Parks. Screw up!"

"I don't care where they put it just not here."

“Middle of my community – want it at the airport or periphery.”

“Don’t put in growth node.”

Those opposed to the location didn’t believe that Strathcona County had researched other locations, despite conversations with County administration outlining why other locations were not suitable.

“They never researched other locations. Their defense doesn’t hold water.”

Other concerns from those who disagree with the location are captured in Section 4.3 Perceived Risks and Mitigation Comments.

Mistrust of Strathcona County and the Public Engagement Process

Those opposed to the residential water fill station expressed a mistrust for Strathcona County, and thus the process that was used to seek the perspectives of the community.

*“This is the 4th time we have had this come up... seriously??
Does this only stop once the County gets its way?”*

“Right now, its residential. In a year it will be commercial.”

“Funny how things change.”

“Never trust the County.”

Participants who opposed the project also challenged the process used to seek input from residents. They believed that votes and comments should be restricted to those who physically live in the hamlet of South Cooking Lake. In their view, residents in the catchment area outlined by the County should not have a say in the process.

“Non-hamlet residents should not be allowed to have a say in the decision.”

“People who don’t physically live in the community should not be given a vote because it is a swaying hugely what the residents actually want! Quite unfair!”

Those opposed also disagreed with the drop-in format of the community event. They would have preferred a traditional town hall approach.

“I’m just thinking about all the money being wasted with all these votes. I’m sick of coming out here and you keep coming out; here it’s a waste of time.”

“Detest these open houses. It muzzles us so they can do what want. People should be able to see who is saying what.”

4.3 Perceived Risks and Mitigation Comments

Mitigation sheets presented at the event outlined potential barriers and mitigation strategies. Participants were invited to comment on the barriers and mitigations.

The content on the mitigation sheets was created by the CIP. They identified concerns that they themselves had or that they had heard from the community. The CIP then gathered data and brainstormed solutions to mitigate the concerns. The participants at the drop-in event were invited to comment on the risks and mitigations. The risks identified by the CIP were:

- Safety for children
- Increased traffic merging onto Highway 14
- Increased traffic through the community
- Unsafe and/or inadequate water hauling equipment
- Misconception on size of the residential water fill stations
- Icy roads in winter conditions
- Impact on property values.

Safety for Children

Those opposed to the location of the residential water fill station identified the risk to children from St. Luke Catholic School as a major concern.

To assess the concern of those who felt children were at risk, traffic cameras were installed to observe children’s movements around the school. Over a 24/7 period from June 3 - 9, 2019 three children were seen crossing South Cooking Lake Road or near the fire station. Those who disagreed with the residential water fill station being located at the fire station thought that the cameras captured



'too short a time period' and that winter conditions and the toboggan hill should be considered. Most participants felt that danger to school children was not an issue.

"I don't see a safety issue because kids shouldn't be on the road and we already have a 30 km speed limit. I don't get the problem."

"Kid's from school won't be here."

Other participants strongly disagreed that children at the school were at risk in the event of increased residential truck traffic.

"I don't see why the water fill would be a problem any more than the fire trucks."

"The school kids don't really ever leave the school. They don't need to. They left the last day of school to go to the store and that was about it."

Strathcona County confirmed with school administration that students are not allowed to leave the school premises during school hours, and that school administration had no concerns with the fire station location.

Increased traffic merging onto Highway 14

Increased traffic merging onto Highway 14 was a perceived risk by some; however, most participants at the drop-in event did not think that this was a significant risk.

"Try to get onto Highway 14 at a high traffic time. Someone will be killed!"

Under the direction of the CIP, Strathcona County staff requested traffic and highway information from Strathcona County Transportation Planning and Engineering department. They found that the times the fill station would typically be used according to usage patterns of other fill stations is when traffic is the lightest. Traffic information indicates that traffic is not anticipated to increase significantly on Highway 14 in the years ahead. The majority of participants at the drop-in event did not think that this was a significant risk.

“Beaver County fill has vehicles having to enter onto Highway 14. No issues.”

Increased traffic through the community

Increased traffic through the community was a perceived risk by some; however, the majority of participants at the drop-in event did not think that this was a significant risk.

Participants suggested that the people driving through the hamlet are those who live there. Users from outside South Cooking Lake would use South Cooking Lake Road to get to Highway 14. Engineering design and access to the proposed location can mitigate any traffic on Lower South Cooking Lake Road.

Unsafe and/or inadequate water hauling equipment

People using unsafe and/or inadequate water hauling equipment was a perceived risk. Participants felt that this could be managed through education and enforcement and therefore was not a significant risk.

Misconception on size of the residential water fill stations

Rumours about the size of the water fill station was considered a risk that required clarification. Efforts were made to communicate that if approved, the water fill station would be for residential use only and would not be accessible for commercial haulers. Participants expressed satisfaction that the size of the facility reflects their wishes for a residential water fill station. They emphasized that the engineering design must be such that commercial trucks would be restricted.

“Only thing, hope there is no big trucks.”

*“There has to be a way to not have commercial trucks.
How will we keep commercial trucks out?”*

“Commercial trucks will be kept out? Okey dokey and keep it that way please.”

Icy roads in winter conditions

Icy roads in winter conditions were identified as a perceived risk. South Cooking Lake Road is categorized by the County’s Transportation and Agriculture Services department as a Priority 2, which means snow is to be removed within 12 hours or when the Priority 1 roads have been completed. Although the risks should be mitigated by maintenance crews, not all participants trusted the County’s ability to maintain the site.

“I would definitely like a fill station here but am very concerned by the icy roads, etc. Maintenance has never been done well in the first place, it’s always icy in winter.”

Impact on property values

Impact on property values as a result of a residential water fill station at the fire station was identified as a perceived risk by those with nearby properties. Most participants who attended the event disagreed, suggesting that the opposite would occur: property values would go up if people did not have the expense of relying on commercial haulers, or driving long distances to haul water to their homes.

“Property values going up when we get water. I hear all the time people won’t move out here because there is no water.”

“Might get more people wanting to live here.”

*“Yes! Finally, yes! 1) It increases saleability of properties in the hamlet.
2) It decreases many people's fuel bills and increases safety (less driving overall).”*

Other Risks and Preferences

Participants were invited to identify other risks. One additional risk emerged: the impact of the residential water fill station on Lower South Cooking Lake Road. Participants emphasized that the entrance and exit of the water fill station be on South Cooking Lake Road only. Trucks should not be allowed to access or depart the site from Lower South Cooking Lake road, which runs in front of the fire station.

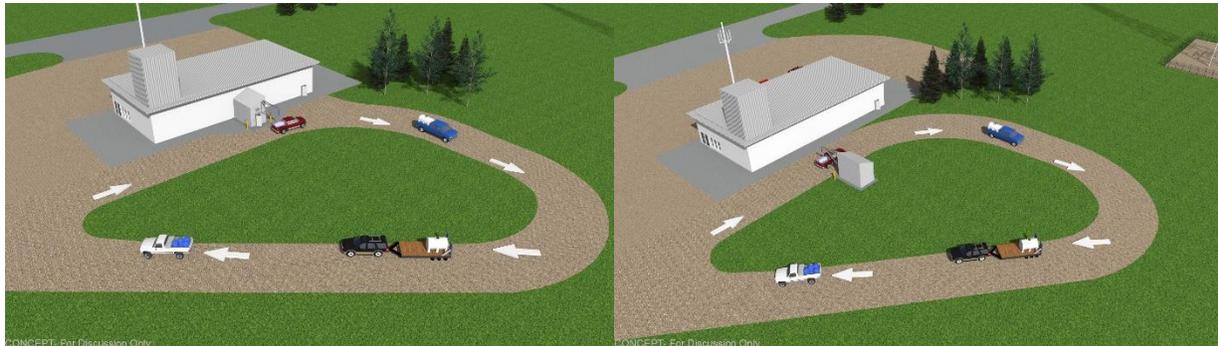
“Can we restrict access off of the lower road to fire station? Don’t want increased traffic on the lower road.”

“They need to come up over on the road between school and fire station and not on the low road by the houses.”

“Reduce access to the fire station from lower SCL road.”

“I don’t want people on the low road.”

Participants were also shown two concept drawings that indicated two possible locations at the fire station site. The majority of participants preferred concept one, which was adjacent to the fire station.



Concept 1

Concept 2

4.4 Comments received through email.

County administration received four emails from people who were unable to attend the event, but expressed strong support for a residential water fill station at the fire station.

*I was unable to attend the July 23 Public Engagement Drop in Session at South Cooking Lake. I understand from a neighbour that there was a vote. If it is not too late, I would like to register my vote by this email. **I am in favour of a residential water fill station adjacent to Fire Station 2***

My daughter and I have lived here since 2003 and have always had to rely on water delivery companies for our potable water and have also hauled it ourselves. Please mark us both as a strong "YES" to having a much closer water fill station in South Cooking Lake. This would greatly reduce the carbon foot print of water delivery in our area. Thank you for this opportunity to have a say in this decision.

5.0 Conclusion

A thorough public engagement process determined that there is decisive support for a residential water fill station at the South Cooking Lake fire station.

Comments from the sticky notes, scribed notes, and voting results from Feedback Frames (81%) suggest the majority of participants are in favour of the project moving forward.

A majority of the participants commented that any identified perceived risks could be adequately mitigated. While those opposed to the location of the residential water fill station believe that increased traffic in the community, safety of school children and dangerous access to Highway 14 are risks associated with the fire station location, they represent a small minority of participants. This is reflected in comments as well as the Feedback Frames results that register disagreement with the residential water fill station at the fire station at only 19% of property owners who voted.

Overall, participants felt that the public engagement process demonstrates that a residential water fill station is both needed and wanted. They appreciate both the efforts of Councillor Lawrence and Strathcona County administration in addressing this pressing community issue and urged the County to go forward with the project.