

## Swift River Energy responds to Township's concerns

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MUSKOKA LAKES - Concerns about the safety, aesthetic and economic impacts of the Bala Falls hydroelectric project will all be mitigated, according to the project's proponent.

Swift River Energy Limited (SREL) responded to a township report released last week that expressed concerns about its three to five megawatt run-of-the-river hydro facility proposed at Bala's north falls.

Township chief administrative officer Walt Schmid brought a report outlining concerns on the project to a special council meeting on Aug. 11.

The township needs to submit information this month to the Ministry of Environment in order for the ministry to consider an environmental screening "bump up" or more extensive analysis of the project, said Schmid.

In response to Schmid's concerns about reduced flows over the falls, SREL project manager Karen McGhee suggested the water flow will look as it does this summer.

"The flows over the north falls will be exactly the same as what are currently flowing today and are considered typical summer flows," said McGhee.

During the meeting, Schmid said he would like to see the modeling done again so people could see exactly what it will look like when the project is complete.

"This (water flow) definitely has an impact on Bala's economy," said Schmid.

Coun. Mary Grady agreed.

"Both falls are virtually lost with what they are currently proposing; there is no falls and that's not acceptable," said Grady.

In addition to water flow concerns, Schmid said the velocity of water in the area of the Bala Wharf will be too high for safe swimming or canoeing. He suggested there could be errors in SREL's calculations.

SREL's engineers, with the assistance of the Ministry of Natural Resources, calculated flow velocities, said McGhee.

"These velocities are considered reliable and much more so than any modeling calculation or analytical method," she said.

The flows were reviewed by Transport Canada and determined to be within the acceptable values for navigation, including canoes, she added.

SREL and its engineers do not see the need for a break wall to slow the water velocity.

The wall was suggested by Schmid.

However, if the Township would like SREL to help with the installation of a

breakwater installed at the end of its wharf as part of this project, SREL is open to discussions, but not until the environmental screening process is complete, said McGhee.

Coun. Brian Hare wondered if Schmid's numbers on velocity could be "a deal breaker" for the project.

"Obviously, their (Swift River) and your numbers are not lining up," said Hare.

Schmid wasn't sure if it was a deal breaker.

Schmid also raised concerns of high water levels during the hydro facility's construction and said he was at first denied more information, but then finally did get diagrams. He didn't see any calculations on how the flow would be reduced during construction, he said.

There could be a potential for flooding in Bala Bay and possibly Lake Muskoka, said Schmid.

Grady suggested SREL should provide proof that SREL will pay for damages to property in the event of flooding.

After looking over the report, Coun. Nancy Thompson suggested there are too many concerns for the particular location.

"I am all for green power...but if you get down to the bits and pieces of it, maybe downtown Bala is not the place for it," said Thompson to thunderous applause.

McGhee said the Township's concerns have been largely addressed, or, will be should the project get the necessary approvals to move to its construction planning and permitting stage.

SREL is confident economic issues will be addressed through an independent economic impact study now underway, said McGhee.

The hydroelectric project can go ahead with or without the support of the District of Muskoka, she suggested.

Muskoka Lakes mayoral candidate Jeff Mole, who spoke at the Aug. 11 meeting, has suggested the District deny SREL approval to lease municipal land for the project.

After objections to an initial proposal, SREL developed a second option on district land. Council agreed to lease the land to the company once the project had environmental approvals from the province.

McGhee said if the district reversed its position and refused to lease the land, SREL is fully prepared to develop its original option on Crown land.

"While some additional work may be required, the technical and economic viability of the option one plan abutting the north dam's waterfall was confirmed during the Ministry of Natural Resource's site release process back in 2005," she said. Option one would be smaller and significantly less expensive than option two, she added.

She suggested a lease agreement would present an opportunity to negotiate a number of additional long term community benefits for Bala.