

October 2008

Capital Regional District – Attitudes towards operation of new sewage treatment

The Environics Research Group conducted 500 telephone interviews with residents 18 years of age and over in seven municipalities in the Capital Regional District (Victoria, Saanich, Oak Bay, Langford, Colwood, Esquimalt and View Royal) from October 6 to 11, 2008. The survey primarily focused on issues related to new sewage treatment being planned for the region, in the context of the November municipal elections.

A survey of this magnitude yields results that are considered accurate to within plus or minus 4.4 per cent, 19 times out of 20. The survey was commissioned by the Canadian Union of Public Employees and follows up on a similar survey conducted in January 2007.

Sewage treatment should be operated by regional district, not private corporations.

Residents of the CRD overwhelmingly trust the regional district more than a private corporation to develop new sewage treatment. The main reason people give for trusting the regional district more is that it is “not for profit,” followed by the perception that the public interest is better served.

When asked who they would trust more to manage and operate new sewage treatment, a private corporation or the regional district, seven in ten (70%) say that they trust the regional district a lot (48%) or a little (22%) more, compared to just 16 per cent who would trust a private corporation a lot (7%) or a little (9%) more. Since 2007, there has been a slight decline in the overall proportion who trust the regional district more (down 6 points) but no corresponding increase in the proportion who trust private corporations more.

Most CRD residents agree that, despite the cost, new sewage treatment is necessary.

New sewage treatment is seen by most CRD residents as something that must be implemented, despite the costs involved. The CRD estimates that new sewage treatment could cost as much as \$1.2 billion. When asked whether, in light of this, new sewage treatment should be postponed, more than six in ten (63%) of CRD residents instead take the view that “new sewage treatment is needed and that we cannot afford not to do it.” Just one-quarter (27%) agree that “\$1.2 billion is too much money and that new sewage treatment needs to be postponed.” Nine per cent offer no response.

CRD residents think that regional government would do a better job in key areas of operating new sewage treatment, including protecting the environment.

When CRD residents are asked to consider the pros and cons of having a private corporation or the regional government operate new sewage treatment in four areas, on average, 73 per cent think the regional district would do a better job in any area.

Three-quarters (75%) think that regional government would do a better job of protecting the environment, compared to ten per cent who think private corporations would do a better job.

-2-

Seven in ten (69%) think regional government would do a better job of being open and accountable about environmental risk, costs or damage, compared to 14 per cent who favour private corporations.

Two-thirds (66%) think regional government would do a better job of providing the public with reliable information, compared to 18 per cent who favour private corporations.

Two-thirds (66%) think regional government would do a better job of being open and transparent about how tax dollars are being spent, compared to 17 per cent who favour private corporations.

Environment and sewage treatment are in the top five issues for CRD voters when deciding how to vote in the November 2008 municipal elections.

When asked what will be the most important issues in deciding how to vote in the November municipal elections, residents most frequently mention homelessness (18%) followed by environmental issues and pollution (14%), sewage treatment and housing prices (8% each), and traffic and congestion (7% each).

Candidates' positions on sewage treatment will affect voters' intentions.

Asked whether it would make a difference to them if a candidate running in the upcoming municipal elections declares that they favour private operation of sewage treatment, one-half (53%) say they would be a lot less (32%) or a little less (21%) likely to vote for such a candidate. A total of 15 per cent would be a lot more (6%) or a little more (9%) likely to support such a candidate and one-quarter (25%) say it would make no difference.

When CRD residents are asked to consider whether it would make a difference to them if a candidate says they oppose any new sewage treatment because it is too expensive, six in ten (58%) say they would be a lot less (36%) or a little less (22%) likely to vote for such a candidate. A total of 20 per cent would be a lot more (11%) or a little more (9%) likely to vote for such a candidate. Two in ten (18%) offer no response.

Importance of "resource recovery" in CRD

A large majority of CRD residents think that the regional district should bring in "resource recovery" as part of new sewage treatment, using new technologies to get value out treating and reusing wastewater for things like heating buildings and for irrigation in parks and agriculture. Seven in ten (69%) think it should be a high priority for the regional district to bring in this kind of resource recovery in the CRD, while another 23 per cent think this should be a medium priority and just four per cent think it should be a low priority.