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STANDARD



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Higher natural gas cost approved

By SARAH A. ZIMMERMAN

SKEENA MLA Robin Austin says northwesterners are getting the short end of the stick in the B.C. Utilities Commission's (BCUC) decision to allow Pacific Northern Gas to dramatically increase its rates for delivering gas to customers here.

After more than eight months of negotiations between PNG and intervenors such as Austin who opposed the rate hike, the BCUC has decided to allow PNG to increase its delivery rates by more than 20 per cent.

Gas utilities such as PNG have no control over the cost of natural gas and do not mark up the cost of the product, but they make their money from charging customers for delivering the commodity.

PNG had filed a request to increase its delivery charge from the October 2005 rate of \$5.79 per Gigajoule to \$7.47 per Gigajoule. That increase was

put into place on an interim basis Jan. 1, 2006 pending the outcome of the hearings.

The final rate approved by PNG is \$7.01 a Gigajoule, which is a 21 per cent increase in the delivery charge.

The closure of Methanex's methanol plant in Kitimat, which used natural gas to make that product, was given as the reason because it was PNG's largest customer.

"It's essentially given PNG everything its asked for which means that the shareholders have been protected from the shortfall in revenue by losing Methanex and the ratepayers have to be the ones to pick up the difference," says Austin, who spearheaded a petition containing thousands of names from the northwest opposing the rate hike.

"I don't believe it's fair at all, I think at the very least they could have split the difference between the shareholders and the ratepayers."

Austin argues the rate hike will affect those who can least afford it.

"I also think, by the way, that this is not in the best interest of PNG in the long run either, because there have been a lot of people coming into my office who will not pay these prices and they will just go back to burning wood and, for some people, they will just make the capital investment of a pellet stove or a pellet furnace - including me," he says.

Through the negotiations PNG was asked to make several amendments to its projected revenue losses for 2006 in the wake of the Methanex departure.

"The commission decided that our cost of service with a revenue deficiency of \$4.1 million was the appropriate cost of service and there was no justification for allocating any of the revenue deficiency to our shareholders," says PNG official Craig Donohue.

Originally estimated at \$4.104 million, that num-

ber has now shrunk to about \$4.01 million, says Donohue.

"The commission would have had to have broken new ground for them to say the rates are too high 'just because,'" Donohue says, adding that would have meant shareholders subsidizing customers.

Because the interim rates approved in January were based on the original estimate of \$4.1 million in revenue losses, customers can expect to see a 39 per cent reduction in the delivery portion of their bill with the new price being \$7.01 per Gigajoule, Donohue said.

The rebate is retroactive to Jan. 1, 2006 and customers should see the adjustment on their October bill. It will add up to about \$18 per average household.

The new rates now approved will mean an average residential heating bill this year of approximately \$1,260.

Dignity, humour in their work

By SARAH ARTIS

AT 9 A.M. on a recent sunny Thursday morning, three friends gather near Terrace's train tracks around what they call home - a low square-shaped cement structure, mostly buried in the ground, its wooden cover in pieces at its bottom.

A moldy mattress, where the men sometimes sleep, lies in the bushes a few metres away.

"For our mothers and forefathers," says one of the friends, Roy, as he raises a capful of sherry into the air and splashes it on the ground.

Roy and his two companions - Huey and Harry - are celebrating after a hard night of work, a daily morning ritual.

"It stops the shakes," Roy explains.

The night before, just like every night of the week, starting at 3:30 in the morning, they scavenged the streets of Terrace with shopping carts, jumping in and out of garbage dumpsters, in search of bottles and cans.

Pooling their money, the three "binners" have made about \$30 - enough for four bottles of sherry.

The saying "one person's junk is another's treasure" couldn't be more true here.

The men's main source of income is collecting and returning recyclables others litter or throw away, or finding and selling goods such as old shoes in the trash.

Sometimes they make up



DEWEY, Roy, Harry and Huey hang out at the place they call "home," near the Terrace train tracks on a sunny Thursday morning. All four men are local "binners." They make their incomes by collecting empties and recyclables from about 3:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. almost every night, and returning them to the Terrace Return-It Centre and the Skeena Liquor store in the mornings. SARAH ARTIS PHOTO

to \$70 a day, Huey says.

"A lot of people call us the three stooges," Roy says. "But we have our own nicknames."

Roy "Orbison" has a scab on the bridge of his nose and a scar that runs the centre of his stomach, from his chest to his bellybutton. The gnarly, purple line is from when he was stabbed during the night while sleeping outside a few years ago.

Harry "Belafonte" is missing most of his teeth but he never stops grinning.

And "Baby Huey" - as in Huey, Dewey and Louie - holds himself a step back from the others but stays close enough that he remains part of the group.

Harry and Huey, a logger and carpenter by trade, both own homes in New Aiyansh.

"But there's no work,"

says Harry.

He got divorced so he moved here.

Huey and Roy have similar stories of wives gone.

Huey couldn't work anymore after his wife left two years ago, so he also moved here, he says.

Roy has an apartment in Terrace, where the group sometimes stays.

But Roy says, "There's nothing to do at home except

stare at the walls or at each other."

So they spend most of their days here at the tracks, and then wander the streets at night collecting bottles.

Almost every day like clockwork, they return their findings to the bottle Return-It Centre behind the Terrace Inn at 8:30 a.m. and the Skeena liquor store at 9 a.m.

The latter is also where they buy their day's supply

of Okanagan Valley 35 sherry - how much depends on their earnings from the night before.

The men are now used to hard times on the street, they say.

They sleep outside, even during the winter, finding anonymous and not-so-anonymous covered areas around town like a small shack behind the downtown Tim Hortons.

If they eat, it's at the Salvation Army, the soup kitchen or the Kermodie Friendship Centre.

It's not unusual for them to get stuck in dumpsters and scream for help until someone arrives.

The worst though, they say, are the groups of young men who harass them and sometimes beat them up in the middle of the night.

Cont'd Page A2

City readies new ice rink cost

By DUSTIN QUEZADA

TAXPAYERS SHOULD get an idea of the price tag for the city's latest attempt to build a second sheet of ice as early as next week.

City council is expecting an early September report into the results of breaking the project down into small contracts as opposed to seeking one company to build it all.

If council likes what it sees, construction could begin as early as the end of September, says city leisure services director Ross Milnthorp.

The city's new consultant for the project is confident the new price will be about half of the \$13 million price tag it faced this spring when it sought one large company.

That \$13 million figure includes the actual construction

cost of \$10.54 million, a \$1 million contingency fund and roughly \$1.4 million that would have been spent on parking lot paving and architectural, engineering and project management fees.

"I'm not ready to give numbers but we're in the ballpark," said Wayne Aussem of North American Ice, the city's new consultant.

Roughly 40 packages were sent out to contractors who have enquired and those that have made bids, including individual trades.

Aussem said between six and eight local contractors are on that longer list.

"I'm happy with the interest shown by locals," Aussem said. "I think we'll be pleasantly surprised by the results of the bidding."

One of the ways Aussem proposed to shave money off the cost was to divide the project into components.

For instance, both the refrigeration and steel building and sheeting components are being considered by three to four companies respectively in B.C. and Alberta - none of them local.

Last week, Aussem said just how many components the project would be divided into has yet to be determined.

He says based on bids, certain contractors may be able to take on multiple components of the build instead of dividing them between different contractors if the price is lower.

"We won't know until all the bids are in to see what the best value is," Aussem said.

Cont'd Page A2



Ross Milnthorp

From front

City expects rink price tag

Though the process doesn't have a firm deadline, Aussem said the prices will be available to council the first week of September.

At half the previous bid, the current project's price tag would be in the \$6.5 million range and would include taxes, a contingency fund and parking lot and storm drain upgrades.

Milnthorp said last week that minor design changes to the project are being considered, including redesigning the main entrance to face north and facilitate parking; increasing the upstairs square footage; adding washrooms upstairs and downstairs; reworking the snow dump and mechanical area; and adding a small custodial room at ice level.

Aussem says every week his team is finding "something it's not 100 per cent happy with" but the changes being considered are all within a certain percentage in their prices and won't affect the timing for delivering the prices to council.

He's confident his plan, which would see the proposed second sheet of ice built on to the current arena's north side, will be successful because it would allow for the sharing of everything from a main lobby, to a snowmelt pit and ice resurfacer to staffing.

"In my mind, it's twice the facility," he added. "It's the kind of thing you would do if you were building two arenas at once."

The second sheet of ice is phase one of a proposed three-phase project.

The second phase would see upgrades to the existing aquatic centre and arena.

That includes mechanical upgrades to the pool to maximize energy savings and several changes to the arena, including an internally insulated ceiling, a new rink slab, boards and lighting.

The upgrades are only under consideration and would likely be done during construction of the sportsplex, depending on the financing of North American Ice, said Milnthorp.

Milnthorp said the costs for that phase would be part of the final report that will come before council in September.

Milnthorp calls the third phase - a civic centre - highly speculative.

"It's only under consideration by city council," Milnthorp said.

The next city council meeting is Monday, Sept. 11.

The city has received \$2 million in a federal-provincial grant that must be spent on a second sheet of ice or sportsplex and a \$1 million unconditional grant from the province itself.

It has already spent more than \$500,000 over the years on various attempts to build a second sheet of ice.

AUGUST 2006				AUGUST 2005			
D	Max	Min	Total	D	Max	Min	Total
A	Temp	Temp	Precip	A	Temp	Temp	Precip
Y	°C	°C	mm	Y	°C	°C	mm
18	21.7	13.2	0.0	18	25.1	13.5	T
19	23.7	8.0	0.0	19	18.4	14.5	9.4
20	27.7	9.9	0.0	20	17.9	14.0	1.4
21	21.9	11.2	0.0	21	16.3	12.0	2.9
22	21.3	11.8	0.0	22	14.5	11.3	7.0
23	20.8	12.4	T	23	21.5	11.0	0.0
24	n/a	n/a	n/a	24	24.0	8.3	0.0

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From front

Dignity, humour in their work

"We don't even know them," Harry says. But for the most part people like what they do, Roy says while picking a cigarette butt off the ground and lighting it. "It's not us busting the bottles," he says. "We are the ones saving them."

"We are the ones cleaning up," Harry adds. "Lots of people think we are the ones making a mess but it's not true. We try our best to respect people."

Many people, mostly women, save their refundable items especially for them, and sometimes give them food or clothes.

A fourth binner, Dewey - as in Huey's counterpart - strolls into the conversation.

He is one more of about 12 binner in town.

"For the most part, we are all friends. There's no real competition between us, but it's first come, first served," explains Harry.

For the next few minutes, all four catch up, joke, laugh, pass the bottle of sherry and open a second one.

Huey talks of how his daughter just took him in for a couple days, cleaned him up and fed him.

"Some of us are on welfare or EI (employment insurance) but others are just out here," he says.

As for how long they will continue with this lifestyle, none of them can say or seem overly concerned - except Huey.

"I'm going back to work soon," he says in a determined voice.

INTERESTING FACTS

- a single person on welfare receives \$325 for rent (including bills) and \$185 for support each month.
- on an average day, the bottle Return-It Centre in Terrace can receive up to 15,000 containers and binner bring in about seven per cent of that.

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British Columbia Environmental Assessment Office Galore Creek Copper-Gold-Silver Project

NovaGold Canada Inc. (NovaGold) has submitted an Application for an Environmental Assessment Certificate (Application) to construct and operate an open pit mine approximately 200 km southwest of Iskut, B.C. The proposed Galore Creek Project is subject to review under British Columbia's *Environmental Assessment Act*, S.B.C. 2002, c.43 and Canada's *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* and is being reviewed by both governments through a harmonized process.

NovaGold has also applied to have applications for provincial authorizations under the *Forest Range and Practices Act*, *Land Act*, *Water Act*, *Environmental Management Act*, *Drinking Water Protection Act*, *Transportation Act* and *Health Act* reviewed concurrently with the Application.

Public Comment Period

A 60-day public comment period on the Application has been underway since **July 10, 2006** and closes on **September 8, 2006**. Comments on the Application must be received by the EAO by midnight on **September 8, 2006**. Please send your comments to:

Anne Currie
Project Assessment Director
Environmental Assessment Office
PO Box 9426 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9V1
Fax 250-356-6448

Comments by e-mail are encouraged and may be directed to eaoinfo@gov.bc.ca.

NOTE: All documents and/or comments received by the EAO regarding this Project are considered public and will be posted on the EAO website. Please indicate if you wish your personal information (full address, e-mail address and telephone number) to be treated in confidence.

