

# RM OF STE. ANNE

## Wastewater Engagement Results Analysis

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Prepared for: RM of Ste. Anne

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# 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ste. Anne Wastewater Questionnaire was developed to gather public feedback on a potential sewer system and lagoon to service the Local Urban District (LUD) of Richer and the immediate surrounding area for the Rural Municipality (RM) of Ste. Anne.

The Newsletter was sent out to each land owner in the LUD of Richer (approximately 240), with a flyer posted at Burnell's Food Plus in Richer and advertised on the Municipal website and Facebook for all RM residents. The attached survey received a total of 384 responses over a four week period between April 1 and May 2, 2025, with 354 submitted digitally and 30 hard copies returned, representing a high community response rate. Key findings and insights include:

- The results indicate strong community opposition to install a new sewer system and treatment facility. The cited reasoning for opposition generally includes increased taxes, potential air quality and smell from the lagoon, and threat to the rural character of the community from future development.

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- Few respondents (44 people or 12.5%) indicated support for a new municipal sewer system and lagoon. The primary reason for support includes maintaining groundwater quality, as well as the potential for economic and population growth.

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- Some respondents (29 people or 8.25%) indicated that their support depends on how much it costs them personally. Many respondents emphasized that an additional \$2500-\$3000 annually for 25 years exceeds their willingness or ability to pay.

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- Should the RM be successful in receiving grant funding to cover most of the capital costs, public support for a new sewer system and lagoon could expect to increase by 10-20%.

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- A common perception is that the project unfairly burdens rural residents, those with existing septic systems, or low-income households, with benefits disproportionately given to developers at the expense of RM residents.

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- Addressing community concerns and misconceptions around costs, site selection, environmental impacts, potential nuisance of a lagoon, and the decision-making process could help grow support.

# 2.0 SURVEY RESULTS

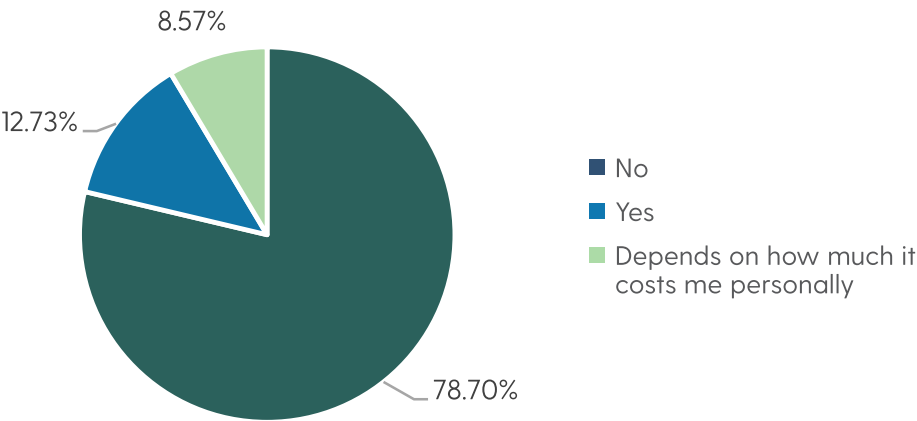
## 1) Are you in support of a municipal sewer system for the LUD and RM?

Answered: 384

Skipped: 0

Most respondents (79%) are opposed to the proposed municipal sewer system. A total of 49 people (12.5%) expressed support for the project, while an additional 33 respondents (8.5%) indicated conditional support based on the cost impact on them personally.

The primary issue for those in opposition is the potential cost impact on residents, and not necessarily the project itself. Should the RM be successful in receiving additional grant funding to support the project, it is reasonable to assume support for the project would increase significantly.



Answers	Count	Percentage
No	303	78.7%
Yes	49	12.73%
Depends on how much it costs me personally	33	8.57%



## 2) What do you see as the benefit of a municipal sewer system?

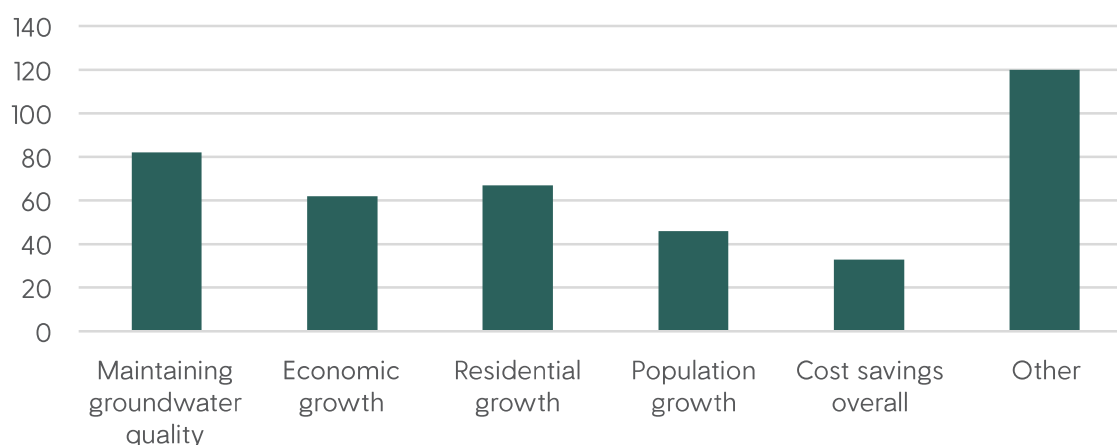
**Answered: 242**

**Skipped: 142**

*(Multiple selections allowed)*

When asked about the perceived benefits of a municipal sewer system, maintaining groundwater quality (21%) and supporting economic (16%) and community growth (17%) were ranked the highest. Cost savings was the least common perceived benefit of a municipal sewer system. Without being able to compare the benefits to the costs, many respondents believe the costs to residents will outweigh the project's benefits.

120 people responded with “Other” which overwhelmingly indicated “none” or limited benefits to individual residents. While some spoke to improvement in resale value or suggested that while there are benefits, the costs outweigh them. Among those who answered “yes” or “depends” to question 1, the rank order of perceived benefits is similar, with groundwater quality and community economic growth being the lead benefits.



Answers	Count	Percentage
Maintaining groundwater quality	82	21.3%
Economic growth	62	16.1%
Residential growth	67	17.4%
Population growth	46	11.95%
Cost savings overall	33	8.57%
Other	120	31.17%

The full list of “other” responses is included in Appendix A.

### 3) What concerns do you have about a municipal sewer system? (select all that apply)

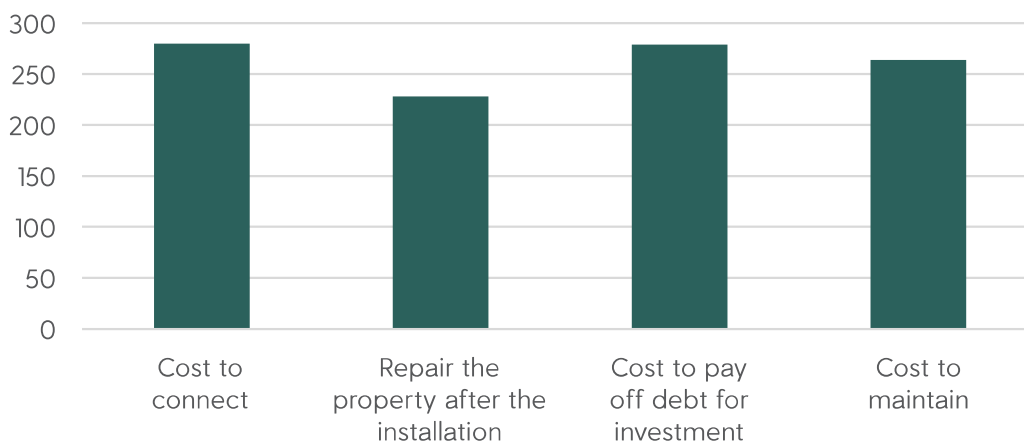
**Answered: 328**

**Skipped: 56**

*(Multiple selections allowed)*

When asked about the concerns of a municipal sewer system, the cost to connect (72%) and cost to pay off debt (72%) were ranked the highest. This aligns with the written survey responses as the primary concern for proceeding with a municipal sewer system. Maintenance costs (69%) and property repairs to accommodate the new system (59%) were also ranked high.

Question 3 had a higher response rate (86%) compared to Question 2 (63%) which suggests that residents have more concerns about the project that outweigh the perceived benefit. The distribution of responses for Question 3 remains similar among only those who are in support or conditionally in support of the project.



Answers	Count	Percentage
Cost to connect	280	72.73%
Repair the property after the installation	228	59.22%
Cost to pay off debt for investment	279	72.47%
Cost to maintain	264	68.57%

#### 4) Do you have any questions you would like answered before Council decides on this?

**Answered: 198**

**Skipped: 186**

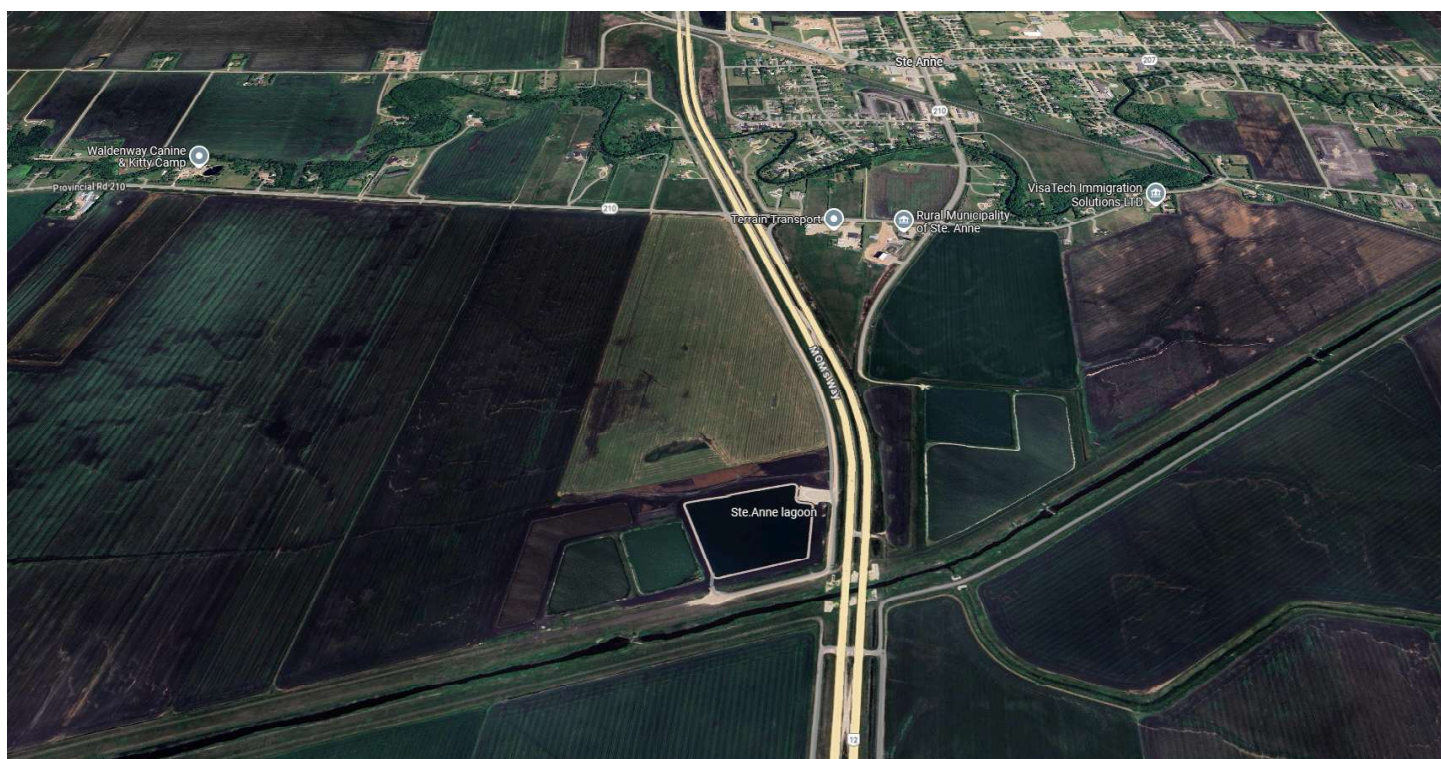
The 198 respondents raised a wide range of questions and concerns related to the proposed wastewater lagoon project which suggest there could be a need for more detailed communication from the RM. The questions/responses are grouped into the following categories based on recurring themes:

Theme	Summary
1) Cost Concerns	The primary concerns/questions here surround the high costs of installation and maintenance on landowners over the timeframe of the project. Questions were asked about who bears the cost (e.g., all RM residents vs. only those serviced, existing septic system owners, developers). Residents also spoke to the impact on property taxes and affordability, especially for low-income households, seniors, or single-income homeowners. Some concerns were shared about additional usage fees, connection costs, and maintenance of infrastructure like grinder pump. A few residents suggested government subsidies or longer payment terms (e.g., 30–35 years).
2) Fairness	One of the main issues identified by residents was about fairness – for those outside the LUD or with large properties (e.g., 2+ acres) who may not benefit, or those who recently installed their septic systems. Some believe that the project only benefits developers or businesses (e.g., Tim Hortons) rather than residents. Others are also concerned about being forced to connect and questioned if there would be opt-out options for those with functional septic systems (a challenge given Provincial Regulations on the requirement to connect within a 10-year period).
3) Environmental Impacts	Many questioned how the lagoon would affect air quality, water quality (particularly in Lake Riviera), wildlife, and wetlands. Other questions were about environmental assessments, water quality testing, and mitigation plans for flooding or sewage leaks.

Theme	Summary
4) Location of the Proposed Lagoon	Some raised health concerns related to proximity to lagoons and potential contamination. Concerns about odour from the lagoon were the most frequently repeated individual complaint. Some people perceived a decrease in property values due to proximity to lagoons and potential nuisance caused by a treatment facility near their home, although this is not substantiated. Opposition to the proposed site on Road 41E due to its proximity to residential areas (despite Provincially required buffers), wetlands, and flood-prone zones was common. Here, some people suggested alternative locations closer to Richer or in less populated areas (e.g., east of Richer, Crown Land, industrial lands).
5) Infrastructure and Maintenance Concerns	Residents had questions about the RM's financial capacity to maintain the sewer system over the long-term given existing issues with roads, ditches, and drainage. Many were concerned about damage to private property (e.g., driveways, lawns, trees) during construction and who will cover repair costs. At least one resident would like more information about specific technical details (e.g., synthetic lining lifespan, metering water wells).
6) Need and Justification for the Project	A few respondents questioned why the sewer system is necessary now, given no prior complaints about septic systems. One resident shared their doubts about the projected population growth justifying the \$16–20 million expenditure and if the tax base is large enough to justify the expense. Some also wondered if this was the best use of public funds and if other issues (e.g., drainage, road maintenance) should be prioritized over the sewer system.
7) Impact on Specific Areas or Groups	Questions were raised about impacts on specific areas (e.g., La Coulée, Dawson Road, Lake Riviera) or groups (e.g., Métis residents, rural homeowners). And some residents were confused as to the Town of Ste. Anne's involvement and impact on the project.
8) General Opposition to the Project	Many residents took the opportunity to share general opposition without specific questions ("Just don't do it"), citing no need for the system or preference for existing septic systems.

Theme	Summary
9) Support or Conditional Support	Despite the general opposition, there is justified support for the project, with residents citing aging septic systems or the need for growth to sustain the community.
10) Community Engagement and Decision-Making	No matter the outcome of Council's decision on the project, residents called for public meetings, town halls, or a referendum to ensure resident input before a decision is finalized. There were also questions about whether survey results will be made public and if a plebiscite will be held for LUD residents. This may present an opportunity for the RM to address misconceptions and concerns about a potential lagoon and sewer system.

For the complete comments from the community see Appendix A.





## 5) Do you have any suggestions for Council before they make a decision on this?

Answered: 199

Skipped: 185

The 199 responses to question 5 reflect similar sentiments shared in questions 1-4. The responses are grouped into the following categories based on recurring themes:

Theme	Summary
1) Strong Opposition to the Lagoon and Sewer System	The most consistent theme was direct opposition due to the projected cost of the project. Concerns about the smell, perceived lack of need and negative impact on rural lifestyle and property values were prevalent. Two Métis respondents called for the importance of preserving the area's natural, rural roots.
2) Financial Concerns	Many respondents expressed alarm over the estimated costs, especially the \$2,500–\$3,000/year for 25 years, particularly in a time of economic uncertainty. They stressed the financial burden on fixed-income residents and questioned whether the RM would contribute fairly. Some called for reconsideration of the financing model, such as finding more grant funding or lowering the portion paid by residents.
3) Location and Environmental Impacts	The proposed lagoon site was again a frequent point of contention. Residents near 41E expressed strong resistance due to proximity to homes and concerns over smell, flooding, property devaluation, and environmental damage to Lake Riviera and local wetlands. Several recommended moving the lagoon closer to Richer or piping to Ste. Anne's existing lagoon. One suggestion for a multi-purpose constructed wetland or other environmentally friendly alternatives to lagoons to preserve ecosystems and support wildlife.
4) Engagement and Transparency	There were numerous calls for public meetings, town hall meetings, referendums, and transparent communication on the decision-making process. Some residents felt the decision was being rushed without sufficient input and stressed the need for Council to listen to constituents, especially those most directly affected (although the newsletter made it clear that Council <b>"has not"</b> made a decision and this campaign is the RM's attempt at gathering input). Several respondents explicitly mentioned their desire to be notified of Council's decision on the issue.

Theme	Summary
5) Growth and Change	Many said they chose Richer for its rural character and affordability, and fear urban-style infrastructure would bring unwanted change.
6) Fairness	Residents again questioned whether the sewer system was being driven by developer interests, the Town of Ste. Anne, or business growth (Tim Hortons, car wash, etc.) at the expense of residents. Some suggested that developers or businesses benefiting from the system should cover the system's costs proportionately.
7) Alternative Proposals	A few respondents offered constructive alternatives, such as using a low-pressure sewer system, phasing the project over time, Partnering with the Town to expand the Ste. Anne lagoon or a constructed wetland that can be used for recreational and wildlife purposes. Others suggested that only future development should be required to connect, and existing homeowners be allowed to opt out (against Provincial Regulations). Suggestions to make the project more affordable, such as securing provincial or federal subsidies to reduce resident costs (which is clearly stated in the newsletter). Some suggested Municipal funds be allocated to other priorities, such as road maintenance, dust control, a daycare, senior care, recreation facilities, or building a high school.
8) Support or Conditional Support	The limited public support for the project cited the need for growth, environmental benefits (e.g., replacing aging septic systems), or alignment with future federal regulations. Some suggested to expedite the project, connect high-growth areas like La Coulée, or pair sewer with water infrastructure for a comprehensive plan. One resident called for the RM to consider the unheard voices of future residents, not just the voices of today.

The full responses to Question 5 are available in the Appendix A.

## 3.0 CONCLUSION

While surveys often capture the strongest voices for or against a project, the high response rate and breadth of responses reflect a community that is deeply engaged and invested in the future of the Municipality. While some residents recognize the long-term benefits of a municipal sewer system, such as supporting growth, attracting investment, protecting groundwater, and improving property resale, concerns about the financial, environmental, and social implications of the proposed lagoon project overshadowed its voices of support.

The majority of respondents oppose the project outright, with the primary reasons being affordability, quality of life impacts, and a perceived lack of meaningful consultation. These RM of Ste. Anne residents expressed that the projected costs are a non-starter while some proposed alternative financing models such as government subsidies, reserve funds, or developer-paid models.

Many residents feel the proposed project does not reflect the community's needs or values, and that other priorities such as road maintenance and keeping taxes low are more pressing.

The strong feedback also underscores the importance of location: proximity to homes, potential odor, and perceived harm to natural areas were common concerns. The desire to maintain Ste. Anne's quiet, natural, and affordable rural character were paramount, and fears that the sewer system would bring urbanization at the expense of this character.

With cost concerns being the greatest issue for residents, funding support from provincial and federal levels of government could potentially increase support for the project, and ease resident anxiety. However, the other concerns highlighted by the survey such as property value impacts, environmental impacts, and site location would still remain to be addressed.

Moving forward, it will be critical for the RM of Ste. Anne to provide transparent communication, additional engagement opportunities, and a thorough examination of the project's scale, siting, and financing structure to address misconceptions and maintain public trust.

