

# **OLD FORT COMMUNITY MEETING – MEETING NOTES**

Pomeroy Hotel and Conference Centre  
July 27, 2022

The meeting began at 7:08 pm with introductions from BC Hydro.

The independent meeting facilitator was introduced and outlined the meeting format.

A resident of Old Fort requested to read the following statement aloud, on behalf of Old Fort residents. The statement was provided via email, after the meeting, for inclusion in the meeting notes as follows:

*Good evening,*

*On behalf of the residents of the Old Fort Community I am here to share a statement highlighting our many concerns with the construction of BC Hydro's Site C dam. I will start by reading a direct quote from BC Hydro's policies with regards to their policy on the treatment of neighboring communities affected by this project:*

*1.3.2*

*BC Hydro Good Neighbor Policy and Communication Protocol BC Hydro is committed to being a good neighbor in communities in which it works, treating its neighbors with respect and consideration. BC Hydro prepares comprehensive construction plans, construction management plans and environmental management plans to minimize the impact of its work on others and the environment.*

*Unfortunately, this has not been the case for the community of Old Fort. Over the past number of years, we have endured countless impacts to*

- Our property*
- Our livelihoods*
- Our safety*
- and Our health*

*Since the beginning of the project's construction, BC Hydro has repeatedly promised the members of the Old Fort that the impacts to their community and lives would be minimal. This has simply not been true and was quickly apparent upon breaking ground at Site C. Since 2015, Old Fort residents have sent many emails and made countless phone calls to have our concerns heard.*

*To date, very little has been done to mitigate any of these concerns and our lists keeps growing with impacts becoming more and more severe. I'd like to take a minute to briefly remind everyone at BC Hydro exactly what these concerns are:*

- Poor communication*
- Dust and diminished air quality throughout construction*
- Exposure to silica, which is classified as a human lung carcinogen, and can cause serious lung disease and lung cancer*
- Excessive noise*
- Disruptive lighting*
- High traffic*
- Lack of public road safety*
- Future truck hauling when the conveyor system is down*
- Lack of an emergency plan for residents*
- Reduced access to emergency response vehicles*
- Job losses due to the road being closed for penstock moves*

- *Loss of recreational use on the island and back channel*
- *Changing river water levels*
- *Non-stop construction 7 days a week from 7 – 7 in our residential neighborhood*
- *Ground instability and landslides*
- *Stigma pertaining to the structure of the dam*
- *And most importantly: the effect all these concerns has had to the Old Fort housing market, the majority of which are principal residences*

*What we have experienced is the devaluation of our properties, and the detrimental impact on the ability to sell our homes!*

*We are very aware that many other property owners have been considered and compensated due to the impacts of the Site C construction project. We have only ever asked that the Old Fort Community be given that same consideration.*

*We are asking BC Hydro today to compensate each household for the pain and suffering, for the health and safety concerns, for the loss of property value and for the loss of property enjoyment.*

*It is abundantly clear that no amount of mitigation attempts will ever be sufficient to give us back all that we have lost.*

*Thank you for your time and consideration.*

*The Residents of the Old Fort Community*

The meeting then moved to cover the concerns highlighted by residents at Gate B to BC Hydro staff on July 13, 2022. It was outlined that the meeting would focus on the top concerns shared at that time of dust, noise and traffic. It was also highlighted that next year, construction activity will start to wind down as projects on Site C begin to move inside.

The meeting notes aim to capture the points and questions raised by participants as well as the responses provided by BC Hydro.

## **Dust**

BC Hydro provided information on dust mitigation currently in place, highlighting changes to the dust management plan to help reduce dust in the Old Fort community.

**A resident expressed concern that the road and island are full of dust, stating the water truck only waters the main trail, nothing else. The residents enquired why BC Hydro continues with work when they are informed about the dust and say they are aware of the dust issues, but do not have solutions that work. Residents asked if the senior leaders have ever been to Old Fort as the water truck is not watering the roads often enough, if at all. Residents offered to take BC Hydro management to Old Fort during the meeting to view the dust as they feel it is not being watered often enough.**

- BC Hydro explained that a full-time water truck is on the island for the Fish Enhancement project. Calcium will be applied on the roads in about two weeks once the road is capped and compacted. The calcium will last until wash-boarding appears and will be reapplied at that time. There are a number of products that can be used to suppress dust.
- BC Hydro stated that they do manage dust on the project with comprehensive air quality monitoring stations. There are five stations for the project. These stations monitor fine particulate concentrations of PM2.5 and PM10 (PM: particulate matter). The stations

report in near real-time 24/7 and that information is shared with the Northern Health Authority and the Ministry of Environment and is available to the public in real time.

- BC Hydro explained that the Old Fort air quality monitor has not recorded levels that would indicate a concern to health. There will be peaks, however, the 24-hour rolling average shows that air quality levels are well below the threshold. The threshold levels, above which dust concentrations are considered unsafe, are determined by the Health Authorities

**A resident stated that they understand that BC Hydro is not over the allowable amount (for dust), however that is not acceptable for the amount of dust that they have experienced. In thirty years, there has never been this much dust. The resident feels that BC Hydro is doing only what is required, the minimum, and noted that children are out playing in the dust. The resident wanted to know if there are health disadvantages for exposure to this amount of dust for years on end, stating that residents have been exposed to the dust for ten years. The resident wanted to know what will happen with the dust once the dam is complete, stating that the Williston Reservoir has serious problems with dust and that the Old Fort river front will see more fluctuations in water levels.**

- BC Hydro explained that the Site C reservoir will be managed in a much different way than Williston Reservoir. The fluctuation will be minimal compared to Williston Reservoir, which can fluctuate as much as 20 metres.
- Site C will operate much like a run of river project, as it will pass what the Peace Canyon Dam releases.

**Residents have financial concerns as well as health concerns. Residents stated that there is so much dust, windows can't be opened, houses and homes are coated in dust and that there has been no compensation for the dust.**

- BC Hydro recognized that there are a variety of concerns within the community which need to be discussed further.

**Residents are concerned with dust that comes from the construction site, not just the Fish Enhancement project area. Residents see dust created at the unloading area for the conveyor and stated that it's easy to see dust being kicked up by trucks driving on un-watered roads. Residents stated that it is not just excavation that is creating dust and that this has been an issue for a long time.**

- BC Hydro re-confirmed that the frequency of the water trucks on the construction site roads has increased and calcium has been applied to the main roads for dust control.

**Residents would like more information regarding the dust monitor readings. Residents want to know why the readings (for dust) spread over a 24-hour period. A resident stated that health concerns due to exposure to dust are typically reported for a three year period; what happens when people are exposed (to dust) for seven or eight years?**

- BC Hydro clarified that the 24-hour rolling average is the measure used for the provincial air-quality objective.

**Residents commented that employee vehicles are likely having the cab filter changed often, Old Fort residents are having to change the furnace filter on a monthly basis as the**

**dust is clogging them. Residents asked how this dust affects those who have existing health concerns?**

- BC Hydro clarified that the air quality objectives developed by the Health Authorities are based on the population as a whole and not just healthy people.

**Residents noted that they are concerned that future sloughing could create more dust.**

- BC Hydro confirmed that there will be sloughing, as the Peace area is prone to that. Monitors will be in place and the Site C reservoir area has been surveyed. Impact lines have been established to ensure structures and homes are not affected in the reservoir. There should be very little impact to air quality from sloughing.

## **Property and Compensation**

**Some residents stated that they have previously heard the information BC Hydro is presenting tonight. Some residents stated that they are at this meeting to discuss compensation and that Old Fort residents need answers.**

- BC Hydro is not able to discuss compensation at this time.
- BC Hydro clarified when compensation is paid for impacts to property. When a component of the project such as the reservoir, highway realignment or impact lines are located on a property, that is when BC Hydro acquires land or rights and pays compensation to property owners.

**Residents shared that they want BC Hydro to know that, at this time, mitigation efforts are not enough and that residents want to be compensated. Residents wanted to know why they came to the meeting if BC Hydro wasn't prepared to answer questions and provide compensation? Residents stated that they want their way of life back and lifestyles back. Residents stated that they know the dam is there and it cannot be stopped and this leaves Old Fort residents with no options. Some residents stated they have lost over 60% of their home's value. Residents say they are stuck and want the right to the peaceful enjoyment of property.**

- BC Hydro restated that they are willing to work with residents on a one-on-one basis to address issues they are concerned about, however BC Hydro is not able to discuss compensation at this time.

**Residents are concerned that although they have been living with the negative affects of the dam for seven years, other residents (outside of Old Fort) are being given large compensation packages for very little impact, or for future impacts. An Old Fort resident asked why BC Hydro hasn't knocked on the doors of Old Fort residents who are being impacted now, stating that property values have plummeted and that no other residents live as close as Old Fort residents. The resident asked why BC Hydro has not bought Old Fort houses; there seems to be money for everyone other than Old Fort residents, what can BC Hydro do for us?**

- BC Hydro explained that directly impacted property owners are compensated for having a part of the project on their property or for an inevitable affect to their property in the

future such as the impact lines. Compensation of the type being sought is not provided for indirectly impacted property owners.

- BC Hydro confirmed that there was a lot of work done in 2011 and 2012 to determine the location of the preliminary impact lines and identify the properties that would be directly impacted as a result. There is a distinction to properties that have a piece of the project on them.

**Old Fort residents stated that they feel that BC Hydro should have known back in 2013 how much the construction would affect the neighbourhood. Residents stated that they sat in a community meeting before construction started and were told there would not be impacts to the Old Fort community.**

**An Old Fort resident asked why BC Hydro does not have regulations similar to the oil and gas sector. The resident asked why BC Hydro has not come to speak to residents; they were informed that this project on the river near the community was about fish habitat, but it seems it is for other reasons. The resident stated that all summer the channel has been dry and there is no compensation.**

- BC Hydro explained that operations, not Site C, controls the dam water discharges and since the spring has been cooler, they have been generating less. Also, the water supply is higher in the Columbia system at this time, and they have needed to run those facilities which has led to Peace Canyon and GM Shrum generating less. This is the reason for the lower water levels in the Peace River for the last several weeks.

**A resident wondered why down stream houses are not getting armoured and stated that BC Hydro is not living up to their commitments.**

- BC Hydro confirmed that it was originally going to undertake some work in the back channel at Old Fort, including some rip-rap protection of the shoreline as part of the Fish Enhancement project, however due to the landslide, that work was halted. This change was to reduce work in and around the slide area.

**A resident asked what BC Hydro is planning to do for indirectly impacted residents in Old Fort. The resident stated that BC Hydro has been purchasing land that is not affected, that water will not even touch it. The resident stated that BC Hydro claims that Old Fort is indirectly impacted, that the mitigation is not enough and wants to know what BC Hydro is prepared to do for Old Fort residents?**

- BC Hydro reiterated when compensation for property impacts is paid within the BC framework. For reservoir impacts in particular it was noted that land was purchased up to the Maximum Normal Reservoir Level of 461.8 metres above sea level and that partial rights were acquired where land was within the preliminary impact lines.
- BC Hydro noted that while the predicted effects were expected to take place over the next 100 years, the preliminary impact lines are not speculative and impacts to the shoreline such as erosion are expected to occur very soon after reservoir creation.
- BC Hydro stated that a number of concerns can be addressed, however not all decisions will make residents happy.

- BC Hydro relayed that a number of suggestions have been brought forward by residents which include the purchase of air purifiers, air conditioners, interior cleaning, house and car washing.

**A resident stated that BC Hydro is trying to buy out residents with a car wash and that residents want to bring back value to their lives, that residents have lost the value and enjoyment. The resident stated the idea sounds silly, look at how much BC Hydro is spending on fish. The resident commented that when residents call with concerns the calls are not returned and questions are not answered, how many blockades will residents need to do for action?**

- BC Hydro confirmed that after seeing a photo of dust from the dam site they will continue to ramp up dust control measures. The project is in the peak year of construction activity.

**A resident commented that when the project is over, property values will still be low, and the road will continue to be an issue. Residents stated that they need answers and have been asking for seven years. Residents stated that they want their lives back, or they want BC Hydro to help them leave and that so far no one at BC Hydro is giving answers or solutions.**

- BC Hydro confirmed this is important. It is not always easy seeing issues through other people's eyes.

## **Water Levels/Operations**

**A resident explained that Old Fort residents were informed that the fish project was cancelled, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI) also confirmed this. BC Hydro also confirmed it was all cancelled. A resident stated that in those discussions, it was never mentioned that a project would take place on the island and that the river has been the lowest it has ever been. The resident stated that they think BC Hydro is misleading residents and that this project is about something other than fish, asking if BC Hydro's need for more gravel is the real reason for the project?**

- BC Hydro explained that while it is the Operations division that has affected the water levels, it does work well for the work being done, but the construction team does not control water levels on the river. With the cool spring there wasn't a high demand for power, but now that the province is heating up, generation will now increase at our facilities upstream and water levels should come up. The Fish Enhancement project has been planned for years. Under the Fisheries Act, BC Hydro has a large requirement, in terms of hectares, of new fish habitat that must be created. There are very few suitable areas and the back-channel work was at the top of the list, but it was cancelled after the slide. This site on the island is important, BC Hydro is deepening the channel to reduce the stranding risk for fish.
- BC Hydro confirmed that the project is being done for the benefit of the fish.

**A resident asked if the island will be smaller when the work is done.**

- BC Hydro confirmed that the island will be the same size when the project is done as the excavation was taking place in the river channel. Any excess gravel will be hauled off the island.

## **Safety**

BC Hydro heard from residents that there is concern about safety on Old Fort hill. BC Hydro provided an update on the work the security team has been doing with emergency operations (911) to create a contingency plan in the event of an emergency and a traffic issue blocking Old Fort road.

**A resident is concerned about the hauling that may occur if the 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue till conveyor breaks down. Residents feel this would be a breaking point for them and want to know how long of an outage there would need to be for truck hauling to start?**

- BC Hydro confirmed that all of the till is moved by the conveyor. If the conveyor should break down, the contingency to haul is required. BC Hydro doesn't want to haul by truck, but a significant delay if the conveyor was out of service would be an issue.
- Typically delays are 1-2 days, however a vandalism-related break down last winter resulted in a ten-day repair. Note, the conveyor only runs from about Apr. 1 to Oct 31.

**A resident asked why BC Hydro can't build another road and keep trucks off Old Fort road. The resident expressed that they feel there will end up being a death on Old Fort road if truck hauling takes place, that the turning lane into Gate B is not adequate and feel that it's basically half the width it needs to be and half as short. Residents stated that they were originally told that the hill would be double-laned. A resident stated that while jogging, a truck driver was not paying attention and they had to jump a barrier to prevent from being hit, they feel the road should take into account pedestrians and cyclists.**

- BC Hydro will have engineering look at the road.
- BC Hydro also confirmed that employees will be spoken to about safe driving.

**A resident asked if Gate B could be closed to trucks in bad weather to avoid a jackknifed truck blocking Old Fort Road. Residents would rather see problems on site than on the public road.**

- BC Hydro committed to looking at that option. There is a concern about the route on site from Gate A to Gate B as there is a steep hill on site that may be problematic for trucks.

**A resident felt that a spin-out on the construction road would be better than a problem on the Old Fort public road.**

- BC Hydro explained that a contractor is on call and can be dispatched to sand and clear the road.
- BC Hydro explained that an ambulance can be hosted by security through the construction site in the event that Old Fort Road is blocked.

**A resident commented that having a contractor sanding and clearing the road has not been successful in the past. The resident stated that all residents have been stuck on the**

**hill due to Site C traffic problems and asked how would an ambulance driver know the road is blocked until they reach the blockage?**

- BC Hydro explained that a new process was implemented in November 2021 whereby security staff check the route at least once per hour and monitor for spinouts. RCMP have committed to a media campaign with enforcement of snow chains for heavy duty vehicles travelling on Old Fort road. There are several tow truck companies available to respond.

**A resident asked if BC Hydro could have their own tow truck available.**

- BC Hydro said this will be considered.

**A resident asked about response time in relation to the golden hour (the urgent need for the care of trauma patients). The resident wanted to know how much time would be added to reroute an ambulance, stating that adding another ten minutes to the trip could mean the difference between life and death.**

- BC Hydro said the travel time between Gate A and Gate B is approximately three minutes.

**A resident asked how the ambulance would know the hill is blocked, noting that currently residents are not notified. The resident stated that with 911 operators situated around the province, they are not familiar with the local area and potential issues. The resident asked why residents are not worrying about these types of issues and wonders why BC Hydro has not addressed these prior to construction starting. A resident asked that once a firm plan is in place to reroute an ambulance, that an Old Fort resident is invited to stress test it during winter conditions.**

- BC Hydro confirmed that they rely on a variety of sources to know when the road is blocked and inform 911 dispatch.
- BC Hydro agreed that having a resident join for a stress test would be a good idea.

**Residents asked for BC Hydro to put a sign with a phone number along the road so they have access to a person in charge 24/7.**

- BC Hydro offered to look into an electronic sign that can be updated as needed.

**A resident expressed concerns about emergency planning and asked what happens if there is a dam breach. The resident shared that there are concerns about the stability of the dam and residents are not confident with the Peace River Regional District (PRRD) creating the emergency plan as they are often not responsive. The resident stated that since BC Hydro owns the dam, they should be responsible for looking after residents.**

- BC Hydro explained that an emergency response plan is in place and last year BC Hydro spoke with the majority of river front property owners regarding the plan.
- BC Hydro committed to getting back to residents about an emergency response plan.

BC Hydro confirmed a follow-up meeting would be scheduled in another month or two.

The meeting concluded at 9:06pm.