



Working together with our community

Council Meeting – July 22, 2025

Subject: Next Steps - Forestry Farm Road Gas Well
Report Number: CDS-25-006
Division: Community and Development Services
Department: Administration
Ward: Ward 2
Purpose: For Decision

Recommendation(s):

That Staff Report CDS-25-006, Next Steps-Forestry Farm Road Gas Well be accepted as information; and,

That Norfolk requests that the Province coordinates an update meeting with local interested residents; and

That Norfolk requests the Province to arrange for a multi-Ministerial meeting to advocate for a Provincially funded and managed action plan to address the concerns at the Forestry Farm Road Gas Well site.

Executive Summary:

After almost a decade of searching for solutions to the Forestry Farm Road abandoned well, new data collected through the ground water study has led experts to recommend an alternative approach. Initially, the thought was to “cap” the well but after those efforts failed and new data collection was analyzed, the recommended solution has changed. Instead of “capping” the well, the recommendations now involve, amongst many recommendations:

- Installation of a temporary pressure relief well (approx. \$500,000)
- Installation of technology to improve air quality and provide water treatment (approx. \$1,000,000)

Discussions:

A solution to the abandoned gas well, thought to be associated with sulfur-rich groundwater that is discharging to ground surface on a County-owned property on Forestry Farm Road (FFR) remains elusive. For close to a decade, following the capping of a nearby well by the Province, believed by some to be the catalyst for the

current situation, the FFR well has been the subject of concern for area residents, Norfolk County, and the Province of Ontario.

With close to 30,000 abandoned gas wells across Ontario, many located in southwest Ontario, Norfolk continues to believe that the issue requires the Province to be the lead in any effort to solve the issue. The problem of abandoned wells does not respect municipal boundaries – it is a regional issue.

After several years of asking for the Province to step in and take the lead in the search for a solution, Norfolk was successful in having the Province agree to place the FFR well into the Abandoned Works Program, a fully funded and administered program by the Province. The approved scope of work involved the Province acting as Project Manager and contracting a company to “plug” the well in an effort to provide relief.

In 2019, a research study looking for solutions to the FFR provided four possible solutions to the situation. Based on the evidence at the time, it was felt that “capping” the FFR well was the ideal solution. However, after a prolonged period of time within the Abandoned Works Program, the Province was unable to find the well head and “cap” the well.

In late 2024, in an attempt to find a solution to the FFR, the Province provided Norfolk with additional one-time funding to fund additional studies, which included the installation of monitoring wells and further data collection. The study was completed, and the report was delivered to Norfolk on May 30, 2025. The objectives of the follow up work were achieved – monitoring wells were sited, and data was collected and continues to be collected.

After the experts reviewed the additional data, recommendations attempting to control and resolve the FFR situation have been revised. With additional data in hand, the current belief is that there is no way to stop the issue. The underground pressure will find a way to relieve itself. This reality could not have been supported initially, although some believed this to be the case from the start. The additional study and data conclude that there is not a single location – there are multiple locations that the underground pressure will find to relieve the pressure forming deep underground.

As a result, the original strategy to “cap” the FFR is no longer being recommended. Instead, the report makes several recommendations including:

- Continued monitoring of the situation
- Continued calibration of groundwater flows
- Full survey of additional groundwater discharge points
- Pivot the focus of discharge from FFR to the Spanjers Spring area
- Prioritize nearby gas wells for decommissioning as part of the Abandoned Works Program
- Contain existing flow and gas discharge with a temporary collection system and install a vacuum degasser

- Stop erosion at FFR by installing a nearby pressure relief well
- Initiate a technical working group with MNR, MOE, MOH and Norfolk to work towards long-term solutions
- Initiate an Environmental Assessment to address potential treatment and discharge of groundwater

The recommended revised go-forward plan will require additional financial commitments from the Province and an agreement amongst multiple Provincial Ministries, including the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry of the Environment (MOE). A multi-Ministry go-forward plan is required because the installation of equipment to treat water and air requires various Ministry approvals.

Financial Services Comments:

On April 24, 2024, Norfolk County received confirmation from the Ministry of Natural Resources regarding the success of the Legacy Oil and Gas Wells program eligibility for up to \$280,000 in base funding for the 2024-25 and 2025-26 years for a total of \$560,000. According to the schedule set out in the Transfer Payment Agreement, the final year 3 (2025-26) of this grant funding expires March 31, 2026. The grant funding for year 2 (2024-25) and year 3 (2025-26) have been spent and/or fully allocated as outlined in each transfer payment agreement as required prior to the approval of the grant.

As per Report OPS-25-005, Additional Funding for a Ground Water Study, from January 2025, the agreement with MNR was amended to include an additional \$450,000 in grant funding to cover the costs of the groundwater study. These funds have been fully spent on the study.

As per the recommendations outlined in this report based on the findings from the Ground Water Study, Norfolk County would be petitioning for additional Provincial funding to mitigate the remainder of the costs associated with the installation of the temporary pressure relief well and the installation of technology to improve air quality and provide water treatment. After utilizing the remainder of the grant funding available, Norfolk County would be seeking to ask the Province to provide an additional \$1,500,000 to complete these tasks as a suitable solution to the issues regarding the Forestry Farm abandoned gas well.

Interdepartmental Implications:

N/A

Consultation(s):

Various internal stakeholders

Strategic Plan Linkage:

Sustaining Norfolk - Creating a sustainable community and a positive legacy

Explanation:

Norfolk County continues to treat this matter with utmost urgency and priority. Creating a positive legacy involves dealing with and resolving issues such as these.

Attachment(s):

- Mountrose Environmental Ground Water Study Report

Approval:

Approved By:

Al Meneses, Chief Administrative Officer

Prepared and Reviewed By:

Bill Cridland, General Manager, Community and Development Services

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Next Steps - Forestry Farm Road Gas Well - CDS-25-006.docx
Attachments:	- 31976-551 Report.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Jul 15, 2025

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

B. Cridland, General Manager, Community and Development Services

A. Fanning, Treasurer / Director, Financial Management and Planning

A. Meneses, Chief Administrative Officer