

Sept. 25, 2023

Dear local government leaders,

Re: Review of subdivision proposals by Northern Health

I am reaching out to you to offer an update regarding Northern Health's temporary suspension of the review of routine subdivision proposals submitted by municipalities and regional districts.

This temporary suspension is the result of a critical shortage of Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) to conduct the reviews and has been in place since May 2022. We continue to prioritize work on those issues posing the greatest risk to communities and public health, while we continue to recruit EHO staff.

Northern Health EHOs normally play a consulting role in the subdivision process, and their review and approval is not required for subdivision development. Municipal or provincial Approving Officers may request comments from Northern Health on the suitability of the proposed lots to accommodate onsite sewage disposal systems and/or onsite drinking water systems, but if neither of these is required the subdivision can be assessed on its own merit. If one or both are required, the municipal or provincial Approving Officer may require a subdivision applicant to submit feasibility studies conducted by certified experts, prior to considering approval. Subdivision applications should always engage their own experts to confirm the feasibility of any planned water or sewer system.

However, if a local government or other developer believes a proposed subdivision could pose a public health risk, NH Environmental Public Health staff may be able to review the proposal if staffing capacity is available, and we encourage municipalities to reach out to Public Health via our central intake process (php@northernhealth.ca, 250-565-7322) with a specific request and a brief description of the public health concern.

In order to meet the needs the communities Northern Health serves, we continue to aggressively recruit new EHOs. In addition, Northern Health has created three new Environmental Health Analyst positions and a Drinking Water Specialist position to support the work of EHOs. Northern Health is also committed to supporting the training and development of new EHOs, and has offered professional development opportunities for current staff and mentors practicum students working to attain their certification. Our staff have also started conducting remote inspections of low-risk facilities, to reduce travel time and increase workflow.

Despite Northern Health's best efforts to fill vacancies in our Environmental Public Health Department, our vacancy rate for EHOs remains high. However, we continue to actively recruit and look for creative ways to fulfil our public health mandate. When staffing levels increase, we will be able to consider resuming the regular review of subdivisions referrals.

Feel free reach out to my office if you have any more questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jong Kim', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Dr. Jong Kim, Chief Medical Health Officer
Northern Health