

**Subject: Comox Valley Water Treatment Project**

**File: 1470-06**

### **Purpose**

To provide an overview of the Water Treatment Plant Communications Plan. This document outlines the proactive outreach activities planned for residents of the Comox Valley in advance of the public assent process in March 2018.

### **Goals**

- Provide the public with accurate information about the project and the need for it.
- Correct and clarify misconceptions about drinking water standards, required upgrades and potential alternatives.
- Demonstrate cooperative, productive work underway with Island Health and impacted municipalities.
- Generate interest among Comox Valley Water System users to encourage participation in the assent process.

### **Target Audience(s):**

#### Primary

- Eligible voters, including Courtenay/Comox residents and Electoral Areas A, B and C. This includes residents that are not connected to the Comox Valley Water System but are still eligible to participate in the public assent process.
- Comox Valley businesses including restaurants and dental offices.
- Other affected stakeholders and community groups including School District 71, health care facilities, public buildings, Chamber of Commerce and Comox Valley Economic Development Society.

#### Secondary

- Local media
- Comox Valley Water Committee
- Island Health
- Provincial and federal funding agencies

### **Key Speaking Points:**

- The Comox Valley water system provides drinking water to 45,000 residents. The current system is non-compliant with the provincial surface water treatment objectives guideline. We are the only community of our size in BC that does not have a secondary form of treatment.
- The new system will deliver three main benefits:
  1. It will eliminate the need for turbidity-related boil water notices
  2. It will remove the risk of viruses and bacteria in our drinking water
  3. It will provide a secure supply of reliable, high quality drinking water for decades to come.

- The new system is comprised of four main components:
  1. A new deep-water intake to access cooler, cleaner water found deeper in the lake
  2. A new pumping station near the intake location
  3. A new Water Treatment Plant to perform water filtration and disinfection
  4. A new treated water pipeline from the Water Plant to the water distribution system.
- Project timelines have been adjusted to conclude in 2021 to allow us to secure maximum grant funding which will ensure a minimum impact to water rates for those on the Comox Valley Water System.
- A public assent process is necessary in order to borrow the funds to undertake the project, which is currently estimated to cost \$110.6 million, of which a maximum of \$29 million will be borrowed.
- Comox Valley residents deserve modern treatment to protect their drinking water. The new system will bring the Comox Valley water system in line with other communities across BC, Canada and the developed world.

**Guiding Principles:**

- Proactive communications and regular updates will establish reliability by the CVRD in continued information sharing
- Respectful acceptance of the concerns of the community and commitment to responding to questions and sharing information where possible
- Communications to reflect the need for new infrastructure and the Water Committee's vigorous review of options has already occurred. Phases in this plan are intended to build upon the foundation of this work.

**Situation Analysis:**Strengths:

- The only option is to move forward with a filtration plant. This is a mandatory requirement in order to meet the province's surface water treatment objectives.
- Strong foundational assessment work has been completed, which will provide important evidence for key messages.

Weaknesses:

- The current permit to operate the Comox Valley water system requires that filtration be installed by September 2019.
- Due to changes in grant programs, funding announcements will be delayed until early 2019, meaning that a new system will not be operational until mid-2021. Public misconceptions that a water treatment plant is not needed will need to be addressed to ensure residents understand that filtration is a requirement and not an option.

Opportunities:

- Water quality and security is of critical importance to the public and many are eager to see this project proceed.
- Island Health wishes to move forward with a cohesive voice that demonstrates all parties are working together to bring our water system in line with provincial standards.

- Effective messaging about need for a new water treatment system will help to build public support for the project.

Threats:

- Residents are becoming fatigued by news of the project, which has been under discussion for many years. They wish to see action (shovels in the ground).
- Boil water notices are frustrating for water users and misperceptions have developed about “easy fixes” to the system.
- If appropriate resources are not invested in project communications there is a risk that residents may not support the borrowing of funds required to build the treatment plant.

**Communications Strategy/Tactics:**

<p><b>Phase 1: Underway</b> Set the Stage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop clear key messages for use with media, and for public/resident/stakeholder meetings</li> <li>• Develop ad campaign concepts/design</li> <li>• Develop easy to understand infographics explaining treatment process/timeline</li> <li>• Develop informational displays</li> <li>• Create/update information library: FAQ, Backgrounder, Fact Sheet</li> <li>• Create a centralized project contact (email)</li> <li>• Establish email/mail list for interested Comox Valley residents</li> <li>• Create educational video series</li> <li>• Create user-friendly campaign pages with easy to browse links and categories.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Phase 2: Oct - Dec 2017</b> Educate about Water Treatment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentations to key audiences, groups</li> <li>• Implement ad campaign phase #1 (print, online)</li> <li>• Develop informational mailout for distribution to all eligible participants in assent process</li> <li>• Maintain/update information library</li> <li>• Install informational displays at key community hubs (rec centres, municipal halls, community events), including those areas not serviced by the Comox Valley Water System</li> <li>• Publish informational articles.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Phase 3: Jan – Mar 2018</b> Prepare for Assent Process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host public open houses where factual information is available (including info materials, advertising &amp; promotion, media advisory, photos, event summary and follow-up materials)</li> <li>• Implement ad campaign phase #2 (print, online, radio)</li> <li>• Prepare notice and mail with project backgrounder, including those areas not serviced by the Comox Valley Water System.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Phase 4: Mar – Apr 2018</b> Communicate Results</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issue news release announcing outcome of assent process</li> <li>• Prepare FAQ re: next steps</li> <li>• Update website with vote results and next steps</li> <li>• Develop communications plan for next stages.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Phase 5: May – Oct 2018</b> Maintain Goodwill and Engage with Stakeholders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain public awareness of the project, through monthly news bulletins</li> <li>• Maintain/update information library and project website</li> <li>• Communicate results of indicative design and value planning processes, through news release and public open house</li> <li>• Engage with Comox Lake user groups/stakeholders on an individual basis (i.e. logging companies, campground, cabin owners, Fish &amp; Game Society, BC Hydro, adjacent property owners) to provide up-to-date information about project and advance Watershed Protection Plan.</li> </ul>

**Approval History**

Created by:	C. Wile, Sept/19/2017
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