



North Salt Spring Waterworks District

Be water savvy – Use only what you need.

August 2017

Moving Forward – A Message from the Board of Trustees

With a little over a week remaining until islanders go to the polls to determine the governance model under which the North Salt Spring Waterworks District (NSSWD) will operate, the Board of Trustees feels further discussion of the available options and the potential impacts to ratepayers is warranted.

Much has been made of the fact that the Board publicly stated their support for incorporation and the reasons for that support including the additional funding opportunities available to municipal governments. The Board has a clear responsibility to inform ratepayers of the impacts of all possible forms of governance and stands by the decision to do so. This is, in fact, an important part of the duty of a Trustee.

The Board recognizes and respects the rights of all islanders to express their preference for the future of Salt Spring, and does not believe that informing ratepayers interferes in any way with the ability of islanders to exercise their right to vote on September 9th.

Only Three Options Available to NSSWD

Recently, there has been discussion in the community about the possibility of governance models other than the status quo or municipal incorporation. It is important for ratepayers to know that there are only three options for the NSSWD: municipal incorporation, conversion to a local service area of the Capital Regional District (CRD), or remaining an improvement district. Governance by a local community commission is not an option for the NSSWD.

If the island chooses not to incorporate, the District will enter into discussions with the CRD about the possibility of conversion to a local service area. Conversion is not something the Board can decide for the ratepayers and there is no guarantee that it will happen. In 2008, the NSSWD and CRD examined the possibility of conversion, but ultimately, it did not occur. This time, it will likely be a lengthy process involving studies and negotiations, and even if an agreement with CRD is reached, the ratepayers must approve conversion via referendum. Although conversion would provide some additional funding opportunities, it would mean a loss of local control and would not provide greater opportunities for coordination and prioritization of services. For those reasons, the Board feels municipal incorporation is a better option.

The upcoming referendum is about the future, not the past.

There has also been discussion about what has been accomplished on the island to date. While there is no doubt that many projects have succeeded, it is important to discuss what has not been done and

cannot be done effectively under the current governance structure and narrow mandate of an improvement district. The upcoming referendum is about the future, not the past.

NSSWD Water Service Underpins the Socio-Economic Health of the Island

The NSSWD provides water to approximately half the island's residents and the hospital, schools, and downtown business core. This service underpins the socio-economic health of the island and supports the many visitors to our island as well as all the businesses and residents that depend on them. To provide this service, the NSSWD operates a complex distribution system consisting of treatment systems, pipes, pumps, tanks, and pressure regulating stations, and employs a well-trained and certified staff capable of responding to emergencies at any time without assistance from other organizations.

The cost and complexity of providing service on SSI is a consequence of many factors, some shared by other municipal water purveyors and some unique to the island. All water suppliers are facing the challenges of climate change adaptation, increasing regulatory requirements for water treatment, and the need to replace aging infrastructure; however, water supply on SSI is further complicated by local factors. The geography and topography of the island require a more complicated distribution system than in many other communities. Historical growth patterns have resulted in a large and complex distribution system with a low number of connections per kilometre of pipe, which increases the cost to ratepayers. The limited availability of surface water on the island; the lack of winter snow pack to replenish summer supplies; the seasonal demand due to tourism; the need for two separate surface water sources; and the existence of frequent and sometimes toxic cyanobacterial blooms are not issues that most communities face.

With an estimated population-served of 5,500 people, the NSSWD is larger than 87 of the 162 municipalities in BC. The Board feels that the NSSWD has outgrown the improvement district model and is at a disadvantage compared to other public water suppliers. The NSSWD and community as a whole have reached the point where coordination between service providers is necessary to address issues effectively. Through the authority and powers granted to municipalities by the *Community Charter* and *Local Government Act*, an island municipality can create programs to address the wide range of community and water-related issues. Neither the current situation nor conversion to a CRD local service area will allow the integration of services that is required to address local needs.

The Board is aware that the cost and complexity of water service will increase in the future regardless of the governance structure; however, the Board feels that a municipal model is best equipped to minimize those increases. Furthermore, the Board's preference for a municipal government is based on more than the possibility of grants. Quite simply, the Board of Trustees feels that a municipality will provide a single voice for Salt Spring, and is the best mechanism to effectively address the many current and future challenges and meet the needs of the ratepayers and community of Salt Spring Island.

Marshall J. Heinekey,
Chair Board of Trustees