



HAGENSBORG WATERWORKS DISTRICT,

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Hagensborg Waterworks Board Meeting

Community update

Your elected Hagensborg Water District Trustees met Monday, November 21st. In attendance were Trustees Jeremy Baillie, Donald Mikkelson, Chairperson Chris Matthews and Mark Nelson. Trustee O'Neill was unable to make the regularly scheduled meeting. Also in attendance were Dianne Tuck, Melany Rambo, June Vosburgh and Ken Dunsworth.

Trustees first presented an update regarding ongoing discussions with DFO representative John Willis regarding collaboration with local DFO. The Department of Oceans and Fisheries is in need of their own intake to provide disease free water to the hatchery. Their installing of an intake would be at their cost and present no cost to ratepayers but add substantial benefits in the area of improved water delivery service and ongoing maintenance. First, much of the current aging infrastructure would be replaced through monies the DFO has access through the Federal Government. Some of the infrastructure improvements ratepayers would see would include improved flow, increased safety for volunteers performing maintenance after high water events and should a major flood event occur that damaged any of the infrastructures DFO would have access to monies to see this occur.

Much of what the current board is working on involves sound planning for the future in the areas of pipeline replacement, etc. This includes a project replacement of the Firehall in approximately ten years' time. The board currently awaits news of their Canada150 grant application which would match existing funds the HWD has in reserve to replace the aging Firehall.

The board heard concerns from ratepayers present regarding a recent decision to maintain water delivery rates at the previously approved level. Trustees have discussed options over the past few months and all agree that no one is satisfied paying more or even paying the current rate. We would be remiss in not acknowledging that amongst board members there is some disagreement on how the best way to meet an ever increasing amount of government policy/regulation, to maintain infrastructure and continue to water delivery.

Trustees have presented many ideas and despite varying opinions presented in print by one of the trustees, all opinions have been heard, considered and thoroughly debated. Debate is good, discussion is good and we're doing our best to make sure that the process is transparent and inclusive of ratepayers. Costs have been cut. Maintenance that was once done by contract is now done on a volunteer basis by Trustee Matthews and Mikkelson. During our most recent heavy rainfall, the well recently installed performed perfectly with none of the usual water turbidity that plagued ratepayers and usually forced a flushing of the lines that further disrupted service. However, it still did require Trustee Matthews to donate approximately 10 hours of his time digging by hand the silt that had entered the system.

Trustees have examined proposals to cut administrative costs and have moved forward with different rates for different activities performed by the chief financial officer.

One recent decision that was thoroughly debated regarded what percentage of expenses to place upon water delivery vs. fire protection. In the past, boards maintained a 75% water delivery 25% fire protection split when it came to shared expenses. However, through the dedicated work of the CFO the split has been ascertained to be higher in the area of fire protection so the Board did vote in favour of presenting to the provincial finance authority a proposal that would see the split at 50%.

This proposal was welcomed and commented upon by Joshua Craig, from the BC Municipal Finance Authority as one of the best he has seen and congratulated the Improvement District on planning for the future.

A misconception that unfortunately has grown out of this decision involved a recent opinion piece stating that the HWD decided to raise property taxes. The HWD does not control the amount rate payers pay for property taxes. It could raise property taxes for some and it could lower property taxes for others. To ignore that fire protection is the greater expense could lead to higher costs in terms of rate payer house insurance which was not a decision the majority of the trustees were comfortable with.

Trustees appreciated those present asking thoughtful questions and holding the trustees accountable and allowing trustees to answer questions and encourage further dialogue including notions of working closer with the Central Coast Regional District and a dialogue about the future of the POE system. Trustees agree that the POE mandate from rate payers needs to be revisited and have committed to a public consultation discussion in late January or February. Trustees will be presenting various options including continuation of the POE, possible chlorination and other alternatives. Finally, trustees are also committed to holding further public consultation regarding a closer working relationship with the CCRD prior to the AGM. We want to ensure that the rate payers have all recent, accurate, unbiased information prior to both consultation discussions so that informed decisions can be made moving forward.

Finally, your trustees welcome any feedback and encourage rate payers to contact them and engage in dialogue as we continue to move forward. The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Board of Trustees will be December 12th at 1:00pm at the Hagensborg Fire Hall.