



# Water Quality Improvement Project

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## **SEKID \$15.3 million borrowing bylaw defeated, community calls for government funding assistance**

The South East Kelowna Irrigation District's Alternative Approval Process (AAP) to determine community support for a \$15.3 million borrowing bylaw has been defeated. The AAP required ten percent or more of eligible voters to register their opposition to the bylaw to prevent the bylaw from moving forward. With 3,309 landowners eligible to vote, the ten percent threshold required 330 responses. At the closing of the AAP period October 25, 2012, one thousand and sixty-five (1,065) responses were received, representing 32% of eligible voters.

The purpose of the borrowing bylaw was to help fund the \$22.3-million Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP) recommended by the board of trustees to improve the quality of drinking water and comply fully with health regulations. The project would supply treated groundwater (well water) for domestic use through a new "twinned" delivery system, and provide untreated surface water for agricultural use through the existing distribution network. One of eight options considered by SEKID trustees and staff, the proposed solution provides the most effective and economical response to SEKID's ongoing challenge to meet provincial drinking water standards.

"SEKID has been working hard for several years to find the best way to upgrade its domestic water system," says board chair Brian Wright. "We are disappointed we cannot move forward with the project at this time. The message we have heard time and again is that the community is in favour of the project but are not willing to move forward without government funding assistance."

Wright goes on to say, "We have recently met with our local MLAs and the Minister of Community Development, Bill Bennett., and, while no firm commitment has been made, we hope senior government grant funding for our project could become available in the near future."

The community needs to recognize, however, that defeat of the borrowing bylaw means the district is unable to comply with the Conditions on Permit required by Interior Health on the district's operating permit.

"Without the ability to borrow money to fund the project we are not in compliance with our operating permit issued by the health authority," says general manager, Toby Pike, "we will have to sit down with Interior Health and see what our options are for moving forward."

SEKID and all other water suppliers serving more than 500 people are required to meet the *Drinking Water Treatment Objectives (Microbiological) for Surface Water Supplies in BC*. To receive its annual operating permit from Interior Health, SEKID must show that it is working toward meeting these provincial water quality standards and treatment guidelines.

In addition to mailing a newsletter to all landowners in the service area, the district held three open houses for residents to provide information about the project and the projected rate increases that would be required to cover project costs. Without senior government grant assistance, it is estimated that rates for domestic units could increase about ten percent annually over the course of the ten-year project. For example, the monthly rate for domestic units could increase from the \$38 charged now to about \$72 after seven years. An additional monthly water quality levy of \$42 could also be introduced to users in the year they are scheduled to come onto the new groundwater system. The combined total after seven years could be about \$114 per month, triple the current monthly toll rate.

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