



## Okanagan Falls Incorporation Study

# Communications & Community Engagement Summary

Okanagan Falls Incorporation Study

November 2024



# Purpose

This document summarizes the communication and engagement that occurred during the Okanagan Falls Incorporation Study which took place from fall 2023 until the end of 2024.

## Background

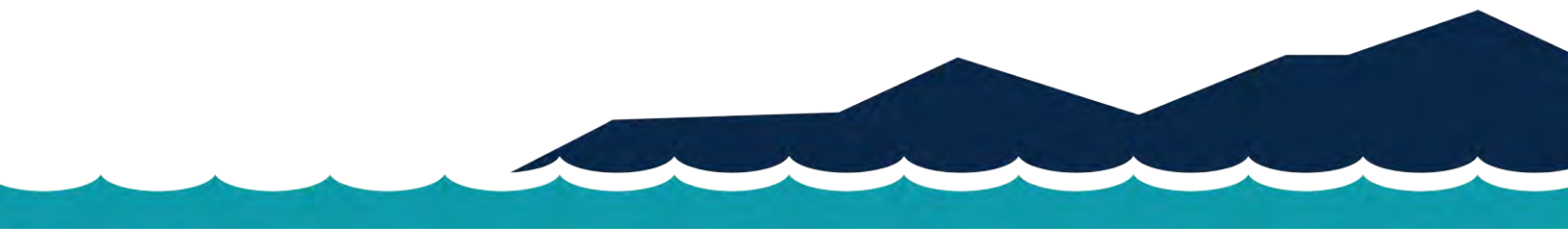
Okanagan Falls is currently situated within Electoral Area “D” of the Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen (RDOS). The RDOS is the local government responsible for providing most of the local services on which residents depend, including water, fire response, planning and building inspection, parks and recreation, bylaw enforcement and several others.

RDOS has nine (9) electoral areas, with each area represented by one (1) elected official, the Area Director, on the RDOS Board (for a total of nine (9) electoral area Directors). Okanagan Falls is represented by the Area “D” Director. There are also 11 Municipal Directors that represent municipalities within the RDOS, for a total of 20 directors on the board, each representing their own jurisdictions/electoral areas.

Incorporation is the process through which an area transitions from an unincorporated community to a municipality (village, town, city, or district, depending on its geographic size and population). The possibility of incorporation has been discussed in Okanagan Falls for some time.

Incorporation was last voted on and rejected by residents in 1989. Since then, residents have been grappling with how best to guide services, renew infrastructure, resolve community issues, and ensure that local interests are paramount. Recently, following the results of a Services and Boundary Configuration Study, the RDOS and Ministry of Municipal Affairs have supported an Incorporation Study to consider incorporation once again.

The Okanagan Falls Incorporation Study was conducted between summer 2023 and the end of 2024. The Study set out to assess what a decision by electors to incorporate would mean for local services, governance and property taxation in Okanagan Falls. The Study was intended to provide electors within the Study Area the information they need to make an informed decision about incorporation, should the Study Committee and RDOS Board of Directors recommend that a referendum on incorporation be held.



## Communications and Community Engagement Sub-Committee

Throughout the duration of the Study, four (4) members of the Incorporation Study Committee volunteered additional time to review and provide advice on draft communication materials and event plans, as well as attend most events and distribute information around the community. Special thanks to these individuals for contributing their time and insight:

- Rick Wilson
- Kea Adachi
- Randy Ludwar
- Debbie Rose

## Communication with Indigenous Communities

Consultation with Indigenous communities is undertaken by the Province of B.C. and is not addressed in this document.

## Communications Vision

At the outset of the Incorporation Study, a Communications Vision was established to provide a foundation for all communications and engagement. The Communications Vision was:

To inform Okanagan Falls residents within the Incorporation Study Area in a clear and neutral way about how regional districts and municipalities are different, and how incorporation would be expected to affect Okanagan Falls in terms of local services, governance and property taxation.

To distribute this information throughout the Study timeline and in locations and at times that make sense to reach Area residents where they are at.

## Creative Theme

The following logo/wordmark was used on all project materials.



**Okanagan Falls**  
Incorporation Study



# Key Messages

Key messages are the most important information about the project. The following key messages were used across all Incorporation Study communication and engagement materials:

1. There are different ways that communities in B.C. are defined and governed.
2. An unincorporated area, or Electoral Area, is comprised of communities outside of municipal boundaries. Electoral Areas are represented by one (1) Area Director on the Board of the local regional district.
3. Incorporation is the process through which an unincorporated area becomes recognized as a municipality (village, town, city, or district). As a municipality, the community elects its own Mayor and Council and makes its own decisions about most local services and taxation.
4. At present, Okanagan Falls is an unincorporated community of 2,760 people within RDOS Electoral Area “D.”
5. Residents in Okanagan Falls have been interested in incorporation for many decades.
6. An Incorporation Study is underway to assess how incorporation would affect Okanagan Falls’ services, taxation, and governance.
7. The Incorporation Study was conducted between fall 2023 to the end of 2024. The first half of the study took place between fall 2023 and summer 2024 and consisted of technical research about the implications of incorporation. The second half of the study began in spring 2024 and ran until the end of that year, focused on sharing information with the community about incorporation.
8. The Study was led by independent consultants that did a detailed assessment of costs, benefits, and impacts of incorporation. The consultants also worked with the Incorporation Study Committee to communicate the Study process and findings to Okanagan Falls residents.
9. The Study was guided by an impartial 10-person Incorporation Study Advisory Committee made up of community members that live within the Incorporation Study Area. The Committee was a neutral group tasked with reviewing Study findings and engaging the community on the findings.
10. Consultation with Indigenous communities regarding the Incorporation Study is being undertaken by the Province of B.C. and the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen.
11. All Study information was posted as it became available on the RDOS Incorporation Study webpage at [www.rdosregionalconnections.ca](http://www.rdosregionalconnections.ca).
12. When the Study is complete, the Committee will advise the RDOS Board whether it recommends holding a community referendum (vote) on incorporation.
13. After hearing from the Committee, the RDOS Board will make a recommendation on a referendum to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The Minister will decide if a referendum should be held.
14. If a referendum (vote) is held, electors within the Study Area will decide if they wish to incorporate as a new municipality or remain as an unincorporated community within RDOS Electoral Area “D.”
15. The Incorporation Study is important and will affect the future of Okanagan Falls.

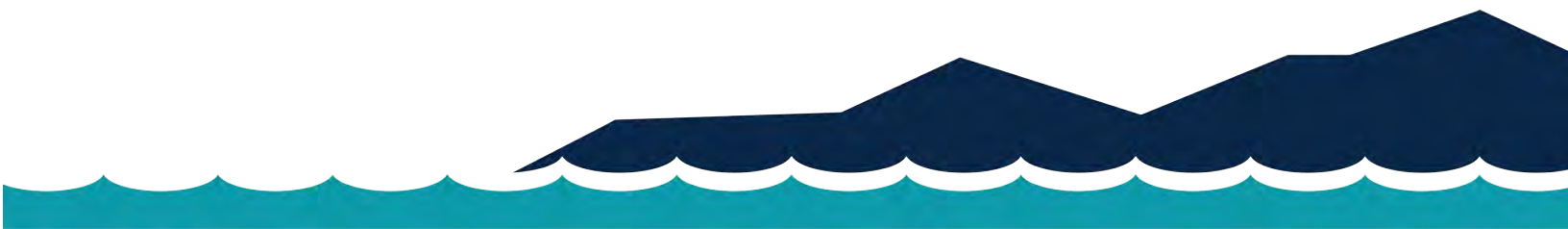


# Audiences

An audience is a specific person or group of people with whom we want to communicate. The primary audience of the Incorporation Study was **electors who own properties within the Study Area**. Electors are defined as Canadian Citizens who are over the age of 18. This large audience group was broken down into several sub-audiences to help determine what types of communication methods were needed (in no particular order):

- Resident electors (property owners and renters)
- Non-resident property owners
- Okanagan Falls Community Association
- Royal Canadian Legion Branch 227 (Okanagan Falls)
- South Okanagan Chamber of Commerce
- Okanagan Falls Skaha Lake Winery Association
- Okanagan Falls Community Partners
- People living along the border of the Study Area who do not know if they are included
- The RDOS Board, including the Area Director
- The Ministry of Municipal Affairs
- Residents who prefer to get information online
- Residents who prefer to get information in hard copy or in person
- Residents who prefer details
- Residents who prefer summaries

For clarity: Indigenous groups are not listed as an audience because consultation and engagement with Indigenous communities is being undertaken by the Province of B.C.



# Summary of Communications and Engagement

The table below summarizes the communication and community engagement activities that occurred between fall 2023 and the end of 2024 as part of the Incorporation Study:

What	Timeframe	Audience Focus
<b>Study Committee Meetings</b>  All Study Committee meetings were advertised, and community members were invited to attend. Participation for all meetings was available in-person as well as online/remotely. All meetings included time for attendees to ask questions of the Committee and consultants.	Ongoing throughout the duration of the Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electors within the Study Area</li> </ul>
<b>RDOS Regional Connections webpage</b>  This webpage was the main place where Study documents were posted throughout the project. The page was updated regularly with Study findings and features about important meetings. There was a place on the page where residents could post questions and have them answered by members of the project team.  Numerous questions were posted by residents throughout the duration of the Study, all of which were replied to by the project team.	Ongoing throughout the duration of the Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electors within the Study Area</li> <li>Residents who prefer detailed information</li> <li>Residents who prefer to access information online</li> </ul>
<b>Videos</b>  Two (2) short explainer videos were produced, which respectively focused on: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">The Study process and timeframe</a></li> <li><a href="#">Study findings and next steps</a></li> </ol> Both videos were promoted on social media and the Incorporation Study project webpage. The videos can be viewed on the RDOS YouTube channel (links included above).	November 2023  September 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electors within the Study Area</li> <li>Community groups (who can show the video to their members)</li> <li>Residents who prefer summaries</li> </ul>
<b>Tax Impact Estimator Tool</b>  This web-based tool allowed residents to calculate approximately how much their local government taxes would change as a result of incorporation.	May 2024 - current	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electors within the Study Area</li> </ul>
<b>E-Newsletters</b>  Nine (9) e-newsletters were sent to individuals who subscribed to receive updates on the project through the website.	Ongoing throughout the duration of the Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electors within the Study Area</li> </ul>
<b>RDOS social media</b>  RDOS' social media channels (Facebook, X, Youtube) were used roughly bi-weekly though the project timeframe to generate awareness about the Incorporation Study and share key details.	Ongoing throughout the duration of the Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electors within the Study Area</li> </ul>



What	Timeframe	Audience Focus
<b>Monthly advertisements in Skaha Matters</b> Monthly advertisements highlighted different aspects of the Study: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>October 2023: Study is underway</li> <li>November: Study timeline</li> <li>December: Study participants</li> <li>January 2024: Study is underway</li> <li>February: Study timeline</li> <li>March: Study is underway</li> <li>April: How to submit a question to the project team</li> <li>May: Study timeline</li> <li>June: List of ways to get information (including events)</li> <li>July: List of ways to get information (including events)</li> <li>August: List of ways to get information (including events)</li> <li>September: You're invited: Sept. 11 and Oct. 8 events</li> <li>October: You're invited: Oct. 8 Discussion Panel</li> <li>November: Study concludes by end of 2024</li> <li>December: Study has concluded, read the final report</li> </ul>	Ongoing throughout the duration of the Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electors within the Study Area</li> </ul>
<b>Monthly editorials in Skaha Matters</b> Monthly editorials were submitted under the name of the Committee Chair highlighting different aspects of the Study: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>October 2023: About the Study and Committee</li> <li>November: Decision-making in regional districts and municipalities</li> <li>December: About the research phase</li> <li>January 2024: Why the Committee is neutral/unbiased</li> <li>February: Review of finalized and upcoming service sheets</li> <li>March: Spring update, review of completed service sheets</li> <li>April: Focus of April Committee meeting</li> <li>May: Conclusion of analysis phase</li> <li>June: Start of community phase</li> <li>July: Upcoming events</li> <li>August: The tax estimator tool</li> <li>September: Upcoming events</li> <li>October: Discussion Panel event</li> <li>November: Important Study findings</li> <li>December: Study has concluded, next steps</li> </ul>	Ongoing throughout the duration of the Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electors within the Study Area</li> </ul>
<b>Presentations to local clubs or associations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>September 26, 2023: Residents' Association town hall</li> <li>December 13, 2023: Showed explainer video at Okanagan Falls Community Partners meeting</li> <li>May 10, 2024: Rolling Hills Improvement District meeting with Chair and Vice-Chair of Study Committee to discuss RHID's concern about being connected to existing water systems in Okanagan Falls and desire to be declared an independent water system</li> <li>June 12, 2024: Community Partners meeting – Consultant presented summary of the Study and engagement to come</li> </ul>	Ongoing throughout the duration of the Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electors within the Study Area</li> <li>Existing community groups</li> </ul>

What	Timeframe	Audience Focus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oct. 16, 2024: RDOS Advisory Planning Commission - Consultant presented key findings of the Study and engaged in dialogue with attendees</li> <li>Oct. 16, 2024: RDOS Parks &amp; Rec Committee - Consultant presented key findings of the Study and engaged in dialogue with attendees</li> <li>Nov. 4, 2024: Okanagan Falls Seniors Society – Consultant presented on key findings of the Study and engaged in dialogue with the 39 attendees</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Hard Copy Information Binders</b></p> <p>Two (2) information binders that held all key documents from the Incorporation Study were available for viewing at both the Electoral Area Community Office and the Okanagan Falls Library from July to November 2024.</p>	<p><b>Ongoing</b> throughout the duration of the Study</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electors within the Study Area</li> <li>Residents who prefer to access information in hard copy</li> </ul>
<p><b>Posters</b></p> <p>Posters were used to generate awareness about the Study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poster 1: September 2023: Study is underway, QR code to website</li> <li>Poster 2: Advertising April 16 Committee meeting &amp; postponement of March meeting</li> <li>Poster 3: How to submit a question to the project team</li> <li>Poster 4: Advertising May 28 Committee meeting</li> <li>Poster 5: Advertising summer/fall community events</li> <li>Poster 6: Sandwich board posters advertising Sept. 11 and Oct. 8 events</li> </ul> <p>Posters were distributed around the community by Committee members at locations including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Belich's AG Foods</li> <li>Pharmasave</li> <li>KJ's Coffee</li> <li>The library</li> <li>Tickleberries</li> </ul>	<p>As needed throughout the duration of the Study</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electors within the Study Area</li> <li>Residents who may not otherwise seek out information</li> <li>Residents who prefer to access information in hard copy</li> </ul>
<p><b>Poster Boards</b></p> <p>Poster boards were used in multiple settings, including the market booths, public information meetings and community group meetings</p>	<p>Summer/Fall 2024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electors within the Study Area</li> <li>Residents who prefer hard copy information</li> </ul>
<p><b>Information Booths</b></p> <p>An information booth was set up at the Music and Market in the Park event on July 1, July 14, and August 11. Visitors to the booth were invited to review information posterboards, a binder of all the Study information (Service Sheets, Issue Sheets, sample tax notices), and speak with Study consultants and/or Committee members.</p>	<p>Summer 2024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electors within the Study Area</li> <li>Residents who may not otherwise seek out information</li> </ul>



What	Timeframe	Audience Focus
<p><b>Public Information Meetings</b></p> <p>Two (2) public information meetings were held on August 17 (attended by ~ 40 people) and September 11 (attended by ~ 50 people) with consultants and Committee members present.</p> <p>The first hour of the meetings were in drop-in format where residents could review poster boards and ask questions. The last hour of the meetings included a summary presentation from the consultant and Q&amp;A from participants.</p>	Summer 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electors within the Study Area</li> <li>Residents who like detailed information</li> <li>Residents who prefer in-person events</li> </ul>
<p><b>Incorporation Discussion Panel</b></p> <p>A discussion panel event was held on October 8 where residents could hear from other jurisdictions that have considered incorporation. The event was hosted by the Committee and moderated by the consultants and was a combined virtual and in-person event. 105 people attended the event in person, and 49 participated remotely.</p> <p>The panel included representatives from Blind Bay/Sorrento (which recently declined incorporation), Clearwater (which was incorporated in 2007), and West Kelowna (incorporated in 2007). The group provided a balanced discussion on the pros and cons of incorporation and responded to questions from the community.</p> <p>The event was recorded and can be viewed <a href="#">here</a>.</p>	October 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electors within the Study Area</li> <li>Residents who like detailed information</li> <li>Residents who prefer in-person events</li> </ul>
<p><b>Household Mailouts</b></p> <p>Two (2) mailouts were sent to all households within the Study Area (1,350 households):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Summary of what has been done to date, information about upcoming events</li> <li>Summary of key findings of the Study and next steps</li> </ol>	<p>July 2024</p> <p>October 2024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electors within the Study Area</li> </ul>
<p><b>Incorporation Impact Briefs</b></p> <p>Two (2) Incorporation Impact Briefs were distilled from the <i>Preliminary Report</i> to share information about four topics in small, digestible pieces for residents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Service Impacts of Incorporation</li> <li>Representation Impacts of Incorporation</li> </ul> <p>The briefs were available as handouts at Information Meetings, in the hard-copy Information Binders, and were posted on the Regional Connections website.</p>	Summer 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electors within the Study Area</li> <li>Residents who like detailed information</li> </ul>
<p><b>Incorporation Service and Issue Summaries</b></p> <p>Numerous service and issue summaries were prepared to outline how incorporation would affect important aspects of community life. Summaries were prepared for:</p>	Ongoing throughout the duration of the Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electors within the Study Area</li> <li>Residents who like detailed information</li> </ul>

What	Timeframe	Audience Focus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administration services</li> <li>• Bylaw enforcement services</li> <li>• Economic development services</li> <li>• Emergency services</li> <li>• Environmental services</li> <li>• Incorporation impacts on agricultural properties</li> <li>• Library services</li> <li>• Parks, recreation and cemetery services</li> <li>• Planning &amp; building services</li> <li>• Police services</li> <li>• Sewer services</li> <li>• Solid waste services</li> <li>• Transportation services</li> <li>• Water services</li> <li>• Property tax impacts (2024 tax rate and assessment update)</li> <li>• Implementation Overview (i.e. how incorporation would happen, logistics of incorporation vote, who could participate, what would happen after the vote)</li> </ul> <p>These summaries were available in the hard-copy Information Binders and were posted on the Regional Connections website.</p>		
<p><b>Information Releases</b></p> <p>Information releases were issued by RDOS at significant milestones through the duration of the Study:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. May 2023: Okanagan Falls Incorporation Study Call for Committee Members</li> <li>2. July 2023: Okanagan Falls Incorporation Study Committee Members Appointed, Contract Awarded</li> <li>3. September 2023: Okanagan Falls Incorporation Study Underway</li> <li>4. July 2024: Community Invited to Events about the Okanagan Falls Incorporation Study</li> </ol> <p>At least three (3) of the news releases resulted in media coverage in local newspapers and two (2) resulted in interviews with the lead Study consultant.</p> <p>Additional news release(s) may be issued when the Study Committee makes a recommendation to the RDOS Board, and when the RDOS Board decides whether to request approval for a referendum from the province.</p>	<p>As appropriate throughout the duration of the Study</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electors within the Study Area</li> <li>• Residents living near the Study Area who aren't sure whether they are included</li> <li>• Anyone in the area who is generally interested</li> </ul>

## Summary of What We Heard

The communication and engagement efforts on this project were undertaken to inform the community about the implications of incorporation and to answer questions raised. Over the course of the Study, community members asked questions on a number of themes. The following examples highlight the more common questions and themes raised:

- Size – is Okanagan Falls too small to be its own municipality?
- Process of ramping up — could a municipality find staff and actually take over service delivery? What land is available for a municipal hall and public works yard?
- Council – would it be expensive (salaries and stipends) to have a local council?
- Tax impacts — why would incorporation increase taxes and what would the community receive in exchange?
- Grants — would a municipality get more grants than the regional district for infrastructure?
- Policing – would there be an RCMP detachment in Okanagan Falls if it incorporated? Would Okanagan Falls receive higher levels of service as a municipality?
- Roads – what would change under incorporation? Would we have more control over Highway 97 (the answer is no)?
- Water – would water systems be combined or kept separate as they are today?
- Decision-making — would benefits of local decision-making outweigh the costs of incorporation?
- Referendum/vote – who makes the decision about incorporation? Who would get to vote in a referendum? When will decisions happen?

## Next Steps Communication

At the conclusion of the Study (anticipated to be in late 2024 or early 2025), a “next steps” communication will be prepared to thank the community for its participation in the Study process, summarize key findings, and inform them about what to expect next. Communication will include:

- News release
- Website update
- Advertisement in Skaha Matters
- Editorial from the Committee Chair in Skaha Matters
- Social media post(s)

