



THOMPSON-NICOLA
REGIONAL DISTRICT
The Region of BC's Best



File: 0400-65

May 13, 2025

Sent via email only:

Honourable Brittney Anderson
Minister of State for Local Governments and Rural Communities
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Honourable Josie Osborne
Minister of Health
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Dear Ministers Anderson and Osborne,

Re: Funding Small Water Systems for Rural Communities in BC

We are writing to bring your attention to the urgent need for provincial and federal governments to collaborate in establishing long-term sustainable funding programs, specifically for small water systems in rural communities. These systems are essential for ensuring safe and reliable drinking water, supporting local food security, and maintaining the integrity of our ecosystems.

Many regional districts operate small and medium sized water systems, and the Comox Valley Regional District, Okanagan-Similkameen Regional District and Thompson-Nicola Regional District are collectively raising this issue with the Province of BC. These systems, while vital to community sustainability, face several challenges associated with upgrades, maintenance, and regulatory compliance.

Key challenges faced by these small rural water systems include:

- **Unsustainable Financial Burdens:** The costs associated with water treatment, ongoing maintenance, and replacing aging infrastructure are unsustainable for rural residents and communities. Some of these systems, such as the Graham Lake Water system in the Comox Valley Regional District, serve fewer than 100 connections, but cost millions of dollars to maintain. In the Thompson-Nicola Regional District, some residents face

The Comox Valley Regional District respectfully acknowledges the land on which it operates is on the unceded traditional territory of the K'ómoks First Nation, the traditional keepers of this land.

annual costs of up to \$2,900 per year, which is significantly more than typical customers on municipal utility systems pay for similar service.

- **Lack of Operational Funding:** With no operational funding available beyond user fees, an annual funding gap exists between total expenses and available funding, leading to underfunded preventative maintenance and decreased contributions to capital reserves.
- **Public Health Risks:** Regional districts across the province have inherited several small or very small water systems that were taken on at the encouragement of the province. However, without sustainable funding, there is a significant risk that these systems may be forced to shut down due to public health concerns.
- **Inability to Amalgamate or Expand:** Amalgamation with other water systems or hauling bulk water is not feasible due to the remote and isolated nature of these systems. Additionally, Development Cost Charges (DCC) are not an option, as there is no new growth within these systems.

To address these challenges, we urge the province to consider the following actions:

1. **Establish Long-term Sustainable Funding Programs:** Create dedicated funding programs that support small water systems to address high costs and regulatory compliance requirements.
2. **Tailor Regulations and Cost-Sharing Models:** Work collaboratively to reduce or tailor regulations that hinder the viability of small water systems, while also implementing cost-sharing models and grant programs.
3. **Capacity-Building Initiatives:** Invest in capacity-building initiatives that empower local governments to manage and maintain essential services effectively.

The viability of small rural water systems is critical for the communities they serve and to safeguard local food security and public health. We believe that, with your support, we can create a sustainable future for these essential services.

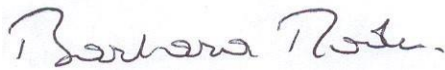
Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to working with you on your mandate to identify the unique needs and opportunities that smaller communities need to grow and thrive, such as small water systems. We look forward to your response and to meeting with you at the annual UBCM Conference to discuss how we can work together to ensure the sustainability of small water systems in our rural communities.

Sincerely,

Comox Valley Regional District

Will Cole-Hamilton
Chair, Comox Valley Regional District

Mark Pendergraft
Chair, Okanagan-Similkameen Regional District

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Barbara Roden". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Barbara" being more prominent than the last name "Roden".

Barbara Roden
Chair, Thompson-Nicola Regional District

cc: Edwin Grieve, Chair of the Electoral Area Services Committee, Comox Valley Regional District
James Warren, CAO, Comox Valley Regional District
James Zaffino, CAO, Okanagan-Similkameen Regional District
Scott Hildebrand, CAO, Thompson-Nicola Regional District