

For immediate release

April 2, 2008

WATER RATE INCREASES SUPPORT LONG-TERM SAVINGS WITH WATER METERS

The Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) board of directors has approved water rate increases for 2008 in the six local water service areas that the CVRD owns and operates within the Comox Valley.

This increase will allow for the installation of a universal water metering system, which will ultimately conserve water and save money. The areas that are served by the Comox Valley water supply system include the Comox Valley, England Road, Greaves Crescent, Arden, and Marsden/Camco local service areas (LSAs).

An additional 18 cents per cubic meter (1000 litres) will be needed to pay for the universal metering program; however, this will be phased in over three years so that only a six cent per cubic metre increase will be charged in 2008. This increase is in addition to the previously approved rate structure that covered operational increases due to inflation.

Water meters have proven to be a very effective way to change wasteful water use habits as they ensure that people pay their fair share for the water that they use. The increased water rates will pay for water meters to be installed on every property. The \$16.2 million needed to pay for the universal metering program will be borrowed by the regional district and, much like a mortgage, will be paid back over 20 years. Members of the Comox Valley Water Committee are also considering using some of the federal gas tax rebate to cover some of the capital costs.

Water meter installation may begin as early as this fall, with all meters expected to be installed by the end of 2009. That would allow meter readings to be used for billing in 2010. Meters will be installed in approximately 13,000 homes in Courtenay, Comox and the local service areas named above, and there will be more homes built over the next two years as well. Universal metering will defer for 10 years the need to spend \$4.45 million in capital works to upgrade the CVRD's supply system. The City of Courtenay can delay expenditures of \$400,000 in capital waterworks projects by 10 years and the town of Comox can defer \$300,000 for that time.

As well, applications for federal or provincial grants for waterworks upgrades are given much greater consideration if a local government is able to demonstrate that there is a specific program in place to reduce overall water consumption to be able to maximize use of existing infrastructure.

“The region has for many years, enjoyed an abundance of excellent quality drinking water for very little cost,” explained Paul Ives, chair of the Comox Valley water committee, which is responsible for the Comox Valley water supply system. “Like other communities across BC and Canada, the Comox Valley is recognizing the true value of treating and delivering water throughout the valley and universal metering is a tried and tested way to discourage wasteful water use habits and to delay major upgrades to the water treatment and distribution system.”

Overall water use in the Comox Valley continues to be very high at about 675 litres per person per day. In comparison, average water use in the City of Nanaimo (which has a universal water meter system) is about 450 liters per person per day. Excessive watering of lawns, car washing, hosing down driveways, and inefficient irrigation systems represent some of the most obvious activities that contribute to extremely high water use in this area. With a universal metering system in place, those residents who choose to continue with wasteful habits will pay more while those residents who conserve water will pay less.

An increase to water rates for the Black Creek-Oyster Bay water local service area has also been approved for 2008 (effective April 1). Water rates in this area have remained unchanged since 1998, and the 2008 increase has been approved to cover rising operational costs. This area is already fully metered and has a sliding rate structure that increases based on the amount of water used. Residents there will see a minimum increase of \$2 per month in their water bill.

The Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) is a partnership of four electoral areas and three municipalities providing nearly 60,000 residents with 87 services -- from parks to full-service sports facilities to a solid waste system that serves both the CVRD and the Strathcona Regional District.

Media contact:

Koreen Gurak, Manager of Operational Communications
Comox Valley Regional District
Tel: 250-334-6066