

Presentation to PIID Board Meeting on New Water Department Position

Submitted by M. Crooks, December 2022

To explain why you are hearing from me tonight, I requested and received permission to make a short presentation this evening in regard to the proposal to consider a new position in the water department. I did so because Bob and I have been actively involved in the water department for over 20 years for him, and 17 for me, and I feel because of our experiences with the system, I could perhaps lend a bit of support for creating this position, which I think is an excellent idea, and offer a possible scenario in regard to the structure and responsibilities that could be assigned to such a position for the trustees and water team members to consider.

First some context: The Piers Island Improvement District is a water supplier granted authority under its Letters Patent to provide a potable waterworks to the community of Piers Island and to raise taxes for that purpose.

The responsibilities of a water supplier must always rank the protection of public health in the place of paramount importance over all other aspects of providing potable water to its users. That basic mandate requirement means that the Improvement District must at all times comply with the regulatory stipulations as set out in the BC Drinking Water Protection Act, the BC Drinking Water Regulation and those water constituent parameters outlined in the Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality.

The operational undertakings to effect this mandate are provided by a team of volunteers who monitor water quality and another team who maintain and repair the infrastructure that supports the Piers Island water distribution system. The water team falls under the specific purview of the trustee who is assigned the water portfolio, the Water Trustee, but collectively by the entire Board of Trustees that holds ultimate responsibility for all decisions that are made, and for all legal, financial and operational ramifications of the water department undertakings.

In the past the department has never established defined job descriptions for the various players in the volunteer water team so with this new initiative proposed by the Trustees, I thought I would take a kick at it as perhaps that might help in deliberating what might best serve in the way of a new, formal position in the team and also make more clear the roles each unit in the team would play so that nothing falls through the cracks. I've shared those job descriptions with the Board and water team but to speak to the point of tonight's discussion, I would like to focus on the new position I have taken the liberty of calling the "Operations Co-Ordinator".

The hierarchy could be structured thus:

- 1. The Water Trustee*
- 2. The Operations Co-ordinator*
- 3. The Water Quality Operators*
- 4. The Water Maintenance Crew*

I believe this new position, the Operations Co-Ordinator, is needed in the water department to be responsible for co-ordinating and managing many of the administrative tasks that were previously packaged and informally undertaken for 15 years by the quasi "lead operator" who happened to be me. After I left the team, many of those administrative and co-ordinating tasks were shared out among the PIID Corporate Secretary, Water Trustee and several Water Operators.

To coalesce the tasks once again within the department, the new incumbent could fill an administrative role that would also, ideally, establish a basis of staff experience and knowledge continuity in the department.

This is an important factor in filling this position because the trustee assigned to the water system (similarly to the Fire Department) hasn't typically come to the position having a lot of background knowledge or expertise in the portfolio. Because a trustee term is 3 years, they come and go regularly while typically an appointed position, similar to the Finance Administrator, the Secretary and the Fire Chief, carries the benefit of serving for multiple years. For this reason, the role could prove to be a valuable support to each new water trustee as they move through a very steep learning curve.

The incumbent could also serve as the prime line liaison with critical external agencies so that there is no confusion as to who would be contacted in an emergency event, for instance if there was an adverse microbiological lab result that required instant reporting to the system users and quick remediation. By formally assigning this responsibility to the Operations Co-Ordinator, there would be a clearly delineated line of communications through a resource equipped to manage whatever issue arose and expedite whatever actions might need to be taken.

The incumbent would be also be responsible for creating a collaborative environment to establish operational priorities, develop training and work plans for both the water quality branch and the infrastructure repair and maintenance crew, and would manage all water department documentation required by regulation as well as daily operational documents, reports and logs.

This resource would also be the appropriate resource who would convene and record regular departmental meetings and by so doing, create an open forum for group discourse and department decision-making. The Ops Co-Ordinator would also compile operational data for the Trustee to assist with financial planning, budgeting and reporting to the landowners.

This person would also play a key role in motivating and engaging volunteers so as to grow the water team and further develop the members as interest is shown. It should be some one who can foster trust and through respectful engagement, encourage people to commit to the necessary tasks of being a water quality operator or an infrastructure maintenance crew member.

Because of the importance of the public safety aspect in the water supplier's mandate, it would seem that the appointee most suited to this position would be someone who has achieved EOCP certification as a Small Water Systems Operator. This is a provincially sanctioned course that teaches the fundamentals of small water system operations and maintenance and what operators need to know to ensure their systems comply with legislation and protect public health. Candidates learn about the factors that impact water quality, the legislation that governs water quality and supply, and how to monitor and, very importantly, report on the water system to the users. They learn common water treatment methods, in our case the safe use of chlorine, and they have knowledge of how our water distribution system functions, including the materials and equipment required to repair and maintain it, and how to do it all safely.

And as a final note, to lend formality to this new position, as is the case with the roles of PIID Corporate Secretary, Financial Administrator and Fire Chief, this new position could possibly be the recipient of an honorarium approved annually by the Trustees although there are pro and con arguments of taking this honorarium route, given that there are so many volunteer positions in our volunteer community perhaps as deserving and it might be a slippery slope precedent to take. However, with or without an honorarium, I would strongly suggest that to enhance greater team cohesiveness as the new position establishes a presence within the team, the Trustees should strive to include the water team members as much as possible in the appointment process.

That concludes my presentation and I would like to thank the Board for giving me the opportunity to share it with you all.

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