

CITY OF KELOWNA (\$25,000)

Landscape and Irrigation Standards for Water Efficiency

Contact: Don Degen



The City of Kelowna Water Utility provides water to approximately 70,000 residential customers and 3,000 businesses. It is the largest of the five water purveyors operating within city limits.

In 1996 the utility embarked on a universal water metering program which, combined with public education and appropriate water rates, helped achieve a 20% reduction in total water use. In 2007, Kelowna City Council endorsed a Water Sustainability Action Plan which calls for a minimum 15% reduction in water use by 2012, over and above the reductions already achieved.

A major component of the Water Sustainability Action Plan is new Landscape and Irrigation Standards for Water Efficiency. Landscape irrigation drives peak demand and is the biggest consumptive use of domestic water in the City of Kelowna.

Funding was requested of the Okanagan Basin Water Board to develop an education package for stakeholders, final stakeholder review and consultation, internal communication and the implementation process, and a pilot program to measure the impact of the new standards on peak demand. These activities were scheduled to take place between February and September, 2008.

The idea for landscape and irrigation standards for water efficiency emerged from U.S. jurisdictions where water shortages are common. In a nutshell, landscape and irrigation standards address water efficiency by ensuring that all new landscapes use less water than traditional landscapes, and that all newly installed irrigation systems meet minimum requirements for water efficiency.

The project was divided into four main activities: 1) consulting with stakeholders; 2) developing the standards; 3) determining how the process would move through city hall and seeking a legal opinion; and 4) presenting the standards to City Council for approval.

The first activity involved consulting with representatives from the development, irrigation, and landscaping industries and then using their feedback to develop a series of guidelines that would “even the playing field” in terms of industry standards. Generally, the feedback from the industry was positive, although concern was expressed about delays that could be caused by an increase in permits and forms.

The second main project activity was developing the standards and producing an information piece that outlined the general principles. This brochure was produced and distributed in June. The actual standards are still in draft form, but are close to completion.

The third project activity is probably the most important, and has proven to be the most time consuming. There needs to be a simple yet effective process to ensure the standards are being followed. It is best described through the following scenario:

1. A developer obtains a development permit to build a subdivision
2. The developer would be responsible to provide a landscape and irrigation plan that follows the pre-determined guidelines for public spaces such as parks and boulevards.
3. A contractor building homes in the subdivision would be responsible to provide landscape and irrigation plans for individual homes.
4. In each of these cases, the plans would have to be submitted when applying for a building permit.
5. The plans would have to be signed off by a certified landscaper and a certified irrigation designer before the building permit is issued.
6. The properties would be subject to inspection to ensure the standards and guidelines were actually followed.

A legal opinion is necessary to determine how prescriptive the standards can be, and if the development/building permit process is the best way to ensure the standards are being followed.

The final draft bylaw is scheduled to be before council in January/February 2009 for implementation in the spring of 2009.

