

## **Council adopts consultant's report as it considers water meter program for Osoyoos**

By  
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Town of Osoyoos council has taken another step forward towards implementing a community-wide program to install water meters on all local homes, businesses and institutions.

After a presentation by Barry Romanko, the town's chief administrative officer, council voted unanimously Monday to support a staff recommendation to support a motion to accept a consulting report prepared for the town as a key strategic planning document to initiate budgeting requisitions to achieve B.C. Water Smart Initiative targets.

Three weeks ago, town council listened to a presentation by two employees with Kelowna-based consulting company Urban Systems who stated several other communities across the South Okanagan that have implemented water metering programs have been successful in getting local residents to dramatically reduce water consumption by 30 per cent.

The Water Conservation and Metering Strategy Assessment revealed that the price tag to implement a water meter strategy in Osoyoos would be in the range of \$1.9 million.

Several councillors made it clear that they would not be comfortable with making any final decision on such an expansive and expensive program without allowing local residents to make the final call through a referendum.

The 2015 town budget approved by council included the development of a Water Conservation and Metering Assessment.

"The broad objective of the town is that the consultant (proponent) would identify all challenges associated with proceeding with a universal metering program and prepare an implementation plan that would address all of the identified challenges," said Romanko.

The project costs for the consultant's report was \$30,000, with \$10,000 being covered by a grant from the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

None of the findings in the study were directed as agricultural water use, but strictly residential and commercial.

The B.C. Living Water Smart Initiative that has been looked at by many municipalities across this province targets a 33 per cent efficiency in water usage by the year 2020.

"Based on water use figures from the year 2010 to the current time, Osoyoos has achieved an approximate decrease in water use of 12 per cent based on per connection measurement," said Romanko. "This consumption decrease illustrates that we have achieved approximately 70 per cent of the water smart initiative targets."

The consultant's report said high use of water can be directly attributed to summer watering of lawns and yards in single family homes, said Romanko.

Mayor Sue McKortoff said it's obvious to her that water restrictions that were applied this past summer to limit watering of lawns to twice a week and implementing other water reduction strategies is going to continue into the future.

Water conservation strategies have varying degrees of success, but the list includes installation of water meters, landscaping subsidies, fixture retrofit programs, water restrictions, education and public awareness campaigns, water accounting and loss control and water audits, he said.

Current water conservation practices within the town have not yet enabled the community to achieve water smart initiative targets and the community will have to make targeted investments over the next five years to achieve those targets, said Romanko.

Budget options should a water metering program be adopted include use of water reserves to implement the program and hire staff to facilitate the program or borrowing money, he said.

“The report has valid data and recommendations that sets the bases for the objective that much be achieved, methods to be used to achieve the objectives and identified barriers to implementing water conservation methods,” said Romanko.

Council will now discuss budget implications of implementing a water metering program in Osoyoos during upcoming budget deliberations for 2016.

*KEITH LACEY*

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