

**REPORT TO REGIONAL WATER SUPPLY COMMISSION  
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2012**

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**SUBJECT      STANDARDIZATION OF MUNICIPAL WATER/UTILITY BILL INFORMATION**

**ISSUE**

To consider the information currently provided on retail water/utility bills and the benefits of standardized billing information across the region.

**BACKGROUND**

The Water Advisory Committee (WAC) undertook a review of the retail water/utility bills issued by the region's municipalities and the Capital Regional District (CRD) and determined that there is a lack of consistency in the format of the bills, the units of measure, and the information provided. A report was presented to the Regional Water Supply Commission (RWSC) that outlined the information considered to be necessary on the bills. The RWSC requested that further information be provided to support the rationale and benefits of standardizing the billing information across the region.

The attached Table 1 provides a summary of the information currently provided on the region's water/utility bills; the information elements are those that were considered necessary by WAC.

The information can be generally categorized as follows:

1. Personal owner information – name, account number, account type.
2. Property information – address, folio number, meter number.
3. Billing information – period/date, readings, consumption, pricing, payment history.
4. Utility financial information – charges for water (fixed fees and/or consumption), charges for sewer (fixed fees and/or consumption).
5. Other information – non-water/sewer related information.

**Observations:**

1. The table indicates that there are only a few instances where all of the information is not being currently provided. However, the bills have a different look and present the information differently.
2. Financial information is determined by the method the municipalities have established to recover funds for the municipal water and sewer utilities. Some municipalities have two components to the water charges, a fixed charge and a consumption based charge. Some only use a consumption based charge. Likewise, more municipalities are incorporating a sewer charge and are therefore, calling the bill a 'utility' bill instead of a 'water' bill.
3. From a regional water perspective, and without impacting the municipal utility financial structures, there would be benefit in standardizing the following information on the bills:
  - a. Units of measure – Providing the billing quantity in cubic metres meets the modern Canadian metric standard for units of measurement and eliminates the need to convert from imperial measurements or custom units of measurement.

- b. Consumption history chart – The bar chart provides a good visual representation of consumption history that is easily understandable and available ‘at a glance.’ Displaying the year over year chart may influence water use.
- c. Water pricing – A standard method of describing the components of the municipal retail water rate provides transparency and helps customers understand how water pricing is established. For example: CRD annual wholesale rate (to recover the regional water system operating and capital expenses) + municipal annual rate (to recover municipal operating and capital expenses) = municipal retail rate.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Regional Water Supply Commission:

1. Receive the staff report for information; and
2. Recommend that the region’s municipalities and the Juan de Fuca Water Distribution Commission standardize on cubic metres as the unit of measurement for water consumption, and provide standard information on water consumption history and water pricing on the customer bills.

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Attachment: 1

TABLE 1 - MUNICIPAL AND JUAN DE FUCA WATER/UTILITY BILL INFORMATION

Item on Water/Utility Bill	Victoria	Esquimalt	Oak Bay	Saanich	Central Saanich	North Saanich	Sidney	Western Communities
Name	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Service address	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Account number	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Account type (i.e. Residential)	✓	✓	✓	--	✓	--	✓	--
Account access code	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Folio	✓	✓	✓	--	--	--	✓	--
Invoice number	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	✓
Billing date	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Due date	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Billing period (from/to)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Meter number (Serial Number)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	--	✓	✓
Number of days in billing cycle	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	--	✓	✓
Current reading	✓	✓	--	--	✓	✓	✓	✓
Previous reading	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Consumption (unit of measure)	✓ (units/100 cubic feet)	✓ (units/100 cubic feet)	✓ (units/gals)	✓ (l gals/m <sup>3</sup> )	✓ (m <sup>3</sup> )	✓ (m <sup>3</sup> )	✓ (gals)	✓ (m <sup>3</sup> )
Municipal retail price	✓	✓	✓	--	✓	✓	✓	✓
Previous balance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	--	✓	✓
Payments received	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	--	✓	✓
Amount due	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Municipal fixed water charge	--	--	✓	✓	✓	--	--	--
Consumption history chart	--	--	✓	✓	--	--	✓	--
Other charges/credits (late/early payment, customer change, etc.)	--	--	--	--	✓	--	--	--
Municipal wastewater (sewer and sewage treatment) charges	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	--	✓	--
Municipal fixed sewer charge	--	--	--	✓	--	--	--	--
Other notices and links	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

**NOTE:** Sidney is the only municipality to show garbage charges on the water/utility bill.