



# Town of Oliver

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*Oliver, BC... "Wine Capital of Canada"*

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

November 16, 2009

For Immediate Release

### **The Town of Oliver Receives the 2009 Brian Harvey Award of Excellence**

On October 29, 2009, at the Annual General Meeting of the Water Supply Association of BC, the Town of Oliver was awarded the Brian Harvey Award of Excellence in recognition of the Town of Oliver achieving a standard of excellence in the water supply industry.

For almost two decades the Town has consistently remained focused and determined to resolve water supply issues both in the Town of Oliver and the surrounding rural area. This was not an easy task.

Water Councillor Miller commented that "the Town of Oliver is the first municipality to receive the Brian Harvey Award of Excellence and he is honoured that the Town of Oliver received such a prestigious award."

Bruce Hamilton, the Director of Operations said "It is great to see the Town recognized for all the water supply improvements Council and staff have pushed to achieve in recent years. Everyone involved is proud of these achievements."

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#### Background Notes:

In addition to receiving the Brian Harvey Award of Excellence, the Town of Oliver received the Green City Award in 2007, by the Hon. Gordon Campbell, Premier of the Province of British Columbia, for demonstrating leadership in green sustainable initiatives by dealing effectively with the challenges of water management and using it for agricultural purposes, dealing with growth through participation in a Smart Growth on the Ground program, hosting of affordable housing workshops, etc.

Attached is background information on the Town of Oliver's water supply improvements over the past 20 years.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **Town of Oliver 2009 Brian Harvey Award of Excellence Recipient**

On October 29, 2009, at the Annual General Meeting of the Water Supply Association of BC, the Town of Oliver (the Town), was awarded the Brian Harvey Award of Excellence in recognition of the Town achieving a standard of excellence in the water supply industry.

A summary of the history of Oliver's water supply hurdles that the community responded to is outlined below. This information was part of the Town's nomination package for the Brian Harvey Award of Excellence.

#### **1.0 HISTORIC ISSUES**

The water supply system in the area surrounding Oliver was developed in the 1920's and was the inspiration of Premier John Oliver. This project may well have been one of the Province's first mega project. Originally, it included approximately 33 kilometers of main irrigation canal and many kilometers of secondary canals. The main canal extended as far south as the US Border and supplied water to the rural area surrounding Osoyoos. Until the late 1960's, this rural water delivery system was used primarily for irrigation water supply and operated by the South Okanagan Lands Project (SOLP), an agency of the provincial government. In the late 1960's, the province turned the system over to the area growers and it was operated under the jurisdiction of the South Okanagan Lands Irrigation District (SOLID). In late 1989, the province dissolved SOLID and split its assets between the communities of Oliver and Osoyoos. From this point onward the Town of Oliver began to integrate the Oliver's portion of the rural water delivery system with the Town's compact and efficient domestic water supply system that had been developed by the Town to serve its municipal residents.

#### **2.0 CORPORATE STRUCTURE**

When dissolving SOLID, the province established a new governance structure for the communities of both Oliver and Osoyoos. The Council for these communities are comprised of a Mayor and four Councillors that are elected by residents inside the municipal boundaries. In addition, two Water Councillor's are elected from the surrounding rural area by those customers that receive water from the rural water delivery system. This system of governance is unique in the Province of British Columbia. At the onset, there was some debate in regards to how well this new system of governance would serve water customers. Upon the implementation of this new governance structure, the Council for the Town of Oliver resolved that the two systems be operated as one water utility and that the two systems become integrated both operationally and financially.

Since 1990, members of successive Councils have continued to adopt a team-like approach and work together to improve water supply to the constituents of both Oliver and the surrounding rural area. The two Water Councillors originally elected in 1990 remain on Council to this day and are looked upon by the rest of Council for leadership on water supply matters.

### **3.0 WATER SUPPLY PROBLEMS AND IMPROVEMENTS**

Over the past two decades this new, expanded, municipal water utility has completed many improvements. Although the utility has been fortunate to receive grants from senior governments to assist in the completion of many of these projects, there have been many millions of dollars that have been raised from tax revenue and user fees received from the water customers. Just a few of the significant projects are noted below.

#### **3.1 Canal Rehabilitation**

In 1990, the concrete lined irrigation canal (the "ditch") was approximately 70 years old, and was seen as a significant liability because of many failing structures. The Town has since completed many rehabilitation projects along the canal and once again it is considered to be an asset that delivers reliable irrigation water supply to the benefit of a growing agricultural economy. The Town continues to direct funds each year towards the ongoing maintenance and continued rehabilitation of the canal. Although a bulk of irrigation customers receive pressurized water, the gravity flow in the canal delivers water to Oliver's pumping stations well above the elevation of the Okanagan River. This results in tens of thousands of dollars in annual power savings and a significant reduction in greenhouse gas equivalent emissions compared to pumping from the valley bottom.

#### **3.2 Water Quality Improvements to Tuc-el-nuit and Rockcliffe Areas**

Almost immediately after becoming the successor to SOLID, the Town completed water quality supply improvements to two large urban neighborhoods that had historically been served with only chlorinated river water during the irrigation season. As a result of these improvements, approximately 600 additional homes now receive quality ground water year round.

#### **3.3 Hester Creek Spillway Replacement**

The canal system that was inherited by the Town included a 0.5 km long spillway constructed of 0.9 m diameter corrugated steel pipe that had become in such a state of disrepair that it resulted in the continual failure of an adjacent provincially owned road. This spillway, which is fundamental to the operation of the irrigation canal, has now been replaced with funding coming 100% from locally raised tax dollars only.

### **3.4 Rural Area Twinning (irrigation / domestic separation)**

As public awareness of drinking water quality has grown, so too has the Town's persistence in acquiring separate domestic and irrigation water supply systems to serve approximately 600 homes located on farm land in Oliver's rural area. In 2007, a new ground water supply was developed to serve these customers and approximately 200 of these farm homes now receive high quality ground water year round. Construction of more twinned (separated) pipeline systems is currently underway and it is anticipated that by June 2010, only 100 homes will continue to be served chlorinated surface water as their summer water source. Subject to funding availability, it is the Town's goal that this Twinning project will be 100% complete in 2012.

### **3.5 SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition)**

The Town continues to fund the implementation of a modern SCADA system, a computerized system that monitors the water flow in the water utility. It has become a great asset to the operational staff and assisted them to ensuring the reliability of the water supply. Until 1990, the operation of the canal and the various distribution systems that it serves was a manual undertaking requiring endless visual monitoring and many hours spent by operational staff driving on the road to observe the control points. The implementation of SCADA assisted greatly in integrating the several systems operated by the Town and saved significant driving costs along with associated greenhouse gas emission reductions.

### **3.6 Universal Metering Program**

The Town is currently implementing a universal metering program for all residential, commercial and institutional customers. This project is 97% complete. Although the metering of agricultural customers has not been included at this time, the eventual metering of this sector is frequently a topic for discussion around the Council table.

The Town of Oliver is a leader in British Columbia through the use of new water supply development cost charges (DCCs). The province approved this new DCC in Oliver as a pilot project.

The Town recognizes the benefits of demand side management of the existing water supply to free up water through conservation for use by new development. Rather than directing exclusively the water DCCs to water supply expansion, the Town used approximately 30% of water DCC funds to pay for the universal metering program. The benefit of water meters is it promotes water conservation. Once complete, the Town hopes its success will allow other municipalities in British Columbia to pursue a similar strategy.

### **3.7 Fish Screening**

Since the original construction of the canal in the 1920's, the diversion from the Okanagan River had remained unscreened and at times allowed valuable fish stock to enter the canal. Design and implementation of a mechanical fish screen project was coordinated as a joint initiative with the Province of BC and the Okanagan Nation Alliance. These agencies are currently replacing the gate structures in the adjacent McIntyre Dam to facilitate upstream and downstream fish passage near the canal intake.

Installation of the fish screen facilities cost 1.1 million dollars to construct and is currently nearing completion. Again, a substantial amount of the funding for this project has been contributed through user fees paid by area water consumers.

### **3.8 Uranium Remediation Project**

In the fall of 2008 it became apparent the uranium concentrations in two of the Town's main domestic water wells were exceeding the maximum allowable concentration (MAC). Although no significant change in uranium concentrations has occurred since the wells were drilled in the 1980's, the acceptable MAC in the Canadian Drinking Water Guidelines dropped. The Town had to act quickly to mitigate the potential loss of production from these two wells prior to periods of peak demand in the summer of 2009. This was successfully accomplished by:

- Operating one of the wells continuously 24 hours /7 days a week, thereby lowering the uranium concentration in the water.
- Implementation of a public awareness campaign to reduce water consumption.
- Re-commissioning a well that had become surplus to community's needs when SOLID was dissolved.
- Construction of a booster pump station that will allow greater flexibility in moving existing available water supply back and forth between the rural and in-town water systems.

### **4.0 WATER SUPPLY ALTERNATIVES**

Since 1983, Oliver has reclaimed 100 % of its waste water and sold it at market rates for beneficial re-use. Existing reclaimed water customers include an 18 hole championship golf course, 2 vineyards, a municipal park, the municipal Public Works yard and a large hayfield on the infield of the Oliver Airport. Currently, there is a waiting list of those that would like to become re-claimed water customers and Council intends to promote use of reclaimed water as an irrigation water supply alternative, as more supply becomes available.

As a result of the re-claimed water project and the aforementioned Twinning Project (water separation), Oliver now has three distinct types of water available to customers dependent on their proximity to available piping. This range of supply options includes:

- Re-claimed water for irrigation use
- Untreated surface water for irrigation use

- High quality ground water for indoor domestic use

## **5.0 WATER CONSERVATION**

In 1997, the Council for the Town adopted a comprehensive Water Conservation Plan that the Town continues to implement. In 2005-2006, Oliver participated in a Smart Growth Planning exercise part of which had a focus on the preservation of water quality and quantity. As result of these and other initiatives in 2007, the Town received one of the first *Green City Awards* presented by the Province of BC.

## **6.0 SUMMARY**

Since the dissolution of SOLID and Oliver's corporate restructure that occurred in 1990, successive Council's have continued to demonstrate brute determination and remain focused on water supply issues to improve water quality and reliability for both the residents of Oliver and the surrounding rural area to meet new demands being placed on British Columbia water purveyors. This has resulted in the delivery of safe drinking water and reliable irrigation water supply to service a growing agricultural area. This spring, during a priority planning session, the Town Council again resolved that issues of water supply remain their number one priority.