

August 26, 2013

Honourable Jim Reiter
Minister of Government Relations
Room 348, Legislative Building
2405 Legislative Drive
Regina, SK S4S 0B3

Dear Minister Reiter:

Regina Water Watch asks you to provide independent oversight of the City of Regina wastewater treatment plant referendum. Regina needs a new wastewater treatment plant. The city passed a resolution for a referendum vote to be held on September 25, 2013.

We realize Provincial intervention is an extraordinary step, but we think the situation demands it. Here are the reasons we are requesting independent supervision.

1. CONFLICT OF INTEREST/ STAFF CAMPAIGNING

The Mayor has said it is the duty of city staff to support and publicize the P3 option.

This violates the spirit of the city's Code of Conduct that prohibits city staff from campaigning in elections on city time or with city resources. A referendum is an election under *The Local Authorities Election Act*. *The Provincial Referendum and Plebiscite Act* prohibits government departments, agencies, commissions, and crown corporations from publicizing any information on a referendum question. The Act ensures civil servants remain neutral.

City staff will also be required to supervise the referendum vote. We know of no protocol to allow staff to balance their direction from the city – to promote the P3 option – with their duty to conduct a fair vote. The referee is a player on one of the competing teams.

2. CAMPAIGNING WITH TAXPAYERS' MONEY

The city is aggressively campaigning for a NO vote using taxpayers' money and city resources. The campaign is reported to cost \$340,000. City administration, not city council, has decided to charge these campaign costs to the construction costs of the wastewater treatment plant.

This campaign includes the identification of voters supporting the city's position. This is being described as a survey and is being done using robo calls out of the Mayor's office.

3. CONDUCT OF THE VOTE

The vote will be tallied electronically by voting machines that are not subject to oversight by representatives from both sides. We believe a paper ballot would remove any doubt as to the fairness of the vote.

4. RESTRICTED VOTING

The City of Regina has determined to limit voting for seniors and those with mobility limitations to mail-in ballots instead of special polls as used in the last general election. We believe this violates the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code. *The Local Authorities Election Act* requires that referendums “*proceed as near as may be to a general election.*” The City is also reducing the days of advanced polling from three days to one.

5. SECRECY

The city submitted a business plan to PPP Canada, yet refuses to release the critical calculations supporting the viability of the P3 option to the citizens. The response to our access to information request was heavily redacted.

6. FLAWED CALCULATIONS

The city has released seven different cost estimates for the project in just 12 months. Each appears to be 15% higher than the previous.

The city’s advertising is misleading the public by claiming that each household will pay \$276 more per year if Regina loses the \$58.5 million PPP Canada grant. All other costs for the project are being amortized over 30 years. But the city is amortizing the grant over four years, which makes the number appear higher.

7. LACK OF INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

There has never been an independent evaluation of the options for Regina’s wastewater treatment plant. The city’s consultant, Deloitte, recommends that the project be done as a P3. Deloitte is a sponsoring member of the Canadian Council for Public Private Partnerships “a proponent of evidence-based public policy in support of P3s.”

8. APPREHENSION OF BIAS

As you know, the City Clerk appealed to the Minister to increase the number of signatures required to validate the petition. This was done shortly before the petition deadline. The city’s decision to hold a referendum came after the clerk disallowed 2,834 signatures from the total of 24,361 simply because they did not include the year in the date.

Water Watch respectfully requests that you consider the above evidence and provide independent oversight of the referendum vote.

Sincerely,

Jim Holmes, Chair
Regina Water Watch

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