



# People for Public Infrastructure

*Supporting lower costs and local control for Prince Rupert's water and sewer system.*

## BACKGROUND: HOW PEOPLE FOR PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE WAS FORMED

### WHAT IS TIMELINE OF THE GROUP'S FOUNDING?

**October 12<sup>th</sup>:** Over a dinner with local and provincial politicians the topic of the city's sewer and water system came up. Tom Kertes, a resident of Prince Rupert, was present. (Tom was the organizer of Community for Clean water, a campaign focus on access to clean water, which was launched during the weeks-long boil water notice of 2018-19.) Over dinner Tom heard about a detailed plan for Prince Rupert to sell, or transfer, its entire public water and sewer system to a city-owned company that would run the system outside of direct city governance. Apparently, this was meant to allow the city to raise as much as \$230 million in capital, more than a public system (one directly governed by the city) could raise. The rumoured plan was specific, and the source was someone within city government.

**October 13-18<sup>th</sup>:** Tom Kertes met with neighbours to discuss the rumour. Plans to get organized and to learn more were developed. The newly formed and informal group planned to call for an open process before the (rumoured) proposal could move forward (if, in fact, it was a real plan and not just a rumor). Residents wanted to know if others had heard of the plan detailed on October 12<sup>th</sup>. We asked others if they had heard anything. We found nothing. (Note: The municipal election was held on October 15<sup>th</sup> and the water and sewer system was not an issue in the campaign.)

**October 18<sup>th</sup>:** *The North Coast Review* blog posted information about the city's request for expressions of interest for a private company to build, operate, and maintain the city's water treatment plant. The wording in the expression of interest notice hinted at some of the components in the rumoured plan heard on October 12<sup>th</sup>. At this point, People for People Infrastructure sped up plans to meet and formalize the group.

**November 6<sup>th</sup>:** A group of eight city residents met at the home of Tom Kertes to discuss forming People for Public Infrastructure. Local politicians were invited and welcome. One city politician originally asked to attend but later sent regrets. Specifically, the person who shared the original information about the city's plans was reached out to and invited to attend to share more. They did not attend. The aim of the meeting was to learn more about the expression of interest and the rumoured plan for a total restructuring of the city's public utilities. At the meeting we decided to start by reaching out to local politicians to learn more and to emphasize the costs in terms of higher fees for residents and businesses and loss of local control if the city privatizes its water and sewer system. The group also decided to focus on research provided by CUPE, which provided a framework for how a city should consult with the public before deciding on privatization. This framework called for city governments to consider alternatives and to have an open community process when deciding on whether to privatize public utilities.

[PeopleForPublicInfrastructure.org](http://PeopleForPublicInfrastructure.org)

**November 6-14<sup>th</sup>:** The group members reached out to city politicians, but calls were not returned. Given this, we decided to next give a presentation to city council. This presentation would focus on the process for deciding whether to privatize a public utility service, including the recommendation to consider alternatives.

**November 14<sup>th</sup>:** People for Public Infrastructure sent a letter to city council to request to give a presentation to city council on November 21<sup>st</sup>.

**November 18<sup>th</sup>:** The City of Prince Rupert released a Memorandum to Council stating that city council had, earlier in the year, directed senior staff to move forward on the formation of a Municipality-Controlled Corporation that would partner with a private company and run the city's water, and possibly, sewer system. The plan outlined in the memo matched the rumoured plan of October 12<sup>th</sup>, with only the missing detail being the scale (\$230M in capital). This level of debt by the city-owned company to take over public utilities has not been confirmed. The Memorandum to Council suggests that the decision has already been made, despite this being the first public mention of the city's plan to move forward on a complete restructure of the city's public utilities.

## **WHAT ARE THE GROUP'S GOALS?**

People for Public Infrastructure is a grassroots community group of Prince Rupert residents working together to ensure that the city's public water and sewer system remain publicly-owned, publicly-controlled, publicly-operated, publicly-maintained, and publicly-financed. This ensures local control over our infrastructure, reduces the cost of operating our water and sewer system, and results in lower fees for residents and businesses.

### **Our goals are to:**

1. Ensure that residents and businesses have a voice in the process of deciding how the city will structure our public utilities
2. Ensure that alternatives to privatization are considered and that this be an open process.
3. Keep utility prices as low as possible and ensure that local governance and control is maintained over the public utility system

A public utility system is one governed directly by the city, within the municipality itself. This puts our city's elected representatives in direct control and oversight of the system.