

FIVE REASONS TO SAY 'YES' TO PUBLIC SEWAGE TREATMENT

What is privatization? In B.C. privatization is happening through public-private partnerships or P3s. Traditionally, government borrows money for things like hospitals, bridges and sewage treatment and uses that money to pay the private sector to design and build the projects. Once built, the facility or infrastructure is operated and maintained by government on behalf of the public. In P3 projects government typically enters into multi-decade contracts with private corporations to design, build, finance and operate facilities. The public always technically retains ownership, but the management and operation are controlled by private corporations who are paid by taxpayers, through multi-decade contracts, to deliver what were public services and manage what were public facilities.

1. To protect the environment

Sewage treatment is one important way to ensure long-term public health and environmental sustainability – but it has to be done right. In private sector lingo, environmental regulations are “red tape” that gets in the way of profit. But to protect public health and the environment, proper regulation and real enforcement are key. It is no surprise that this is an area where the private corporate interest often clashes with the public interest.

On the key issues of resource recovery and reusing waste, a publicly operated system will allow the CRD to integrate these resources across the wide range of programs and services delivered by regional government and member municipalities.

2. Public control and accountability

Unlike private corporations, public bodies are accountable to British Columbians for their actions. Every resident has a right to information and if they do not like what they hear, they can express their opinions directly to their elected representatives. And while citizens have the right to elect local politicians, we have no say over corporate boards of directors.

Multi-decade private contracts are also subject to much secrecy, both during their development and after the fact as corporations seek to maintain their competitive position and proprietary technologies.

3. To keep money, jobs and skills in the community

Public operation means that local people have access to good, well paying jobs in the community. These jobs provide opportunities to train and enhance the skill-sets of residents, which in turn strengthens the area's resiliency. In addition, public procurement

almost always relies on the private sector to design and build public infrastructure. These contracts generally go to local firms, which puts more money back into the local economy and creates even more job opportunities.

4. It's more affordable

Local governments can always borrow money more cheaply than the private sector. Over the long term, the difference in interest rates makes private operation substantially more expensive. Even if this were not the case, private projects always include hefty profit margins for corporations. This means that taxpayers end up paying much more for the same level of service than if it were provided by the local government.

5. To ensure public health and safety

BC's public water facilities consistently receive accolades for the level of protection provided. For example, Whistler's publicly operated wastewater treatment plant was awarded the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrator's Environmental Award in 2009. And the Sierra Legal Defence Fund ranked the Resort Municipality's tertiary sewage treatment system second in the country for the high quality of outflow.

Because public projects are more cost-effective and don't lock local governments into long-term agreements with private corporations, they can also incorporate emerging technology to protect the health and safety of residents and the environment. Again Whistler's Wastewater Treatment plant is a prime example. The plant buildings are not only built to top environmental LEED standards, but the project also incorporates the most advanced heat and energy recovery system in the country, which will provide power to the Olympic Athlete's Village.

For more information go to www.keepwaterpublic.ca