FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Clearwater to Receive Fully Funded Smart Water Meters to Conserve Water and Secure Infrastructure

Clearwater, B.C. – 2025-05-08 — The District of Clearwater has been awarded a $2.42 million provincial grant to install automated water meters on all water service connections in the community. This funding is part of a $50-million provincial pilot program supporting the installation of nearly 15,000 smart water meters across 19 small, rural, and First Nations communities throughout British Columbia.

The Clearwater project will see approximately 830 new meters and 40 replacements installed, each equipped with advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) that provides hourly data to detect leaks, monitor water usage, and support better decision-making during droughts. Work is scheduled to begin in February 2026 and must be completed by March 31, 2027.

“I would rather install meters and find the leaks that way than continue to pour treated water into the ground,” said Mayor Merlin Blackwell. “Clearwater soil has such good drainage that water leaks rarely come to the surface. There are likely dozens of leaks that we can't detect without meters. This grant allows us to solve the problem now, with grant funding, instead of spending massive tax dollars later on new infrastructure just to keep up.”

The meters will enable the District to monitor water use in real time, identify leaks quickly, and ensure that eventually, people pay based on how much water they actually use. Clearwater’s current water use is more than three times the provincial average, and a large portion of that is believed to be lost through undetected leaks in the aging water system.

The transition to use based billing will be phased in gradually over several years, beginning with a period of public education and awareness. During this initial phase, households will be able to view their water usage and compare it to benchmarks without changes to their billing. Future stages may introduce discounts for low water users, with full implementation of metered billing considered only once residents have had time to adjust and understand their consumption patterns.

“This project is an investment in good data and long-term sustainability,” said CAO Byron Johnson. “Our goal isn’t to turn a profit—it’s to make the water system financially sustainable and fair over time. With full Provincial funding, we can move forward without burdening ratepayers, and begin building a stronger foundation for managing this essential service into the future.”

Water metering is a proven method to reduce water use by up to 30%. Once installed, meters will empower both the District and residents to manage usage more effectively, keeping more water in local rivers and creeks and aquifers while reducing operational costs and deferring expensive infrastructure upgrades.

This initiative aligns with the District's 2022 *Water Conservation Plan*, which calls for better data collection, leak detection, and conservation targets. Clearwater is not the first to adopt this approach— Roughly half of B.C.'s municipalities now have some form of residential water-metering, and over a quarter have gone fully universal.[1] Clearwater is fortunate to now be catching up with the support of this grant.

The District will be engaging with the community throughout 2025 to explain the project, its benefits, and the timeline for installation.

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For more information, please contact:
Alsid Prime,
Director of Corporate Services
corporateservices@docbc.ca
250-674-2257

[1] **Source:** *BC Municipal Water Survey 2016, Water Planning Lab, UBC* – http://hdl.handle.net/2429/57077

FAQ:

1. What exactly is happening?

Clearwater has secured $2.42 million in provincial funding to install about 870 automated (AMI) water meters on every remaining connection in town — 830 new meters plus 40 replacements. Installation begins in 2025 and must wrap up by March 31 2027.

2. Why are we moving to universal metering?

- Stop the hidden leaks. In 2017 we found 26 leaks; our well draining soils mean many never surface.
- Bring use back to normal. Clearwater's per-capita consumption has been 250-400 % above the BC average.
- Delay costly upgrades. Every cubic metre we save postpones major capital works noted in the Water Conservation Plan.
- Fairness. People pay for what they use, just like electricity or natural gas.
- Data for droughts. AMI meters report hourly, giving staff the insight they need to manage during dry years.

3. Will this raise my taxes or water rates?

No. The project itself is revenue-neutral.

- 100 % of eligible capital costs are covered by the provincial grant.
- Clearwater only receives the money *after* signing the agreement; we are not borrowing for the work.
- Future rate structures will be designed so the utility collects *the same total revenue* it does today; low-use households will generally see smaller bills, high-use households larger ones.

4. If the grant covers everything, why talk about "modest future increases"?

Like every utility, we face rising prices for electricity, chemicals, and waterline repairs. Those pressures exist with or without meters. What the meters do is *stabilise* the budget by reducing waste and making costs more predictable.

5. What happens if the project runs over budget?

The engineering estimate includes a contingency. If unforeseen costs push us above the grant, Council can draw on water reserves so that residents are not billed extra during installation.

6. Why now?

We're playing catch up:

- Roughly half of B.C.'s municipalities now have some form of residential water-metering, and over a quarter have gone fully universal.
- The Province's one-time $50 million pilot pays up to 100 % of costs for communities under 5 000 connections. Waiting would mean paying ourselves later.
- Climate-driven droughts are becoming more frequent; 2023 and 2024 saw record provincial drought levels. Getting meters in before the next dry summer is prudent.

7. How will the installation work?

1. Notice letter with your tentative two-week window.
2. Appointment (15-30 min) with a certified installer. Indoor "cut-in" meters are standard; a small number will use outdoor pits where access is an issue.
3. Restoration of any disturbed area.
4. "Dummy billing" phase—for several months you'll see your actual water use on a statement, but you'll still pay today's flat rate.
5. Council sets the new rate bylaw, after reviewing dummy-billing data and community feedback. Volumetric billing then begins.

8. Can I refuse a meter?

No. Universal metering is now part of our provincially funded infrastructure and a condition of the grant. Uniform participation keeps billing fair for everyone.

9. Are there health, safety or privacy risks?

Meters meet all Canadian and BC standards. Radio signals are weaker than a baby monitor, data is encrypted, and only total water volume (not what you do with it) is transmitted. Multiple BC communities already run the same equipment without incident.

11. Will metering stop bulk water filling or irrigation?

Meters don't ban activities; they just make costs transparent. The same outdoor watering restrictions will apply, but residents who irrigate efficiently may pay less than before because they're no longer subsidising undetected leaks elsewhere.

12. How is personal data protected?

Data are stored on Canadian servers under Clearwater control, subject to BC's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Only aggregated, anonymised figures are shared with the Province for the pilot research.