

STATEMENT ON THE SAGE MESA WATER REFERENDUM

A statement for public discussion

I have had many people ask for my opinion on the Sage Mesa water referendum. My view is clear: the proposition placed before residents was extraordinary in scale and disconnected from the financial reality of the people expected to pay for it.

The referendum asked Sage Mesa residents to authorize the RDOS to borrow up to \$33.034 million to acquire, upgrade, maintain, and operate the water system. That proposal was rejected on April 11, with 317 votes against and 136 in favour.

This proposal did not appear out of nowhere. It moved through the RDOS administrative process and political structure before it reached the public. Multiple people had the opportunity to assess it, question it, and recognize what its potential cost would mean in the lives of ordinary residents.

At the full borrowing amount, the estimated household cost was approximately \$1,200 per month—about \$14,400 per year—for up to 30 years. Even the lower estimate discussed publicly, approximately \$1,000 per month, would have meant a \$12,000 annual obligation for households already facing the cost of housing, groceries, insurance, fuel, utilities, property taxes, and debt.

Before this proposal was presented to the Board of Directors, every planning technician, administrator, financial controller, and Chief Administrative Officer involved should have stopped and asked a very simple question:

“Could I afford another \$1,000 to \$1,200 per month in my own household?”

For most people, the answer is no. For a senior on a fixed income, a young family, a worker trying to keep up with a mortgage, or a small-business owner facing rising operating costs, a bill of this size is not an inconvenience. It can determine whether someone can remain in their home or community.

THE LOCAL REALITY

The cost becomes even more difficult to defend when it is compared with water charges in the neighbouring communities that bookend Sage Mesa.

Community	Water cost	Monthly equivalent
Faulder	\$791 per dwelling per year	About \$66/month
West Bench	\$350.41 per quarter	About \$117/month
Sage Mesa	Up to about \$14,400 per year	About \$1,200/month

Under the highest Sage Mesa scenario, residents could have faced approximately 18 times Faulder’s monthly equivalent and more than 10 times the West Bench monthly equivalent. Even at \$1,000 per month, Sage Mesa would have been more than 15 times Faulder’s monthly equivalent and about 8.5 times West Bench’s.

Those figures are not just statistics. They represent the difference between an ordinary utility bill and a financial burden that could force people to make impossible choices: paying for water, paying a mortgage, buying groceries, maintaining a vehicle needed for work, or remaining in the community they call home.

A regional district cannot evaluate a proposal like this in a vacuum. It must compare local costs, examine practical alternatives, and ask whether a proposed charge is proportionate to the lives and incomes of the people being asked to carry it.

ACCOUNTABILITY

If elected as an RDOS director, one of my first orders of business will be to call for a broad inquiry into how this proposition was handled.

The inquiry must establish how the \$33.034 million borrowing request was developed; how the household impacts were assessed and communicated; what alternatives were considered; what concerns were identified; and how this proposal passed through the RDOS administrative and political chain of command before reaching a referendum.

This is not about assigning blame for its own sake. It is about determining whether the RDOS's processes gave sufficient weight to affordability, proportionality, and the human consequences of its decisions.

Regional government must be transparent, financially disciplined, and connected to the people it serves. Following a process is not enough if that process produces a result so far removed from what ordinary residents can realistically bear.

Residents deserve representation that asks difficult questions before—not after—they are asked to vote on a decision that could fundamentally alter their ability to remain in their homes and community.

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