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Indigenous owned and operated water utility launching through new partnership model

The Okanagan Indian Band Group of Companies to create community-led, owned and operated water utility through a Public-Private-Community Partnership (PPCP) approach

December 14, 2020 – Vernon, B.C. – The first Indigenous owned and operated water utility in Canada developed by way of Public-Private-Community Partnership (PPCP), is a step closer to reality with a formal agreement signed last month between the Okanagan Indian Band Group of Companies (OKIB GC), EPCOR and Enterprise Canada.

The companies will identify commercial opportunities in utilities-related infrastructure, including water, wastewater and irrigation management systems, to provide quality drinking water and ensure adequate firefighting supply to serve the Okanagan Indian Band's reserve lands.

A PPCP takes the traditional Public-Private Partnership model (or "P3"), formed between governments and the private sector, and involves the impacted community or communities at the beginning of the decision-making process. This approach enables communities to direct and benefit from initiatives in their region as a full project partner.

The OKIB GC water utility will lead to skills training and employment opportunities for community members, in clear alignment with the fundamental right of self-determination for First Nations peoples in Canada. The professional partnership will support ongoing business arrangements to further socio-economic development opportunities for the Syilx of the Okanagan Indian Band.

"This initiative brings OKIB GC in as equal partners at the decision-making tables of mainstream corporate Canada," said Chief Byron Louis of the Okanagan Indian Band. "With shared goals, we are moving forward to invest in the economic and human resources development opportunities in our region and equipping our members with the necessary training to work with a utility owned and operated by our community."

"EPCOR is committed to exploring opportunities that see First Nations communities become active partners in projects that deliver essential services and generate economic benefits for their communities," said Stephen Stanley, Senior Vice President of EPCOR Commercial Services Ltd. "Our work with Okanagan Indian Band will realize this potential, while developing First Nations' capacity in utility operations and management, helping to build a strong and prosperous future."

"We are proud to work with the OKIB GC and EPCOR on this exciting new venture with the community at the helm of the decision-making table," said Enterprise CEO Barbara Fox. "We firmly believe partnerships like this are the future of improved opportunities for Indigenous communities. Drawing on our relationships with communities, corporations and government at all levels, Enterprise is in a prime position to bring together the right mix of people and financing and move this project forward to the next phase of development."



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In the coming weeks and months, OKIB GC, EPCOR and Enterprise will formalize the utility's corporate and financing structures, with blended financing options, and formulate a Community Human Resources Inventory to identify and develop technical and managerial skills among community members, especially women, interested in taking part in this opportunity.

About OKIB GC

The [OKIB Group of Companies](#) is owned by the Okanagan Indian Band. OKIB GC was established to develop business opportunity on behalf of the Band, and is actively developing partnerships for the purpose of pursuing economic and human resources development opportunities within the Okanagan Indian Band's reserve lands. The Okanagan Indian Band has six reserves. The majority of these reserves are located within the proximity of Vernon, B.C., with one reserve being adjacent to the District of Lake Country in the Okanagan.

About EPCOR Utilities Inc:

[EPCOR](#), through its wholly owned subsidiaries, builds, owns, and operates electrical, natural gas and water transmission and distribution networks; water and wastewater treatment facilities; sanitary and stormwater systems; and infrastructure in Canada and the United States. The Company also provides electricity, natural gas and water products and services to residential and commercial customers. Headquartered in Edmonton, EPCOR has been recognized as an Alberta Top 75 employer.

About Enterprise

Enterprise is a national strategic communications firm with consultants drawn from senior levels in politics, government, media, marketing, and business to deliver a full range of communications, government relations, public affairs, digital and public relations services. Enterprise formed its Infrastructure and Development Practice in 2018 with a team of industry leaders from across Canada to clear the way for sustainable development through partnerships that see Indigenous Peoples and communities directing projects and opportunities that impact them directly. Engage socially on Twitter @EntCanada and find more information about Enterprise's Development Practice [here](#).

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