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Guest Editorial [Column]
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Water Districts & Public Utility Districts Bring What, Now??

Why should you vote for a Water District or PUD
Commissioner?

Water District

Per Washington State Title 57, water districts can form under RCW 57.08 or if they provide both water and sewer, under RCW 57.02. There are 6 water districts and one water/sewer district in Kittitas County. They are special purpose districts established to deliver safe, reliable drinking water to a discrete geographic population, to conserve and maintain water resources. Water districts are accountable to the County (RCW 36.94) in which they reside and must abide by county water regulations.

Water districts are typically governed by 3 or 5 elected commissioners who serve nonpartisan 6 year terms. As for all special districts considered municipal governments, water districts must abide by public meeting laws and submit to a state audit every 3 years.

The water district is responsible for issuing an annual water quality report to its customers, notifying customers in the event of water regulation violation or risk to public health.

Its Board of Commissioners must develop and update a comprehensive plan of improvements (RCW 57.16.010) which must also be approved by the county in which it resides as well as by the state agency whose approval may be required by applicable law.

For a general comprehensive plan of a water supply system, the water district commissioners shall determine the present and future needs of its customers; select a water supply suitable and adequate for present and future need; and consider a plan for acquiring water

and for retaining and storing water, and erecting pipe lines to convey water throughout the district. The commissioners determine a general plan for distributing water water throughout the water district and a long-term plan for financing the planned projects, including the potential creation of local improvement districts and determine whether the whole or part of the cost and expenses shall be paid from customer revenues or general obligation bonds. The Board also oversees the District manager.

Only registered voters within the district boundaries are eligible to vote for water district commissioners.

How are water districts funded?

While the Board of Commissioners may choose to raise funds through issuance of bonds or tax levies, most water districts rely on customer fees to support daily operations.

Public Utility District (PUD)

A Public Utility District is a community-owned, locally regulated utility created by a vote of the people under RCW 54. A PUD may provide electricity, or water/sewer, or local access to broadband telecommunication services.

PUDs are governed by a Board of 3 or 5 elected commissioners who serve 6 year nonpartisan terms. Only registered voters within the PUD boundaries may vote for a commissioner. The districts may be further subdivided so that a discrete area is represented by its own commissioner. Commissioners are responsible for setting customer rates and overseeing the operations of the PUD. They establish district policies, approve budgets and expenditures, and approve projects.

Most electric PUDs buy electricity from the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), although some in other counties (Grant, for example) own their own hydro generation dams on the Columbia River.

In 1936, county residents voted to create Kittitas County PUD to provide electricity to residents in specific areas of the county.

How are PUDs funded?

Under RCW 54.16, a Board of Commissioners may raise revenue through issuing bonds or levy taxes on property within the District's boundaries. However, most PUDs relay on customer fees to support daily operations.

In conclusion, commissioners of Water Districts and PUDs can impact your life not only by the fees they set, the bonds they issue, or the taxes they levy but by the level of service and customer care they provide to you. So become an informed voter, learn about commission candidates, make an informed decision.

Not registered? Go to VoteWA.org to register online.

Vote. It matters.