



# **City of Guelph – Outside Water Use By-law Review Phase 2 Community Engagement Summary Report**

---

**Prepared by Lura Consulting for the City of Guelph**

**May 2013**

This Summary Report was prepared by Lura Consulting. Lura is providing third-party facilitation and reporting services as part of the City of Guelph's Outside Water Use By-law Review. This report summarizes the feedback received during the Phase 2 of the Water Use By-law Review (April to May 2013). If you have any questions or comments regarding the report, please contact:

**David Dilks**

President

**Lura Consulting**

Phone: 416-536-1729

Email: [ddilks@lura.ca](mailto:ddilks@lura.ca)



## Table of Contents

1	Background and Introduction .....	1
2	Summary of Phase 2 Engagement (April – May 2013) .....	1
2.1	<i>Overview of Engagement Process</i> .....	1
2.2	<i>Community Forums and Business Roundtable</i> .....	2
2.3	<i>Online Engagement</i> .....	4
3	Next Steps .....	7

## 1 Background and Introduction

Guelph is a community that depends on groundwater to meet its drinking water needs. Typically, water demands increase during the summer months as people use more water for activities like washing the car, watering gardens and lawns, and filling swimming pools. In 2003, City Council approved an Outside Water Use By-law to help manage periods of low water supply and high water use. The by-law was also a necessary step for the City to meet Provincial requirements for water management outlined in Ontario's Low Water Response Plan.

Today, Guelph's Outside Water Use Program (OWUP)—which includes the by-law noted above—is one of the most successful and recognized water conservation programs in Ontario. It outlines the steps that residents and businesses need to take during drought conditions to help protect the City's water supply, the natural environment and ensure we all have access to the water we need.

The Outside Water Use By-law and OWUP have been in place in Guelph for nearly 10 years. During prolonged periods of drought in 2012, the City of Guelph implemented enhanced water use restrictions under the by-law to ensure there was enough water to support both the needs of the City and the local environment.

In response to recent concerns about the by-law and to ensure the City is meeting its water needs in the best way possible, the Water Services Division has initiated a review of the Outside Water Use By-law and Program.

The review is exploring aspects of the Outside Water Use By-law and OWUP that are working well, and examining opportunities for refinements to the by-law and program that could help the City better manage its water resources into the future. The review is following a 3 phase process aimed at engaging residents and stakeholders in an interactive dialogue on the status and effectiveness of the by-law and program, as well as regarding potential changes to the program and regulation moving forward:

- Phase 1: Issues and Opportunities (January 2013 - February 2013)
- Phase 2: Future Directions (April - May 2013)
- Phase 3: Confirming the Results (June - September 2013)

This report provides a summary of community engagement activities conducted during Phase 2 of the Outside Water Use By-law Review. A similar summary report was prepared for Phase 1, and is available online at [guelph.ca/owureview](http://guelph.ca/owureview).

## 2 Summary of Phase 2 Engagement (April – May 2013)

### 2.1 Overview of Engagement Process

Phase 2 of the engagement process focused on hearing feedback from residents and businesses on potential changes to the OWUP and By-law.

Key engagement activities in Phase 2 included two community forums, a business roundtable and online engagement via the program website – [guelph.ca/owureview](http://guelph.ca/owureview). In addition, the City's Water

Conservation and Efficiency Public Advisory Committee (PAC) met and received an update on Phase 2 of the review and community engagement activities.

A Phase 2 Discussion Guide containing background information about the review process was developed for the face-to-face meetings and online engagement process. The Guide also proposed a series of discussion topics for Phase 2, based on community feedback received during Phase 1. Phase 2 discussion topics included:

1. Car washing: Include new restrictions on car washing during Level 2 Red (as a non-essential water use).
2. Fines for non-compliance: Increase the fine amounts for non-compliance (currently \$130) and repeated non-compliance.
3. Automatic sprinkler systems: Include additional requirements for those choosing to install new automated sprinkler systems, such as use of master control valves to reduce water loss through leakage.
4. Watering times: Change the permitted watering time (7-9a.m./p.m.) to a time defined as more convenient by residents and best for plant health.
5. Tree watering exemption: Include an exemption for tree watering (levels 0,1&2) in support of City's urban canopy objectives.
6. Food garden exemption: Include an exemption for food garden watering (levels 0,1,&2) to support urban agriculture objectives of City's Official Plan.
7. Water response levels: Introduce an additional level of water response and provide clearer differences between the response levels.
8. Permit structure: Modify the bulk permitting processes to allow for greater convenience in customer service and develop a new cost recovery structure.

The Phase 2 Discussion Guide also invited any additional feedback or ideas on how to enhance the OWUP and By-law moving forward.

## **2.2 Community Forums and Business Roundtable**

During Phase 2, two community forums and a business roundtable were held on April 24 and 25, 2013 to engage residents and business stakeholders in an interactive dialogue about potential changes to the Outdoor Water Use By-Law and Program. While attendance at the community forums and business roundtable was low (11 participants), the meetings provided an opportunity for in depth conversations between Water Services staff and the participants who did attend.

A summary of feedback from these face-to-face meetings is provided below:

1. **Car washing: Include new restrictions on car washing during Level 2 Red (as a non-essential water use)**
  - The City should provide education on more water efficient car washing procedures (e.g. bucket method).

- Car washing requirements should not be altered because residents will find other sources to clean their vehicle (e.g. professional car wash).
- 2. Fines for non-compliance: Increase the fine amounts for non-compliance (currently \$130) and repeated non-compliance**
- *No specific feedback received.*
- 3. Automatic sprinkler systems: Include additional requirements for those choosing to install new automated sprinkler systems, such as use of master control valves to reduce water loss through leakage**
- The City should provide incentives/rebates to residents who install water efficient irrigation systems.
  - Irrigation systems that are installed should all have a master value to control water flow. Systems should also monitor rain, back flow and protect against leaks. The City should provide more education to residents on the attributes of water efficient sprinkler systems.
  - Establish a separate water rate for users with sprinkler systems (which would be monitored with a designated water meter).
- 4. Watering times: Change the permitted watering time (7-9 a.m./p.m.) to a time defined as more convenient by residents and best for plant health**
- Educate residents on the correct methods of watering their lawns and gardens to reduce water usage.
  - The City should provide information on the correct methods of watering individual plant species.
  - Have varying watering times for different “user” audiences – those with automated sprinklers, non-automated sprinklers and no sprinkler systems.
  - Align the permitted watering days/times with waste collection days.
- 5. Tree watering exemption: Include an exemption for tree watering (levels 0, 1 & 2) in support of City’s urban canopy objectives**
- Educate the public on the benefits of spike and bucket watering methods for trees.
- 6. Food garden exemption: Include an exemption for food garden watering (levels 0, 1, & 2) to support urban agriculture objectives of City’s Official Plan**
- *No specific feedback received.*
- 7. Water response levels: Introduce an additional level of water response and provide clearer differences between the response levels**

- Good idea to introduce an orange level to help highlight the difference between the yellow and blue levels.

**8. Permit structure: Modify the bulk permitting processes to allow for greater convenience in customer service and develop a new cost recovery structure (*discussed at Business Roundtable only*)**

- Permits should be easily accessible to businesses; a business should be able to call directly and apply for a permit over the phone.

**9. Additional Feedback or Ideas**

- Encourage homeowners to replace grass lawns with rock gardens.
- Monitor the amount of topsoil used by developers when building subdivisions through City building inspection process.
- Pool covers should be made mandatory for all pool owners in order to minimize water loss due to evaporation.
- The OWUP is heavily concentrated on residents; businesses (particularly large water users) should also be accountable for water conservation and monitored.
- Incentives should be provided to replace old water softeners by the City of Guelph.

### **2.3 Online Engagement**

Community members were invited to learn about the Water Use Program and By-law on the project website and provide input by filling out an online survey, or by sending an email to [owureview@guelph.ca](mailto:owureview@guelph.ca). In total 34 online surveys were completed and nine comments were received by email. Of note, while attendance at the face-to-face meetings was low, online participation was much higher during Phase 2, with 34 completed online surveys, compared to just three in Phase 1.

Below is a summary of the feedback received from the online survey and email submissions, organized by discussion topic.

**1. Car washing: Include new restrictions on car washing during Level 2 Red (as a non-essential water use)**

76% of online survey respondents support a total restriction on car washing in Level 2 Red. Alternatives to a total restriction, as suggested by the 24% who do not support such a total restriction in Level Red, include:

- Limit vehicle washing to once a week in Level Red.
- Restrict car washing to specific hours (7 to 8a.m. or 7 to 8p.m.).
- Ask people to use a bucket to wash vehicles instead of a hose/nozzle, as this method conserves more water.

**2. Fines for non-compliance: Increase the fine amounts for non-compliance (currently \$130) and repeated non-compliance**

64% of online survey respondents do not support increasing fine amounts for non-compliance. Additional comments included:

- There should be more enforcement by the City.
- Educate the public on the current fine structure.
- Focus of fine increases should be on industrial and commercial zoned properties.
- Large businesses are withdrawing millions of litres of waters from the Aberfoyle and Hillsburg plant and must face the toughest penalties.
- Increase fines only for repeated non-compliance.
- Fines should increase every year based on the cost of living.
- Fines for non-compliance are inconsistent; therefore a fine increase will only penalize some.
- Fines do not discourage people from using water, they are unnecessary.
- Establish an online or automated phone system that can be used by neighbours to alert by-law officers to non-compliance.
- Regarding the fine amount:
  - The first offence should be \$130 and double for subsequent non-compliance.
  - \$130 is an unreasonable amount and should be decreased.
  - Fine amounts should be higher for businesses than for residents.

**3. Automatic sprinkler systems: Include additional requirements for those choosing to install new automated sprinkler systems, such as use of master control valves to reduce water loss through leakage**

79% of online survey respondents support water conserving system design requirements for automated sprinkler systems. Additional comments included:

- City should provide incentives to encourage residents to install water efficient systems or features such as control valves.
- Education regarding the use of such systems is needed (including costs and benefits).
- Concern that introducing specific requirements will be too intrusive and costly for residents.

**4. Watering times: Change the permitted watering time (7-9 a.m./p.m.) to a time defined as more convenient by residents and best for plant health**

56% of online survey respondents support changing the permitted watering times. Suggestions included:

- Automated irrigation system should be permitted between 5-7 a.m.
- Change watering times to help reduce the amount of evaporated water.
- Permit watering as early as 2-9 a.m. in the mornings and 7-11 p.m. in the evenings.

- Permit longer watering times for residents who can't water their lawns in two hour windows (7-9 a.m./p.m.), due to shift work or other reasons.
- Watering times should be permitted on alternative days any time the resident pleases.

Other suggestions included:

- The City should provide documents that indicate the appropriate times to water plants.
- Alternative days are acceptable because it is easy to follow and remember.
- On the 31<sup>st</sup> of summer months all residents should be able to water their lawns.
- Watering restrictions should not affect certified irrigation systems that monitor rain and have smart sensors.
- The need for watering will be a function of soil water content and observation of plant turgor, watering times should reflect these levels.
- Irrigation systems should be allowed to water once a week during any level.

**5. Tree watering exemption: Include an exemption for tree watering (levels 0, 1 & 2) in support of City's urban canopy objectives**

91% of online survey respondents support an exemption for tree watering under all levels of the Outdoor Water Use By-Law. Other comments included:

- The City has failed to maintain the health of newly planted trees and grass.
- There should be no exemptions, including for trees.

**6. Food garden exemption: Include an exemption for food garden watering (levels 0, 1, & 2) to support urban agriculture objectives of City's Official Plan**

85% of online survey respondents support an exemption for food garden watering under all levels of the By-law. Additional suggestions included:

- The City should provide a clear definition of what a food garden is to prevent residents from watering surrounding areas.
- Growing fresh produce is important to the local economy, we have to support our farmers.
- Exemptions indicate that one person's priorities are more important than the priorities of others.

**7. Water response levels: Introduce an additional level of water response and provide clearer differences between the response levels**

82% of online survey respondents support the inclusion of an additional level and 66% support greater differentiation between level blue and yellow. Additional comments included:

- Current structure is too restrictive; a new level will help soften the water restrictions.
- The additional level helps postpone and/or avoid a complete watering ban.

- Watering a lawn once a week will be wasteful because lawns require water more than once a week.
- Level blue could be used to implement alternate days and yellow could be once a week.
- Permit watering twice a week (on garbage day and Saturday or Sunday) in level one.

**8. Permit structure: Modify the bulk permitting processes to allow for greater convenience in customer service and develop a new cost recovery structure**

*Not asked in the online survey (as question generally applies to businesses only).*

**9. Additional Feedback or Ideas**

Other feedback and ideas raised in the online surveys or emails included:

- The performance of irrigation systems should be monitored by implementing annual checks.
- Helpful advice and suggestions from the City on how to conserve water all year should be circulated.
- In the circumstance of a total ban on water, business should be required to stop all water usage.
- Consider changing the price of water at each level.
- Supply each household with rain barrels.
- Level 3 restrictions should not shutdown wading pools and splash pads because they help residents keep cool in a drought.
- Stop the sale of water to big users who bottle the water and send it elsewhere.
- Control the expansion of the Guelph as this has placed a strain on natural resources.
- The City should evaluate changing conditions of turf with climate change, wastewater pollutants and other environmental factors in relation to drier turf to understand the effects of water on turf.
- Promote the use of efficient designs, nozzles and controllers for irrigation systems.
- Provide further information on water volumes related to various uses and tasks.
- Provide an explanation of the impacts of climate change to outside water use.
- Create a FAQ document related to permits and quantity/availability of the City's water supply.

### **3 Next Steps**

Based on the input collected during Phase 2 of the community engagement process, the City of Guelph Water Services Division will design and implement a telephone survey of Guelph residents to ensure that the broader community perspectives are considered in developing recommended changes to the OWUP and by-law. Proposed changes will then be posted online for public review and comment before recommendations are brought forward by staff to Guelph City Council in early fall.