

# Meeting Minutes

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City of Guelph

## **Water Conservation and Efficiency Public Advisory Committee**

September 13, 2017

City Hall, Meeting Room B

From 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

**Present:** Mike Darmon (MD), Paul McLennan (PM), Patty Quackenbush (PQ), Hugh Whiteley (HW), Grant Parkinson (GP), Louise Cottreau (LC), Renuka Baral (RB)

**Regrets:** Louise Cottreau (LC), 1 Vacant seat

**Staff:** Emily Stahl (ES), Heather Yates (HY), Stephanie Cote (SC), Steven Snopkowski (SS)

## **Agenda Items**

### **Item 1**

Welcome and introductions – P. McLennan, all

### **Item 2**

#### **Confirmation of last meeting's minutes – May 16 and July 4, 2017**

Circulated drafted minutes to the committee.

**Motion:** That minutes from the May 16 and July 4, 2017 be approved and circulated.

**Motion** Approved by HW

**Seconded** by MD

**Carried**

### **Item 3**

#### **Vacancy posting for Public Advisory Committee – H. Yates**

Active recruitment is ongoing for the current vacancy. There are attempts to garner interest from the academic or ICI fields as they relate to recommendations in the Water Efficiency Strategy. Applications due to City Clerk's office by Thursday September 21.

Four longstanding members will complete their 8 year term as per the Committee Term of Appointment. Staff can petition to Council for an extension of service to ensure continuity, if the Committee sees this as prudent. Staff must put forward the recommendation and it could be done early next year.

### **Item 4**

#### **Water and Wastewater Rate Review – Billing Exemption Study Results – E. Stahl**

A brief update on the rate review was provided. Please see the [website](#) for details. The billing exceptions study, completed in 2017, will be available online under the "Updates" tab once the council report is released.

Part one considered the rate exemptions our comparator municipalities provide, such as leak forgiveness, that we should consider in Guelph.

Part two considered the opinions of Guelph's residential and ICI sectors to billing exemption programs. Key results: leak forgiveness was positively received by residents and the sewer abatement program was well received by ICI sectors. Due to the extremely positive response to these programs, and the fact that many municipalities offer these exemptions, these programs will be put forward to council before the 2019 rate review. Other considerations that need further investigation will be considered during the rate review.

Interestingly, only 12% had a confident understanding of water and wastewater processes.

### **Discussion:**

**PQ:** A billing exemption regulation drives all costs to be paid by the consumer. Does it allow flexibility for costs to be subsidized by higher payers?

**ES:** Yes it does as it's a block rate structure.

**PQ:** There is an argument to be made that if some people don't have to pay, others will have to cover that cost, and how is that fair?

**ES:** I don't think we would go that direction because there are many alternative subsidies. For example, we might have a money pot from which people could apply.

**PQ:** For the ICI sector, are you not encouraging things like higher irrigation?

**ES:** Irrigation wouldn't apply. Some water is too contaminated for the municipal wastewater system and must be trucked off-site. As a result, companies pay twice for water disposal.

**SS:** Cooling systems are another example where water is not returned to the waste water system.

**HY:** Hugh brought up a current study in California regarding state funding pools that help with low income households. It might be coming out in the next US Federal budget cycle and could be a relevant reference.

**PQ:** Is that coming from the Water as a Human Right?

**HY:** Yes it is.

**GP:** Measuring the sewage flow coming out of larger customers is more difficult but is this in consideration at all?

**ES:** We had an industry consultant speak with them about it and they said they would be willing to participate in something like this. Some already have the infrastructure in place to do so. It is something worth considering.

**ES:** An engineering report would need to be received for the credit. They must have a minimum level of 25% of water that would need to be diverted to a maximum of 75% for participation.

**MD:** Would they need to measure on a consistent basis?

**ES:** They would need to do annual applications and submit data every 6 months, structured similar to a rebate program.

## **Item 5**

**Public Education and Communications Strategy (PECS) Update – H. Yates**

Attachment A – Presentation: An update on the PECS project, including a summary of timeline and deliverables.

The City of Guelph is working with Metroline and Econics to complete the strategy update/ Econics has noted that Guelph is already a leader in terms of water conservation and tap water education and communication efforts.

**Discussion:**

**HY:** The original 2010 PECS needs updating to complement to the 2016 Water Efficiency Strategy Update, which still holds education as a top priority for water conservation. There have been changes in communication trends, and we need to ensure messages still resonate with the target audience.

**PQ:** The Tribune isn't best for reaching people anymore?

**HY:** No it's not. It's still valuable, but we are moving towards other tactics such as sponsored ads through social media.

**PQ:** Are sponsored ads getting more hits because they target certain groups?

**HY:** Yes, but they also target the entire City. For example, our frozen services ad pops up on the Weather Network site for Guelph.

**PQ:** Are there any benefits to looking at communication strategies of other utilities for new ideas and insights? Energy has used a lot of resources to reduce energy outputs to prevent having to upgrade and there are a lot of similarities.

**HY:** That is an excellent idea. There is a lot going on in energy and much literature and social normative studies around energy as well.

**RB:** There are peak energy uses as well.

**GP:** There is also purchasing of appliances; correlation between energy and water use.

**MD:** Low, medium and high use rates are seen somewhere on the energy bill.

**HY:** While there is a water factor with energy star appliances, it's not as prevalent or well known.

**PM:** What is the low hanging fruit right now? Perhaps students and renters?

**HY:** It's been a conversation around the office. How do we target students who care but don't know what to do?

**PQ:** Or how do we encourage them to care if they don't?

**PM:** And they don't have any money. Can we engage the University somehow?

**HY:** might be an interesting place to do an intercept survey to find out about their water using behaviours etc.

**PQ:** It's a group that has been educated, growing up with water conservation. Perhaps they think they are good water conservationists but actually aren't? For example, they might shut off the tap while brushing their teeth but then take a long shower.

**HY:** We have also asked to see, through this process, what others are doing to quantify the unquantifiable. How do we demonstrate that our efforts are a valuable use of rate payer dollars when we cannot use a water meter?

## **Item 6**

### **Water Smart Business Program – S. Snopkowski**

Attachment B – Presentation: An update on the Water Smart Business Program including process changes, feedback and input from the community, timelines and next steps.

Program outline and research is completed. Moving onto consultations and a communications review. A report to Council will be submitted in December.

Two main questions posed for feedback from the committee:

1. Should the program pay for all improvements that lead to water efficiencies/savings?
2. How do we overcome the fact that water is cheap compared to other utilities?

#### **Discussion:**

**PQ:** Have you developed any connections which you could solicit involvement into this committee? We are looking for new membership and are missing ICI representation.

**SS:** There may not be enough trust at this time which is something I am working diligently to rebuild. So perhaps not at this time but in the future.

**PQ:** A connection at the University of Guelph might be good to reach out to. Regarding question 1, I don't think the City should be putting all the money in. There are a lot of government grants that are aimed at industry and they provide dollars to subsidise the payback period.

**HY:** The \$750 per cubic meter per day incentive blows other municipal buyback incentives out of the water. It is the best any municipality is offering.

**PQ:** If there was a quick payback period and easy participation, they may be interested.

**SS:** I agree that they might be interested, but I think it would difficult to get people invested and participating in the program. If a business can't run or are shut down for even a short period of time, it can result in large costs. You need trust, constant communication and check-in. The goal is that the program will mature and then they will call us. The question is how do we get there?

**PQ:** Are you targeting the top 25 water users?

**SS:** The program is available for all ICI customers; we regularly connect with top users.

**PQ:** Is there any value in targeting specific industries instead of offering general programs? For example, a specific program directed towards restaurants? GP: Schoolboards might be a good one too.

**MD:** Is one of the main problems with industry that it's just cheaper to pay for the water instead of putting the time and energy into making changes.

**SS:** Yes. This is where their participation in the rate review will be beneficial. They are quite upset that they are paying for water twice. For example, water that is evaporated.

**PQ:** But that doesn't encourage water conservation. Can we structure it so that they get money back, but they have to use it in a way that contributes to water conservation?

**SS:** We are trying to do our part in the program by district metering our own system. This sends the message that we care and are walking the walk.

**MD:** We used to have an awards event didn't we?

**HY:** Yes. The Committee has this as a tool when something warrants merit. Conversation about promoting people who have gone above and beyond has come up.

**PQ:** The city is doing a wastewater by-law update. They are required to do a lot of things on the wastewater side. Could something be built in for the water conservation side?

**HY:** Any other thoughts on Stevens' two questions?

**SS:** Feel to think about these questions and contact me with any ideas or interested clients. Thank you for your continued interest in the Water Smart Business Program.

## **Item 7**

### **Other Business – all**

**HY:** I have an update on the Watr app. It is now available at the App Store and Google Play. There won't be a massive launch but there will be social media, promotional postcards, and some advertisements going out.

**HY:** City staff went to see the Greyter system – a new iteration of the BRAC greywater system. Please note this is an update on their technology and not a product endorsement. The Greyter system uses bleach instead of chlorine pucks, is slick looking, and has a self-purge during periods of no water demand. It has an LCD screen, an app, and a filtering flange. It works better with sudsing soaps than organic shampoo. Pilots will be installed in the Greater Toronto Area.

**MD:** These systems become a huge maintenance issue which is one barrier to uptake.

**HW:** The Water Reuse Foundation just finished its annual meeting and provided a list of awards they gave out. One was for a researcher in St. Paul Minnesota regarding wastewater systems for urban agriculture. This project captures two social goals – one is reuse and the other is increasing food production in urban areas. Urban food production is an important consideration. Especially with carbon reduction goals. It would be worthwhile to contact the researcher.

**MD:** Especially here with the community and University history in agriculture. **HW:** There was a seminar/webinar on water reuse for cooling. I have raised this issue previously as something Guelph could do to reduce water use. I am pleased to see this is an active area. There are experts available to try to guide programs.

**SS:** An interesting question for reuse is how you treat the water before it is able to be reused.

**HW:** We need to monitor literature and reports being produced.

## **Item 8**

### **Next meeting dates – all**

Wednesday, November 29.

## **Item 9**

Meeting adjourned at 8:55 pm.