

Staff Report



Infrastructure Services Department

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REPORT TO: Community and Infrastructure Services Committee

DATE OF MEETING: March 25, 2024

SUBMITTED BY: Greg St. Louis, Director, Gas & Water Utilities, 519-741-2600 ext. 4538

PREPARED BY: Angela Mick, Manager Quality Management & Water Programs, 519-741-2200 ext. 4408

WARD(S) INVOLVED: All

DATE OF REPORT: January 29, 2024

REPORT NO.: INS-2024-137

SUBJECT: Blue Communities Project

RECOMMENDATION:
For Information

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to provide information regarding the Blue Communities Project as a follow-up to the request of a delegation for Council to pass a motion for City of Kitchener to become a Blue Community.
- The City of Kitchener has already incorporated most of the desired outcomes of the Blue Communities Project and can readily achieve 2 out of the 3 requirements of the program. While bottled water is available in some circumstances (vending and 3rd party contractors) the City has implemented water fill stations and fountains to enable access to municipal tap water across all indoor facilities and has programs to promote the use of tap water.
- There are no financial impacts associated with this report.
- This report supports the delivery of core service.

BACKGROUND:

The Blue Communities Project calls on communities to adopt a water commons framework by:

1. Recognizing water and sanitation as human rights.
2. Banning or phasing out the sale of bottled water in municipal facilities and at municipal events.
3. Promote publicly financed, owned and operated water and wastewater services.

On September 25, 2023, a delegation attended Council and requested that Council pass a resolution to become a Blue Community by adopting the three requirements noted above.

*** This information is available in accessible formats upon request. ***
Please call 519-741-2345 or TTY 1-866-969-9994 for assistance.

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REPORT:

The Blue Communities Project is a joint initiative of the Blue Planet Project, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and the Council of Canadians. Their Project Guide suggests that municipalities recognize the human rights to water and sanitation.

The report will provide information surrounding each of the three (3) resolutions requested by Blue Communities.

1. Recognizing water and sanitation as human rights.

Blue Communities promotes the human right to water which entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, accessible water for personal and household uses. The human right to sanitation would ensure that everyone has access to toilets or latrines that provide privacy and a safe and dignified environment that is physically accessible, affordable and culturally sensitive. This includes:

- Safeguard against a pricing scheme that would limit access to drinking water and wastewater services.
- Ensure all residents have equal access to adequate supplies of safe, clean water and sanitation.
- Provide citizens with information on their water supply and operation of their water services.
- Promote water conservation, treatment, reuse and source protection to enhance water quality and quantity.

Within the Region of Waterloo, the Region is responsible for the supply of drinking water to the municipalities and treatment of wastewater. This includes source water supply, protection, and water conservation.

The City of Kitchener is responsible for the water distribution and wastewater collection system and provides customer connections to the municipal drinking water system. The City of Kitchener and the Region of Waterloo work together to ensure safe and reliable delivery of drinking water to the residents of Kitchener.

Both the City and the Region provide transparent rate structures, access to water and wastewater services, information on water supply and operations, and promotion of water conservation and source protection.

Although rare, the City of Kitchener turns off water for a variety of reasons:

- for non-payment as per the process is outlined in Policy FIN-FEE- 517 Utility and Miscellaneous Receivable Policy.
- Refusal of access for water meter work under the Municipal Act.
- Non-compliance or refusal to comply with the Backflow Prevention By-law.

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- Private water leaks that have not been repaired within 30 days or if it has become a potential safety issue.

Kitchener Utilities provides funding to the Low–Income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP), which is managed by the Region of Waterloo. Kitchener Utilities bills include gas, drinking water, wastewater and stormwater. This program offers funding for customers that need financial assistance with their utility bills. The Region of Waterloo manages the qualification criteria and operates the program on behalf of utilities.

Since Kitchener has programs/policies that minimize water shut-offs and assist customers; the human right to water and sanitation criteria would be met.

2. Banning or phasing out the sale of bottled water in municipal facilities and at municipal events

The Blue Communities website states that “alongside the phase out of bottled water, the Blue Communities Project requires that Municipalities ensure that people have access to drinking water through drinking water fountains or mobile water stations. Blue Communities requires resolution for the municipal staff and public awareness campaign to support the rationale for these changes. Staff are asked to develop an implementation schedule and timelines that include an assessment of access to tap water at municipal facilities.”

Council passed a resolution in 2008 (FIN-08-091), which supports the phasing out of bottled water where possible:

“That therefore be it resolved that the Council of the City of Kitchener direct staff develop a strategy as soon as possible to eliminate the purchase and sale of bottled water in all its facilities where practical and that steps be taken to further raise the awareness of why tap water is safe, economical and environmentally friendly.

And that effective immediately we no longer serve or offer bottled water at our General Committee, Council or any other Committee or Public Meetings at Kitchener City Hall.”

In addition, the City of Kitchener offers many programs to support promotion of free tap water including:

Blue W Program - Free Tap Water Available

All City of Kitchener public facilities provide locations for free tap water (fountain, bottle fill and/or kitchenettes). The Blue W program is a tap water refilling network that identifies local businesses and public facilities that will refill reusable bottles with tap water free of charge. City of Kitchener facilities are included on the site www.bluew.org

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Water Filling Station for Events (No Charge for Water)

In 2010, the Region of Waterloo purchased the Water Wagon which was used as a means to provide tap water at Kitchener Events. The Regional Water Wagon program is no longer available; however the City of Kitchener rented a water filling station for some events in 2023 and purchased a station in late 2023 for 2024 events. The station has a number of fountains as well as bottle fill up tap. The station will be available at 2024 City of Kitchener events to provide free water (Canada Day, Wayback Festival, Cruising on King St, KidsPark). The station can also be made available for other non-city events within Kitchener such as the Multicultural Festival, Blues Festival, etc.

The City provides free water at a number of locations/events; however vendors sell food and beverages, which includes bottled water, at City of Kitchener events. The City also provides water for purchase via vending machines/concession stations at community arenas, the Aud and golf courses. Vending machines and concession points are contracted out for these facilities. Due to health and contractual considerations, bottled water will continue to be offered at these facilities; however free tap water is also available via water bottle fill stations. Pools do not have vending machines and water fill stations are available at all indoor pools. Harry Class and Kiwanis outdoor pools are planning to have water fill stations installed for summer 2024.

3. Promote publicly financed, owned and operated water and wastewater services

The City of Kitchener is already publicly financed, owned and operated water and wastewater services.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report supports the delivery of core services.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The recommendation has no impact on the Capital or Operating Budget.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

INFORM – This report has been posted to the City’s website with the agenda in advance of the council / committee meeting.

CONSULT – Staff met with the delegation to review the Blue Communities Project criteria and seek clarification on requirements.

PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:

- [FIN-08-091](#) Bottled Water Alternatives
- [FIN-09-156](#) Drinking Water Strategy

APPROVED BY: Denise McGoldrick, General Manager, Infrastructure Services