

memorandum

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Item # 21
Report # 9

DATE: March 15, 2013
TO: Hon. Mayor Bevilacqua and Members of Council
FROM: Paul Jankowski, P. Eng
Commissioner of Engineering & Public Works
RE: **Additional information – Committee of the Whole, February 26, 2013,
Communication C1, Deputation 3, “Blue Communities Project Guide”**

COUNCIL – March 19, 2013

Recommendation

The Commissioner of Engineering and Public Works, in consultation with the Manager of Environmental Sustainability, recommends that the following report be received for information.

Contribution to Sustainability

Vaughan's participation in the “Blue Communities” program would be in line with the *Green Directions Vaughan*, Goal 5: “To be leaders in advocacy and education sustainability issues”.

Economic Impact

The ban on the sale of unflavoured bottled water in municipal facilities has already been implemented; however, the provision of free water at municipal events may have financial implications for the City. Mobile water bottle filling stations that could be used at outdoor City events have a capital cost of approximately \$15-20,000 each. Alternatively, businesses would have to be contracted to provide these water stations for such City events. This is currently not a service provided by the City. It is also important to note that third party vendors currently sell single use bottled water at City events, and a ban on bottled water at such events could be a disincentive for such vendors to participate.

Increasing access to municipal drinking water at City facilities through the installation of water bottle filling stations carries a capital cost of approximately \$2,000 per filling station.

Communications Plan

Should Council wish to initiate further measures with respect to banning the provision of bottled water at all municipal events, a detailed communications plan would need to be developed and rolled out to all affected internal and external parties, and third party users of municipal facilities.

Purpose

To provide information with respect to the request made by Ms Robyn Hamlyn for Council to enact the necessary resolutions to become a “Blue Community”.

Background - Analysis and Options

At the February 26, 2013, Committee of the Whole meeting, Ms Robyn Hamlyn appeared before Committee and requested that the City of Vaughan become a “Blue Community” by taking the necessary actions, and passing the necessary resolutions, in order to do so.

The “Blue Communities” Project is a joint undertaking between the Council of Canadians and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (C.U.P.E.)

The “Blue Communities” Project builds on the Water Watch work in coalition with other groups to protect public water services, and challenge the bottled water industry. The “Blue Communities” Project calls on municipalities to adopt a common framework for water by

- Recognizing water as a human right
- Promoting publicly financed, owned and operated water and wastewater services
- Banning the sale of bottled water in public facilities and at municipal events

“Blue Communities” support the concept of safe drinking water to be a human right

As water is essential to life, a “Blue Community” believes that no one should be able to control it or expropriate it for profit. Its mandate is to ensure that people living everywhere in Canada have a right to sufficient, safe, accessible water for personal and domestic uses.

The “Blue Communities” Project suggests that a local municipality can meet these principles by:

- Having a pricing policy for water that would not limit access to drinking water
- Ensuring all residents have equal access to adequate supplies of drinking water
- Providing residents with information about their water supply and the operation of their water services
- Promoting water conservation, treatment, reuse, and source protection to enhance water quality and quantity

Provincial legislation requires water systems to be financially sustainable

In the Province of Ontario, owners of drinking water systems are required to develop financial plans that ensure the expenses to operate, maintain, and replace water treatment and distribution systems are funded to ensure such systems are fully sustainable and full-cost recoverable.

The City has developed such a plan, and takes into account the costs to operate, maintain and replace the City’s water distribution system infrastructure. The City’s water rates take into account the requirement for the system to be fully sustainable with full cost recovery.

The City of Vaughan’s pricing policy for water reflects Ontario’s full-cost pricing, does not prohibit access to drinking water, is comparable to other York and GTA municipalities’, and provides excellent value

While the “Blue Communities” Project requests a declaration of water as a human right, such a declaration cannot be made without a clear recognition that the provision of safe drinking water is not “free”, and the costs to treat and supply safe drinking water should be borne by the users of the system.

The City of Vaughan’s pricing for water reflects the fact that the City must purchase its treated water from the Region of York. As per the Ontario Municipal Act, the Region of York, as the “upper tier” municipality, is designated as the supplier of water to the “lower tier” municipalities, like the cities of Markham and Vaughan. To supply the needs of the entire Region, the Region of York sources water from the Region of Peel, the City of Toronto, and operate their own system of wells.

While residents in rural areas have access to water, they do not necessarily have access to municipally supplied water

While supply and access to municipal drinking water is not an issue in the urban areas of the City, the municipal water distribution systems do not extend to all parts of the City. Many residents living in the rural areas rely on private well water. At this time, the extension of the municipal water distribution systems into those rural areas is not feasible. As such, rural homeowners are limited in their supply of water by what they can pump from their own private wells, or by what is available for purchase from other sources.

Ontario legislation requires public access to municipal drinking water reports

As noted previously, providing residents with information on their water supply and the operation of their water services is a component of the "Blue Communities" Project. The Safe Drinking Water Act requires that specific reports on a municipality's drinking water system be made available to the public, free of charge. The City already provides information about its supply of water through the Annual and Summary reports that are posted on the City's web site. In addition, water conservation and source water protection are promoted in the various publications and newsletters sent out throughout the year.

International treaties such as those that would recognize water as a human right are the responsibility of the Federal government

Any obligations related to international treaties would be the responsibility of the Federal government level. The provinces and local governments would be subject to those obligations made by the higher level of government. Although the "Blue Communities" Project calls on local municipalities to pass a resolution asking the federal government to recognize water as a human right, it would be more appropriate for concerned individuals to encourage the Federal government to consider such recognition.

"Blue Communities" require local municipalities to ban the sale of bottled water at its facilities and events.

Vaughan passed a ban on the sale of unflavoured water at its facilities in 2009, and called on the Province to implement a deposit return system for single use water bottles. On March 7, 2009, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) issued a resolution urging "all municipalities to phase out the sale and purchase of bottled water at their own facilities where appropriate and where potable water is available and that municipalities be urged to develop awareness campaigns about the positive benefits and quality of municipal water supplies".

Vaughan Council adopted the following recommendation in 2009:

"As the City has received a 100.0% rating in the recent inspection of the City's drinking water systems by the Ministry of the Environment, municipal tap water is to be promoted as a safe and economical means of obtaining drinking water;

ii. Unflavoured bottled water no longer be sold in any City owned community centre upon the expiration of contract RFP07-050 on August 31, 2010;

iii. Upon the opening of the new Civic Centre cafeteria, unflavoured bottled water not be sold in the new Civic Centre;

iv. The Building & Facilities Department continue with their ongoing program of installing refrigerated drinking fountains, complete with water bottle filling spouts, in all municipal buildings to promote the consumption of municipal tap water;

iv. The use of the stand-alone water coolers that are not connected to a municipal water supply, be removed from all municipal buildings no later than June 1, 2009, unless potable water is not available in that particular building; and,

iv. That all City employees be provided with a stainless steel refillable water bottle to promote the consumption of municipal tap water, funded through reduced operating budget expenditures for contracted bottled water supply.

At that same meeting, and as part of the same report, Council also adopted the following resolution:

Whereas the municipalities across Ontario are in the business of supplying safe, tested, and economical drinking water to its residents and businesses; and,

Whereas the cost for bottled water can be 240 – 3,000 times the price of municipal tap water; and,

Whereas approximately 40% of all single use plastic water bottles end up in landfill, and are not recycled through blue box programs; and

Whereas a significant amount of roadside litter is often found to be single use plastic bottles; and

Whereas the fossil fuels used to generate the millions of single use plastic bottles has significant environmental and resource depletion impacts; and

Whereas the Province has already set a precedent by requiring a deposit return system be implemented for glass wine and spirit bottles;

Therefore, be it resolved that

1. The Province of Ontario be formally requested to require all manufacturers and producers of products using single use polyethylene terephthalate (PET), and other types of plastic bottles, to implement a deposit return system for all such products;

2. That upon the implementation of such a deposit return system, the Province amend Regulation 101/94 such that single use (PET), and other types of single use plastic bottles, be specifically identified as a product that is not required to be collected in municipal blue box collection programs in Ontario;

3. That the City Clerk circulate this resolution through the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), seeking their support for such a deposit return system to be implemented.

4. That such a deposit return system be implemented no later than January 1, 2011.

The City of Vaughan's current ban on unflavoured water would need to be augmented to fully meet the specifics of the "Blue Communities" requested bottled water ban

As a result of the above noted Council resolution, Community Services has taken the necessary steps to ban the sale of unflavoured bottled water in all City facilities.

As such, the only action required would be to extend the ban to the sale of unflavoured bottled water at all municipal events. As noted earlier, third party vendors currently sell single use bottled water at some events, and such a ban could be a disincentive for vendors to participate in City events.

In order to phase out the provision of bottled water at any municipal event, infrastructure to supply potable water would need to be put in place beforehand. For example, a mobile water trailer may be required for major outdoor City led events, such as Canada Day celebrations, before a complete ban on bottled water could be implemented. This can either be done through the City purchasing such a unit, or contracting with a third party to supply the necessary unit(s). This is not the current level of service provided by the City for such events, and such an increase in service levels would have financial implications that are not currently budgeted for.

The Canadian Beverage Industry does not support a wide-spread ban on bottled water

The Canadian beverage industry has noted that banning bottled water removes the healthiest option available in beverage containers at recreational facilities, which could result in more unhealthy beverages being consumed by the public. This group also maintains that consumers should be given a choice when it comes to beverages. The industry maintains that 70% of polyethylene terephthalate water bottles are recycled across Canada and are one of the most profitable blue box materials.

From a broader environmental perspective, bottled water production is coming under greater scrutiny because of its impact on watersheds and significant environmental footprint from production and product transport.

Promoting municipal tap water, and having water bottle filling stations available to the public in municipal facilities, is key to the success of a ban on the sale of bottled water at City facilities

The City of Vaughan continues to educate residents and consumers about the value and safety of municipal drinking water. Increasing access to municipal drinking water at City facilities is an important component of encouraging people to select municipal water as a beverage. Accordingly, increasing public access to municipal water at all City facilities should be prioritized. This could involve: installing water bottle filling stations that are available to the public at new and existing facilities as part renovation projects; selling refillable water bottles at various facilities; and, encouraging people to bring their own refillable water bottles to City facilities and events.

“Blue Communities” promote publicly owned and operated water and wastewater infrastructure

As noted earlier, the City of Vaughan is under a two-tier system when dealing with water and wastewater. The City operates the water distribution systems and the wastewater collection systems. The City's water distribution systems and its wastewater collection systems are publicly owned and operated by the municipality.

The Region of York is responsible for the supply of water to the City, as outlined in the Ontario Municipal Act. The Region also provides treatment of the wastewater. These supply and treatment systems are currently publicly owned and operated.

It should be noted that the City only has control over its own infrastructure, and the City is not in a position to impose requirements for any other municipality to retain public ownership of their respective water or wastewater systems.

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020/Strategic Plan

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council and ties into the following Vaughan Vision 20/20 Goals and Objectives:

Goal: Service Excellence
Objective: Lead & Promote Environmental Sustainability

Regional Implications

As the City of Vaughan obtains its drinking water from the Region of York, should Council wish to become a "Blue Community", it would be appropriate to send a copy of the Council minutes to the Regional Clerk.

Conclusion

The City has already taken a number of initiatives with respect to being a "Blue Community". In order to become a registered "Blue Community", the City would need to take additional actions, as outlined in the "Blue Communities" Project Guide, and this report.

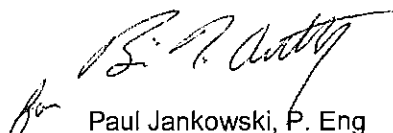
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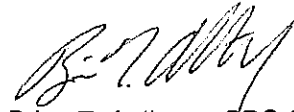
N/A

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Respectfully submitted,


for Paul Jankowski, P. Eng
Commissioner of Engineering and Public Works


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