

TO:	CHAIR AND MEMBERS CIVIC WORKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF MARCH 18, 2019
FROM:	KELLY SCHERR, P.ENG., MBA, FEC MANAGING DIRECTOR, ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENGINEERING SERVICES AND CITY ENGINEER
SUBJECT:	BLUE COMMUNITIES PROGRAM FEASIBILITY

RECOMMENDATION

That on the recommendation of the Managing Director, Environmental and Engineering Services and City Engineer, the following report regarding the Council of Canadians' Blue Communities Project and its application to the City of London **BE RECEIVED** for information.

PREVIOUS REPORTS PERTINENT TO THIS MATTER

- [6th Meeting on the Advisory Committee on the Environment, Wednesday, May 02, 2018, Scheduled Items #2.2](#)

2015-2019 STRATEGIC PLAN

The 2015 – 2019 Strategic Plan identifies these objectives under Building a Sustainable City: 1B – Manage and improve water, wastewater, and storm water infrastructure and services; 3D – Encourage waste reduction and other environmentally friendly behaviours.

BACKGROUND

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to respond to the following resolution by the Advisory Committee on the Environment:

- b) the Civic Administration **BE REQUESTED** to report back to the appropriate committee with respect to the feasibility of implementing the Blue Communities Program in London; it being noted that the Advisory Committee on the Environment received a verbal presentation from J. Picton-Cooper with respect to this matter.

Context

On May 2, 2018, the Advisory Committee on the Environment received a verbal presentation from J. Picton-Cooper, of the London Chapter Council of Canadians, regarding the Blue Communities Project. The Blue Communities Project was developed by the Council of Canadians, the Blue Planet Project, and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) in 2009 to support a “water common’s framework”. The project involves encouraging municipalities to pass resolutions that recognize water as a shared resource for all, so that organizations can treat water as a common good with a shared responsibility for its safekeeping and accessibility.

DISCUSSION

Blue Community Requirements

To become a Blue Community, resolutions must be passed that:

- Resolution 1: Recognize water and sanitation as human rights.
Resolution 2: Ban or phase out the sale of bottled water in municipal facilities and at municipal events.
Resolution 3: Promote publicly financed, owned, and operated water and wastewater services.

The project's focus is to challenge the privatization, commodification, and corporate control of water occurring around the world, including the promotion of generating private funds for infrastructure through public private partnerships (P3s). Blue Community resolutions are not legally binding; however the designation will be lost should actions or policies be carried out in contravention of resolutions.

City of London Feasibility

Many of the City's existing operations and programs align with the Blue Communities Project's resolutions; however, several significant changes to core business processes would be required to fully comply with the resolutions.

Resolution 1: Recognize water and sanitation as human rights.

The Blue Communities initiative promotional literature states that:

"If a municipality has a policy that cuts off a resident's water or wastewater services, this would go against the human rights to water and sanitation resolution and the municipality would not be eligible to become a Blue Community."

The City of London currently uses service disconnections as a last resort when water billing is severely in arrears. Customers are provided with multiple avenues to address arrears. Small arrears (sub \$100) receive standard invoices indicating applicable late charges. Larger arrears are followed with a warning letter, and an invitation to contact London Hydro if needed. Hand delivered notices with warnings of potential disconnects are presented if no action has been taken on the account. To date in 2019, there have been no water disconnections. In 2018, there were ten (10) water disconnections to prevent frozen pipes (not for non-payment of water bills), and there were zero (0) water disconnections in 2017.

The City offers a Customer Assistance Programs for those with difficulty paying their bill. A 25-cent fixed fee that is applied to each monthly bill for all single family residential water customers in London. These funds are collected over the year and applied to the customer assistance program. The funding is collected in a special reserve fund and will be drawn against for:

- Helping low-income Londoners deal with crisis situations on their monthly water bills using existing programs managed and delivered through partnerships with London Hydro, the Salvation Army, and the City;
- Helping low-income Londoners make changes to the fixtures in their homes to help lower their monthly water use. (On average 40% of home water use is from the toilet); and
- Helping London's water customers pay for water and wastewater charges one time that have occurred as a result of a plumbing failure in their homes.

Resolution 2: Ban or phase out the sale of bottled water in municipal facilities and at municipal events.

Resolution 2 requires municipalities to take active steps to reduce the sale of bottled water in municipal facilities and events, with the eventual goal of banning their sale entirely. There is currently a ban on the sale of bottled water in municipal facilities including all solely owned and operated arenas and community centers. Facilities that are operated or occupied by a partner are subject to their own policies. Vendors at

events where the City’s water stations are available (the “Thirstmobile” and “Thirstations”) are encouraged to not sell bottled water as a condition of their use.

The City of London currently has a bottled water ban in place in municipal facilities; however, future work would be required to develop a plan to eventually fully phase out bottled water with third parties.

Resolution 3: Promote publicly financed, owned, and operated water and wastewater services

The City of London water and wastewater systems and the Lake Huron and Elgin Area Primary Water Supply Systems are all publicly financed, owned, and operated. Resolution 3 can be met without changes to existing operations.

Feasibility Review

In order to meet the requirements of the Blue Communities project the City of London will require a major change to its current arrears billing practice. If Council would like to further consider Blue Community status, it is recommended that further work be undertaken to understand the financial implications of the initiative. This would include contacting other Blue Communities and exploring other effective means of collecting arrears.

CONCLUSIONS

The Blue Communities project values generally align with the City of London water service’s approach to providing compassionate services to our community. The City of London’s current practices differ from those proposed by the Blue Communities project; however, our programs do support those with financial challenges albeit in a different way. If Council wants to further explore a Blue Community designation, additional research and changes to our current business processes would be required.

Acknowledgements

This report was prepared with the assistance of Daniel Hsia, P.Eng. Water Demand Manager.

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