

Report to Civic Works Committee

To: Chair and Members
Civic Works Committee

From: Kelly Scherr, P.Eng., MBA, FEC
Managing Director, Environmental & Engineering Services
and City Engineer

Subject: Blue Community Program

Date: March 2, 2021

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Managing Director, Environmental & Engineering Services and City Engineer, the following report regarding the Blue Community Program be received for information.

Executive Summary

Purpose

This report confirms that the objectives and requirements of the Blue Community Program are in close alignment with the existing operation of London's water and wastewater systems. London becoming a Blue Community would bring recognition to our ongoing efforts to be inclusive and good stewards of the environment.

Context

In 2019, members of the Council of Canadians approached the City of London about the possibility of London becoming a "Blue Community". Initially, staff had some uncertainty about the implications of the program and what impact it could have on the City's water and wastewater systems and this was communicated to the Civic Works Committee in a report on March 18, 2019.

Since that time, staff have been communicating with the Blue Communities group to clarify the interpretation of the resolutions and other particulars to better define any impact to the City's water system. Staff have concluded the program is aligned with London's priorities with respect to the operation of its water and wastewater systems.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

This recommendation supports the following 2019-2023 Strategic Plan areas of focus:

- Leading in Public Service:
 - Trusted, open, and accountable in service of our community;
 - Exceptional and valued customer service; and
 - Leader in public service as an employer, a steward of public funds, and an innovator of service.
- Building a Sustainable City:
 - London's infrastructure is built, maintained, and operated to meet the long-term needs of our community

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter

March 18, 2019 – Civic Works Committee – Blue Communities Program Feasibility

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

There are three main resolutions that are required to become a Blue Community. The following subsections describe how these resolutions align with the existing objectives and operations of London's water and wastewater systems.

2.1 Water as a Human Right

The key portion of this resolution is that it requires the City to state that it will not shut off water to customers that have an inability to pay.

When the existing water and wastewater rate structure was created, a 25 cent "Customer Assistance Charge" was established on the bills of all single family residential customers. Part of these funds were directed to the leak allowance program which helps customers pay unusually large bills due to leaks. Another use of these funds is helping the most vulnerable members of our community through the Salvation Army Center of Hope's Housing Stability Bank which pay towards the water bills for customers in significant financial distress. We also offer flexible payment plans to customers that have fallen behind on their bills.

Each of these programs help different customers in different ways. The leak allowance program could help a customer that might normally be able to afford their water bill but would struggle to pay a large one-time bill due to a leak. Payment plans help customers who may have gone through a time of temporary financial stress catch back up. Finally, our finding through the Salvation Army is designed to assist the most vulnerable of our customers and is part of a broader program designed to help prevent people that are currently housed from becoming homeless.

The Blue Communities group has evaluated these programs and has determined that based on these, the City already does not shut off water to residential customers that do not have the ability to pay. This resolution is therefore in alignment with the existing operation of the water and wastewater systems.

2.2 Restricting the Sale of Bottled Water in City Facilities

On this resolution, the City of London was ahead of the curve, passing restrictions on the sale of bottled water in City Facilities more than a decade ago. The Blue Communities group was amenable to adjusting this resolution so Council is simply reaffirming their original restrictions. This resolution is therefore in alignment with the existing policies of the City of London and will not have an effect on the operation of the water and wastewater systems nor civic facilities.

2.3 Publically Owned and Operated Water and Wastewater System

The City of London's water and wastewater systems are currently fully publically owned and operated so this resolution is in alignment with the operation of the water and wastewater systems.

It should be noted that the two regional supply systems that treat and supply London with water are publicly-owned by the member municipalities. The water treatment and primary supply systems use a contracted operator under the oversight of by Regional Water Supply staff at the direction of the two regional water supply boards. Since these systems are separate legal entities from the City of London, London becoming a Blue Community will not have any effect on the existing operation of those systems.

3.0 Financial Impact/Considerations

There is no financial impact from this report

Conclusion

Given the programs and policies already in place, there is close alignment between the

objectives and requirements of the Blue Community Program and the existing operation of London's water and wastewater systems. London becoming a Blue Community would bring recognition to these efforts especially those designed to make our City more inclusive while being good stewards of the environment while not adding additional costs to the operation of the systems.

Prepared by: Aaron Rozentals, GDPA, P.Eng, Division Manager, Water Engineering

Submitted by: Scott Mathers, MPA, P. Eng., Director, Water And Wastewater

Recommended by: Kelly Scherr, P. Eng., MBA, FEC
Managing Director, Environmental and Engineering Services and City Engineer

CC: J. Simon, Daniel Hsia, Lynn Brown (Council of Canadians)