

## MOTION

### 7. Water and Washrooms as a Human Right

At the Council meeting on March 10, 2020, Council referred the following motion to the Standing Committee on Policy and Strategic Priorities meeting on March 11, 2020, in order to hear from speakers.

Moved by: Councillor Boyle

#### WHEREAS

1. Almost 2 billion people around the world do not have access to clean drinking water, 4 billion people face severe water scarcity and 2.5 billion people do not have adequate sanitation;
2. The United Nations' *World Water Development Report* stated that, "3.6 billion people live in areas that are water scarce for at least a month per year," and if we do not take action, it will "increase to as many as 5.7 billion people by 2050.";
3. On July 28, 2010, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 64/292 recognizing the human right to water and sanitation and acknowledged that clean drinking water and sanitation are essential to the realization of all human rights;
4. On September 23, 2010, the United Nations Human Rights Council passed Resolution 16/2 which affirmed that the rights to water and sanitation are part of existing international law and confirms that these rights are legally binding upon States. It also calls upon States to develop appropriate tools and mechanisms to achieve progressively the full realization of human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation;
5. The climate crisis further threatens our water supplies through more frequent droughts and increased water demands;
6. The effects of climate change are already being felt on Vancouver's water supply, including the severe drought of 2015 and the increasing variability of Vancouver's snowpack;
7. The manufacturing, transportation, and disposal of single-use bottled water has serious environmental ramifications, particularly impacting air quality and the climate, consumes unnecessary resources such as oil in the manufacturing of plastic bottles and fuels used in the transportation of

bottled water to the consumer, and creates significant recycling and waste disposal costs;

8. The privatization of drinking water often results in the commodification of fresh water, restricting communities' rights to access drinking water while prioritizing the profits of multinational corporations;
9. The problems associated with the privatization of multinational corporation's access to drinking water was exemplified in 2015 when in the midst of a drought the interest of local communities were pitted against the interests of Nestlé's access to an aquifer outside Hope;
10. Additionally, the cost of single-use bottled water makes it less accessible to low-income residents than public water fountains;
11. Public ownership and operation of drinking water and wastewater treatment systems have been fundamental to access and quality over the past century;
12. On June 29, 2001, the Greater Vancouver Regional District decided against the privatization of the operation of a water filtration plant on the grounds of potential free-trade lawsuits;
13. Tap water in the City of Vancouver is safe, healthy and accessible to residents and visitors, is readily available at most indoor public facilities, and is substantially more sustainable than bottled water;
14. Vancouver has temporary fountains and water trucks which it rents or provides during particularly hot stretches or outdoor events;
15. Vancouver Civic Theatres do not currently have bottle fill services in place, relying on the sale of bottled water, or concession staff filling water bottles which slows down service;
16. On April 7, 2015, in recognition of the 2015 UN World Water Day, the Vancouver School Board passed a motion to phase out the sale of bottled water at VSB schools and facilities, including the introduction of water refilling stations and the sale of reusable water containers.
17. In 2009, the "Blue Communities" Project was developed to respond to the various threats posed by the commodification and privatization of the world's drinking water;

18. In BC, a number of communities have protected their water supplies from privatization and increased water rates, including Nanaimo, Victoria, North Vancouver, Burnaby, Abbotsford, and White Rock;
19. In 2011, the Union of BC Municipalities passed a resolution supporting Blue Communities;
20. To become a Blue Community, a municipality must recognize water as a human right; ban the sales of bottled water in public facilities and at municipal events and commit to promoting publicly financed, owned and operated water and wastewater services;
21. A critical aspect of a human rights approach to water is ensuring safe and accessible access to public washrooms, a particularly important requirement in making a city welcoming for seniors, children, people with disabilities, and people with unstable housing; and
22. The UN World Water Day will be observed on March 22, 2020, the day highlights the importance of freshwater, and advocates for the sustainable management of freshwater resources;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT the City of Vancouver endorses and supports the “Blue Communities” project, and recognizes and affirms that access to water and sanitation services are fundamental human rights.
- B. THAT Council direct staff to prepare a report on the necessary policy and by-law amendments required to align city services with a human rights centric approach to water and sanitation services. Such a report should pay particular attention to:
  - a. Applying a human rights framework to its application of applicable by-laws;
  - b. Providing an update on Council’s 2009 ban on the sale of bottled water in municipal facilities and events, and a plan to phase out the sale of bottled water, while increasing the availability of public water fountains and water bottle filling stations;
  - c. Improving public access to washroom facilities, including advocating for universally accessible washroom facilities in transit hubs and high-foot traffic areas, and improved wayfinding signage and digital mapping; and

- d. Considering relevant safety and accessibility concerns for Vancouver residents most vulnerable to the opioid crisis.
- C. THAT Council direct the Mayor to write to the Federal Government advocating that they enshrine the human right to water and sanitation in federal law, and advocating that they fulfill their responsibility to support municipal infrastructure by investing in a national water and wastewater infrastructure fund that would address the growing need to renew existing water and wastewater infrastructure and build new systems, and further advocating that public infrastructure funding only fund public projects.
- D. THAT Council direct the Mayor to write to the Provincial Government advocating that they enshrine the human right to water and sanitation in provincial law, and advocate that the province stop issuing licenses to extract groundwater for commercial water bottling and/or for bulk water exports.
- E. THAT the City of Vancouver commit to promoting publicly owned, financed and operated water and wastewater services, including opposing privatization in any form of water and wastewater treatment services, including through public-private partnerships or short-term service contracts, and resolve to keep these services publicly financed, owned, operated and managed.

\* \* \* \* \*