

MOTION

13. Water Works By-law Exemptions and/or Viable Exceptions for Notable Decorative City Water Features

At the Council meeting on March 28, 2023, Council referred the following motion to the Standing Committee on Policy and Strategic Priorities meeting on March 29, 2023, in order to hear from speakers, followed by debate and decision.

Moved by: Councillor Meiszner

WHEREAS

1. The Greater Vancouver Water District (GVWD) was created and constituted under provincial statute as the *Greater Vancouver Water District Act*. Its purpose is to supply drinking water to the Metro Vancouver region and it operates under the name “Metro Vancouver”;
2. Metro Vancouver’s *Drinking Water Conservation Plan* (DWCP) is a regional policy developed with member jurisdictions and other stakeholders to manage the use of drinking water during periods of high demand, mostly during late spring to early fall, and during periods of water shortages and emergencies. The DWCP helps to ensure that our collective needs for drinking water are met affordably and sustainably now, and in the future; ⁱ
3. The City of Vancouver has a *Healthy City Strategy*: A long-term vision and integrated plan for the city to become a healthy city for all. At a fundamental level it requires that we work together to build an equitable, sustainable, resilient community where everyone is able to thrive. The ultimate goal of the strategy is healthier people, healthier places, and a healthier planet that enables all of us to enjoy the highest level of health and well-being possible;
4. The City’s Healthy City Strategy is comprised of 13 long-term goals for the well-being of the city and its people, including ambitious targets to be reached by 2025. These goals include: being and feeling safe and included, cultivating connections, active living and getting outside, and creating and maintaining environments and spaces where all people can thrive;
5. Health is about much more than just physical health or treatment in the health care system – it is also about the social determinants that shape health and well-being in the broadest sense and in ways that connect our social, environmental, and economic sustainability;
6. Urban parks are among the places that contribute to the health and well-being of people living in cities. Urban parks allow people to easily access

nature and to move away from the noise and complexity of the city, even if only for temporary moments of calm and respite;

7. The City of Vancouver is blessed with a wealth of parks and green spaces, many of which include water features as a prominent design element. Water features in parks and green spaces not only serve an aesthetic purpose, they also serve to cool the air, contribute to positive mental health outcomes, buffer sound, as well as figuring in a variety of outdoor recreational activities;
8. In recent years, the City's Water Works By-law 4848 (<https://bylaws.vancouver.ca/4848c.PDF>) has mandated that flow-through water features that do not recirculate water – which includes many decorative water fountains in Vancouver parks – must to be turned off as a water conservation measure;
9. The City's Water Works By-law prohibition on non-recirculating water features has resulted in a number of decorative water fountains in Vancouver parks being turned off, notably the fountain on the Bute Street pedestrian walkway which has been the subject of a number of media reports;
10. In recognition of the health, mental health, and social benefits that the Bute Street pedestrian walkway fountain previously supported prior to being shut down, many community members have asked for it to be turned back on due to the many benefits it provides to community members, particularly the seniors home adjacent to the plaza;
11. On the surface, the water conservation objectives of the City's Water Works By-law 4848 and the health and wellness objectives of the City's Healthy City Strategy appear to be in conflict and the situation is leading to negative impacts on liveability and well-being of many people, not the least of which are local seniors whose mobility options may be challenged;
12. In Spring 2022, a Park Board motion entitled "[Iconic Vancouver Park Water Feature Renewals](#)" was brought forward, calling on the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation to provide "an inventory of all potable water fed features across our park system along with the repairs/upgrades needed to ensure they are compliant with City of Vancouver by-laws and remain sustainable in their water use," including a timeline with cost estimates for any repairs and upgrades needed;
13. At the Monday, July 4, 2022, Vancouver Park Board meeting, the "[Iconic Vancouver Park Water Feature Renewals](#)" motion was deferred "until the staff briefing on potable water conservation and the impact on park water features is provided to the Board, likely in the first quarter of 2023.";

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Council direct staff to explore and recommend potential By-law exemptions and/or viable exceptions (temporary or otherwise) for decorative water fountain features in the city deemed to have noteworthy health and wellness value for city residents, in accordance with the objectives of the City's Healthy City Strategy, including the Bute Street pedestrian walkway fountain, until such time as the Park Board can reasonably repair and/or upgrade these water features to be recirculating water features, notwithstanding Metro Vancouver's lowest level Stage 1 water restrictions, and

FURTHER THAT staff be directed to report back with the above noted recommendations for potential By-law exemptions and/or viable exceptions for water fountain features in city parks no later than the end of April 2023, including additional recommendations for balancing the health and wellness benefits of decorative water fountains against regional water conservation objectives during periods of extreme water shortages and emergencies (i.e., Stages 2 to 4).

- B. THAT Council direct staff to request an update from their counterpart staff at the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation on the question of potable water conservation and the impact on decorative water features in Vancouver's parks and green spaces as per the Park Board spring 2022 motion, and then report back to Council at the earliest possible date, either in a memo or as a report back to Council.

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ⁱ There are four water conservation stages outlined in Metro Vancouver's Drinking Water Conservation Plan. Each stage is designed to reduce demand for drinking water through specific water restrictions which become more restrictive with higher stages. Stage 1 reduces demand in summer months, and is automatically in effect on May 1 until October 15. Stages 2 and 3 are activated and deactivated by the GVWD Commissioner, typically during unusually hot and dry conditions to maximize conservation, and Stage 4 is reserved for an emergency to immediately limit water use to essential needs only.