

MEMO / NOTE DE SERVICE



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TO: Chair and Members of Environment Committee

DESTINATAIRE : Président et members du Comité de l'environnement

FROM: John L. Moser, General  
Manager, Planning and Growth  
Management  
and Dixon Weir, General Manager,  
Environment Services Department

Contact :  
Lee Ann Snedden, Manager  
Policy Development and Urban Design  
(613) 580-2424, 25779  
LeeAnn.Snedden@ottawa.ca

EXPÉDITEUR : John L. Moser,  
Directeur général, Services de  
l'urbanisme et gestion de la croissance  
et Dixon Weir, Directeur général,  
Services Environnementaux

Personne ressource :  
Lee Ann Snedden, Gestionnaire  
Élaboration politiques et design urbain  
(613) 580-2424, 25779  
LeeAnn.Snedden@ottawa.ca

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SUBJECT: **Water Roundtable, June 14, 2014**

OBJET : **Table ronde sur l'eau, le 14 juin 2014**

PURPOSE

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a summary of the outcomes from the Water Roundtable (WRT) held on June 14, 2014 and to identify next steps in the development of Phase 2 of the Water Environment Strategy. Participant feedback from the WRT will also inform the Eastern Subwatersheds Stormwater Management Retrofit Study.

## BACKGROUND

In 2010, Council approved the Ottawa River Action Plan (ORAP) which included 17 projects to protect and enhance the Ottawa River. Two of these projects, the development of the Water Environment Strategy and the Eastern Subwatersheds Stormwater Management Retrofit Study, identified consultation with Ottawa's residents as an important requirement. The development of a Water Environment Strategy is a long term strategy to protect and enhance the health of Ottawa's watersheds. The Eastern Subwatersheds Stormwater Management Retrofit Study has the goal of developing a plan to mitigate the impacts of uncontrolled runoff from areas in the east end of the city that have little or no stormwater management.

Early in 2014, Chair of the Environment Committee, Ward 16 Councillor Maria McRae during the Chair's Annual State of the Environment speech called for a Water Roundtable. In June 2014, a one-day Water Roundtable event, hosted by Chair McRae, and Vice Chair Councillor Scott Moffatt, was held with Ottawa residents to explore ideas on how to protect the health of Ottawa's rivers, lakes and streams. Through the Water Roundtable, residents' feedback will be used to inform the development of the above two ORAP initiatives. The purposes of the Water Roundtable event were to:

- 1) Build awareness and understanding of Ottawa's water environment.
- 2) Highlight the City's actions and achievements related to the water environment.
- 3) Share ideas on how to collectively protect the City's natural water assets.

A poster contest was initiated prior to the WRT event to encourage elementary students from all school boards to visually depict their impression of Ottawa's water environment under the theme "Water is Life". The posters illustrated the importance of water as the lifeblood of our city and a resource that we rely on daily. These posters were subsequently displayed at the WRT event.

The Water Roundtable event included a welcome from Mayor Jim Watson and two guests who spoke to participants based on their expertise of Ottawa's water environment and sustainable development: Meredith Brown, the Ottawa Riverkeeper and Jeff Westeinde of Windmill Developments.

Ms. Brown addressed Ottawa's need to engage more citizens in the protection of our rivers. She encouraged participants to be part of the solution and to connect, learn and participate. Her perspective on what a healthy watershed means - Swim-Drink-Fish - resonated with many of the participants. The Ottawa Riverkeeper's goal is to inspire

action and collaboration to achieve a healthy river where every person in our watershed can safely swim, drink and fish in the Ottawa River. Attendees walked away with a clear understanding of Ms. Brown's key message: "Our River – Our Future".

Mr. Westeinde spoke to the importance of considering the environment when undertaking land development, and in particular, ways in which development can be designed in harmony with nature. As case studies, he spoke to his company's experience in building the Dockside Green project in Victoria, B.C. and its current intentions to redevelop the Chaudière Islands on the Ottawa River.

## DISCUSSION

The Water Roundtable provided residents with an opportunity to explore ideas to protect and enhance the health of Ottawa's watersheds. Participants were engaged through the following four conversation streams and in each stream, key themes emerged. The following paragraphs summarise the key themes raised by WRT participants, as well as existing City programs that address these concerns.

### 1) What does a healthy water environment mean to you?

Participants felt a healthy water environment translated to drinking water that is safe, reliable, affordable, accessible and healthy for all - people, animals and plants alike. Across the board, participants echoed the Riverkeeper's message, and referred to Swim-Drink-Fish as the best way to describe their ultimate healthy water environment.

For many participants, a healthy water environment means watersheds that are protected (i.e. lakes, rivers and wetlands) and for others, it is a natural shoreline and natural stormwater management.

### 2) What actions should the City focus on to improve the health of our water environment? If we could do just one thing, what should that be?

Participants felt strongly that if the public is properly educated about environmental impacts, then we as a city will be more likely to have a healthy water environment. More specifically, a greater awareness of where drinking water comes from and the impact of what residents put down their drains will have on our water. Participants felt that to change behavior, the City should do more outreach and consultation to influence social change.

In 2013, the City developed several master plans that identified issues and actions that have some environmental impacts. The following master plans can be accessed

through the City of Ottawa's website: [Infrastructure Master Plan](#), [Transportation Master Plan](#), [Official Plan Review and Update](#), [Ottawa Cycling Plan](#) and [Ottawa Pedestrian Plan](#).

Environmental planning studies are conducted every year and take place on several levels. As noted in [Subwatershed Planning](#) and section 2.4.3 of the [City of Ottawa Official Plan](#) – Watershed and Subwatershed Studies are completed before an environmental management plan is done, providing information on the existing natural features of the watershed or subwatershed study area. As one of the 17 ORAP projects, the [Pinecrest–Westboro Stormwater Management Retrofit Plan](#) was completed in 2011 and identified a Retrofit Plan to improve stormwater management in Pinecrest Creek and the adjacent Westboro area. Currently, the [Eastern Subwatersheds Stormwater Management Retrofit Plan](#) is an ORAP project that is in progress and has been identified as a priority area to address the impacts of uncontrolled stormwater runoff.

Public Outreach and Education is another ORAP project that is ongoing, with an aim to inform the public of the linkages between what they do and the health of the water environment. The City's Outreach Team attended more than 30 events this summer, engaging with residents on a variety of issues including Ottawa's drinking water and the actions that residents can take to protect creeks and rivers.

As an ongoing initiative, the [Rideau Valley Conservation Authority](#) (RVCA) partners with the City of Ottawa on Rideau River flood control. RVCA assists the City's flood control operations by securing provincial funding, assisting in the evaluation of need for the ice removal program, assessing the environmental impact and implementing innovative flood control technology.

Participants were very passionate about their desire to see more green infrastructure and green policies surrounding development. Tax credits were also referred to a number of times as examples of ways to provide incentives to people that install permeable driveways, conserve water and build green homes.

The City has had several programs that focus on public education and financial incentives. For example, from 2005 to 2010, the [Water Efficiency Program](#) provided residents rebates on water efficient items to reduce water consumption. The Toilet Replacement Program, which ended in 2010, provided more than 14,000 rebates to residents of Ottawa. The [Ottawa Rural Clean Water Grants Program](#) is an ongoing grant program, primarily for rural landowners, to provide funding to improve surface

water and groundwater quality. Since it started in 2000, 960 projects have received almost \$1.4 million in grants. At a more local level, the Sunnyside Avenue and Stewart Street Green Street Pilots will demonstrate the role of green infrastructure in reducing stormwater runoff and improving water quality.

Shoreline naturalization and upkeep was a recurring issue whereby many felt that an initiative similar to the City's Cleaning the Capital program could be used to maintain shorelines. For example, "Plant the Capital," was suggested as an initiative where the City could solicit volunteers to assist with vegetation planting along watercourses at a specific time of the year.

Similar to the City's Cleaning the Capital Program, community-led events such as the Great Canadian Shoreline Clean-up or City Stream Watch are events that encourage Ottawa residents to keep creeks and shorelines free of litter.

The [Ottawa Rural Clean Water Grants Program](#) also assists rural landowners who wish to naturalize shorelines on their properties or undertake other projects that protect water quality. Shoreline naturalization projects are also initiatives that Rideau Valley, Mississippi Valley and South Nation Conservation Authorities will undertake collaboratively with communities.

Salt reduction was also mentioned frequently. Many participants felt that the City was going in the right direction on the use of road salt; however, anything that can be done that still protects road safety should be investigated.

The City actively implements best practices for de-icing Ottawa's roadways, sidewalks and parking lots implementing the City's [Salt Management Plan](#), using innovative technology to track salt usage. City staff are certified in the Smart About Salt Program and 96 per cent of the City's salt spreader fleet has pre-wetting capabilities that result in 20 per cent less salt usage.

Participants expressed a desire to reduce the amount of untreated stormwater that enters Ottawa's watercourses. This desire is consistent with the City's current plan to implement stormwater management retrofit plans, including in the Eastern Subwatersheds and Pinecrest Creek/Westboro areas.

Through the ORAP initiatives, the volume of combined sewage overflows to the Ottawa River has been reduced by 80 per cent. Further reductions are expected once the combined sewage storage tunnel is built. In addition, the effluent de-chlorination facility at the R.O. Pickard Environmental Centre (ROPEC) was built and is now operating to

meet discharge requirements to the Ottawa River. This will have a positive impact on flora and fauna downstream of the ROPEC outfall.

In addition, it was suggested that the City provide annual reporting on the “State of the Environment”. This could be achieved through the City’s website, much like the publication of the City’s budget each year.

The 2014 Phase 1 report of the [Water Environment Strategy](#) (WES), available on [Ottawa.ca](#), provides a backgrounder on the issues facing Ottawa’s watersheds and the 4,500 km of streams and waterways within the city. The Phase 1 report is available on the City of Ottawa’s website.

3) How can the community work with the City to protect its water environment and vice versa?

Water quality data is generated by various groups in and around Ottawa, but the results are not always consistent. Participants felt that good consistent, harmonized data that is expressed in plain language is needed to understand the situation and support evidence based decision making. A central repository for all data and reports from all groups that is publicly available and accessible is desirable. Participants suggested developing a partnership between community groups, environmental organizations and the City to engage the community and to avoid duplication of information and initiatives. Ottawa residents also indicated that they would like the City to play a significant role in providing learning opportunities and educational events within schools and communities.

The [Water Environment Protection Program](#) (WEPP) assesses the state of surface waters in the city monitoring 29 creeks, three lakes and six rivers to determine the current state of water quality and to assess changes over time. A series of environmental monitoring activities were conducted in 2010 on the Carp River, Feedmill Creek and Poole Creek. Restoration projects for these areas began in 2013; a significant shoreline restoration project was also done in Fitzroy Harbour Park in 2012. In addition, the City works in partnership with environmental and community groups on environmental projects and educational materials that inform Ottawa residents about healthy habits they can adopt to protect and preserve our water environment.

The City also works with provincial agencies and the Conservation Authorities to strengthen data sharing and coordination, and to support decision-making and reporting. For example, the Conservation Authorities produce subwatershed report

cards that share trends in watershed health. The City also reaches out to schools, educating students about the water environment.

4) What can residents do to improve the quality and manage the quantity of water run-off on their own properties or public property?

The use of rain barrels and water gardens were often referred to throughout the day, but by far the main concern was de-paving asphalt and the use of permeable surfaces.

Other solutions frequently mentioned included:

- Green roofs, green parking lots;
- Gardens that require less water;
- Organic farming;
- Salt alternatives; and
- Tree planting.

Many of the above ideas such as green roofs, permeable pavement, swales and other low impact development measures are contained in the City's [Air Quality and Climate Change Management Plan](#). The Plan, which was approved by Council in 2014, also proposed targets for greenhouse gas emission reduction and outlined the measures the City should undertake to reach these targets.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, participants who attended the Water Roundtable stated that they were pleased with the water environment in Ottawa. All participants expressed a strong desire for the City to report back on what had been heard and to develop an action plan that reflects public interest. Accordingly, a summary of all the feedback from the four conversation streams and what was heard throughout the event is attached to this memorandum. All participants will also receive an electronic copy of the summary notes from the WRT event.

A long-term strategy and workplan for the Water Environment Strategy are being developed and will be brought forward to City Council in 2015. The strategy will include: a strategic framework with long term goals and guiding principles; a 2015-2018 action plan; recommended City investments; and proposed framework to enhance coordination between the City, Conservation Authorities, provincial and federal agencies, and other water environment stakeholders. Education and outreach are also

key components of ORAP and the Water Environment Strategy. The City will continue to review and enhance existing programs that protect and improve the health of Ottawa's watersheds, and consider all new ideas in the development of the Water Environment Strategy Phase 2.

Through the Eastern Subwatersheds Study, stormwater management retrofits will contribute to improved water quality and healthier local creeks. The City will explore ways to address impacts of uncontrolled stormwater runoff and combined sewer overflow into the Ottawa River. A long-term watershed approach, including increasing awareness of and action on, water environment issues at the community level will ensure that the full range of pollutant sources and impacts are addressed.

Several other concerns and suggestions were provided at the WRT event. City staff will review these issues and more information will be provided at a later date. Thank you to all the participants who attended and provided input into the Water Roundtable.

*Original signed by*

John L. Moser, General Manager, Planning and Growth Management

Dixon Weir, General Manager, Environmental Services

CC Lee Ann Snedden, Manager, Policy Development and Urban Design

Tammy Rose, Manager, Drinking Water Services

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Document 1 City of Ottawa Water Roundtable Summary Notes