

General Issues Committee Delegate Submission (Waterfall Enforcement)

Madam Mayor and members of the General Issues Committee, my name is Alex Bonenfant, and I thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.

I am an avid hiker that explores many of Hamilton's natural areas, particularly the waterfalls. I've been exploring them since I was 12, but they really piqued my interest during the lockdowns, as that was one of the only things you could do at the time.

I'm also a member of the Hamilton: The City of Waterfalls Facebook Group, where we share pictures of Hamilton's natural beauty.

Hamilton is arguably the best city geographically in the area, since we are blessed with over 150 waterfalls right on our doorstep.

The bylaw enforcement however is holding these attractions back from the potential they could have.

The previous council approved the bylaw pilot in 2021, and in 2022. It's expected you will look at it in the coming days to decide if it'll be permanent in 2023.

I agree the parking enforcement should continue, but many people myself included have an issue regarding the lack of accessibility for these attractions.

I believe visitors should be able to access the bottom of the falls, particularly Albion and Smokey Hollow, without worrying about a \$75 trespassing ticket.

The current bylaws prohibiting access aren't effective, as people regularly ignore the signs and go off-trail to the bottom anyway. You can do a google/Instagram search of Albion, Chedoke, and other off-limits falls, and you'll see tons of pictures of people down there.

This at the same time punishes responsible hikers, who previously hiked down for decades without issue, but can't anymore due to the new rules. I created a petition in 2021 you may be aware of to bring back access, and as of right now it has 2600 signatures.

I also created a poll in the City of Waterfalls group asking if you prefer viewing waterfalls from the top or the bottom. While 6 people said from the top, 57 preferred viewing from the bottom.

Furthermore the bottom provides the best views, views the viewing platforms simply don't have. Viewing platform views are often blocked by trees, and is much farther from the waterfall, while at the bottom you have an unobstructed view, as well as being able to get up close and intimate with the falls.

Waterfalls are also a natural source of negative ions, which according to many studies have positive psychological effects on mood and stress levels, which can help improve productivity.

Combine these with how 90% of people polled prefer viewing from the bottom, it's no wonder why you still see people trying to get down despite the enforcement.

Global News found the enforcement last year costing \$360,000. This money shouldn't be spent on guards patrolling the waterfall, and some of it should instead fund programs that allow viewers to safely access the falls' base.

Now I'm aware these attractions faced issues in 2016/17, particularly the amount of rope rescues/deaths that occurred at the time. So I know any reopening of access would have to be different compared to what it was like in the past.

I'd normally say building new infrastructure like stairs would be good, however they are very costly and have to go through many studies before shovels get in the ground. With so many waterfalls in Hamilton, the costs would rack up very quickly.

I'm thinking instead, a guided/self guided tour to the bottom every couple of weeks would allow viewers to legally access the bottom, and is much cheaper than building infrastructure. It could be done on days where there's no flash flood chance, and only done in the summer/fall months.

Visitors could pay \$5-10 to be part of the group, and sign a waiver to protect the city's liability. While the price may get some pushback, it's much cheaper than a \$75 ticket, and reduces the cost the city needs to pay for this program.

I'm thinking it could first be piloted where Albion Falls' base is open to the tour, and if the program is successful, expand it to other off-limits falls like Chedoke, or even Tews/Websters if the HCA is on board. As the demand to view these areas from the

base is there, I can imagine people will jump on the opportunity to be a part of these tours.

Unlike in the past where dozens upon dozens were down there at once, the capacity is controlled this time, and the program can ensure visitors have the right equipment to hike these areas, as well as hazards to look out for.

I know from experience you're more likely to need a rope rescue if you're inexperienced and wearing flip-flops, compared to someone who has the experience and knowledge of the area, and wears proper hiking equipment. With proper education and programs, these areas can be safely hiked.

Keeping the tours to once every 2 weeks would also prevent over-tourism, since I'm aware these are environmentally sensitive areas.

We learned from the pandemic that our natural areas are essential for a healthy lifestyle, and our waterfalls are beneficial for relieving stress and our mental health.

If the enforcement program remains unchanged, expect the same result where people keep ignoring signage, and bylaw struggling to keep them out. As the GTA/Hamilton area continue to grow, and blogs further advertise these locations, a permanent closure will be much harder to enforce over time.

I once again thank you for taking the time to hear my concerns. With the right ideas, we can safely improve the access of our waterfalls, and make Hamilton a more liveable city.

Stress levels impact productivity:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7889069/#:~:text=This%20study%20suggested%20there%20is.associated%20with%20lower%20productivity%20scores.>

Negative ions in waterfalls:

<https://switzerlandtravel.swisshikingvacations.com/the-waterfall-effect/>

Bylaw program costing \$360,000 last year:

<https://globalnews.ca/news/8613760/hamilton-waterfalls-bylaw-parking-enforcement-extended/>

Polls I did regarding viewing falls from the top/base (waterfall groups):

 **Alex Bonenfant** created a poll in **Waterfalls of Ontario**.
January 18 at 10:50 AM · 🌐


Do you prefer viewing waterfalls from the top or the base?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Top	8% >	✕
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Base	92% >	✕

Add poll option...

57 Votes 7 comments


 Like  Comment  Send




 **Alex Bonenfant** created a poll in **Hamilton - The City Of Waterfalls**.
February 12, 2022 · 🌐

Do you prefer viewing waterfalls from the top or the base?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Top	10% >	✕
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Base	90% >	✕

Add poll option...

 4 64 Votes 8 comments

 Like  Comment  Send