

Pilon, Janet

Subject: All things Water

From: Viv Saunders

Sent: June 15, 2024 2:19 PM

To: clerk@hamilton.ca

Cc: Beattie, Jeff <Jeff.Beattie@hamilton.ca>

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Dear Honourable Mayor & Council

I'm writing today to request you consider a few tweaks to recently approved changes and for you to consider net impacts to residents when you deliberate on future related issues.

1. Senior's Utility Rebate:

A \$145 'utility' rebate on a low income seniors property tax bill instead of a rebate on their utility bill results in a negative impact to that individual's finances.

I've looked at one such client's situation and a reduction of a claim of \$145 for 'property taxes' will result in a loss of \$186 per year in provincial Trillium benefits (property tax component only).

In other words, it costs the low-income senior \$41 net per year .

Please consider applying the 'utility rebate' to eligible recipients' utility bill and/or issuing non-property tax rebate cheques.

If this is not possible, then Council should reconsider the rebate program since it hurts rather than helps those in need plus results in a loss of revenue to the city / increases property taxes for the rest of us.

In addition, I'm baffled as to why a 'utility' rebate is only available to owners.

There are low-income senior renters who pay rent plus utilities. Why are they excluded from this 'utility' rebate program?

And what about homeowners who rent ADU to low income seniors? Should that group be included?

2. Water Consumption Tiered rates:

I believe that the intent of block rates is to incentivize water consumption for the greater good as well as provide a means for a win-win.

I do know people who conserve water & are making efforts to reduce their monthly expenses but the system doesn't reflect (financial reward) conservation efforts to the degree I would have thought.

I reviewed the billings for one such household recently and over the course of the last 12 months this household consumed 104 m3.

For reference, an average 2 person household consumes 155 m3 per year.

So while this family's usage was 50m3 less than the average 2 person household and 16m3 less than the annual Block 1 consumption rates (10m3 *per month x12*), they paid Block 2 rates for 31m3 in the last 12 months.

I would ask that Council considers:

(a) Aligning Consumption Blocks, which are presently monthly, to daily consumption similar to the Water Fixed charge which is daily & paid based on # of days between readings.

I noted that in 6 of the 12 months of billing, the days between readings exceeded 31 days and only 2 bills were an "actual" month between readings. For your information, this is one month more than the previous 12 month period. The last bill, June 2024 was 35 days (5 weeks) which results in 1 full week's of usage being at the higher rate (200% higher) monthly or annually even though June/July might average out to 10m3 per month.;

For example, Block 1 is 10m3 monthly and could be set at 0.33 daily to ensure equitable charges for all users; or,

c) Replacing "Block" tiered rates with a flat rate system.

If we had a flat rate system, there would no need to implement a change from 'monthly' consumption to daily consumption in order to accommodate the fact that reading dates vary, are random and are inconsistent; and

(b) Implementing an annual rebate program.

One which "thanks" (rewards) those households who at the end of a 12 month period consumed well below the average & make a significant difference on our infrastructure & on the environment; and/or

3. Stormwater Fees: (new system)

I noted that the cost for the Conservation Authorities will be removed from the General Levy and allocated to water utility bills.

I appreciate that this new system will result in a new revenue source now that previously exempt properties (non-profit housing providers, religious organizations etc) will provide a larger pool of contributors towards our water/wastewater/stormwater budgets, however for the same reason outlined above in point #1, please reconsider this particular shift since not all of the operating costs for CAs I believe, is 'water'.

I have no way to calculate if this shift is beneficial or not to low income households but please keep in mind that if a 1% reduction in property taxes (due to \$10M shift) results in 1% increase in utilities bills, the net impact is a greater reduction in provincial Trillium benefits (property tax credits) for lower income households as well as increased costs for properties/facilities/homes exempt from property taxes.

I also noted that there are incentives for certain properties but none for residential properties with less than 7 units who already slow water down and soak it up on their property. Those of us that have been proactive and/or reside on properties where 90+% of the stormwater does **not** flow to a system maintained by the City have no means for credits and/or rebates from what I can see. As an example, my home & most of my neighbours' homes. Majority of stormwater is captured on our land, with very little slowly flowing to Lake Ontario via private properties. Any 'maintenance' costs have been and will continue to be absorbed privately. There is zero cost (no ditches, culverts, storm pipes) to the City for stormwater management on 90% of my land yet there is no program or means to apply for a credit/reduction. There are some unique properties that will not ever be burden on the stormwater infrastructure which I believe should not see an increase in costs; albeit slight.

I would ask that Council consider a reduced rate (not a full exemption) for homes that do not have and never will have a municipal stormwater connection, plus already have backwater valves, disconnected downspouts. and 90%+ water is captured onsite.

Thank you for your consideration of the above items.

Respectfully,

Viv Saunders