




CITY OF HAMILTON
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
Hamilton Water Division

TO:	Mayor and Members General Issues Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	November 6, 2024
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	City of Hamilton Watershed Action Plan (PW24069) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SUBMITTED BY:	Cari Vanderperk Director, Watershed Management Public Works Department
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION

- (a) That the City of Hamilton Watershed Action Plan, attached as Appendix “A” to Report PW24069 be approved as the guiding document for actions under the care and control of the City of Hamilton to improve the health of Hamilton Harbour and surrounding tributaries, and foster sustainable watershed management practices;
- (b) That the Engagement Summary Report, attached as Appendix “B” to Report PW24069, be received; and,
- (c) That the Implementation Strategy for the First Phase of Pending Actions, attached as Appendix “C” to Report PW24069, be received, and that implementation of actions requiring financial resources be referred to the 2025 and future Water, Wastewater, and Stormwater Rate Budget requests, as necessary.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Hamilton Watershed Action Plan (Plan) attached as Appendix “A” to Report PW24069, is an important step in the City of Hamilton’s (City) ongoing efforts to restore and protect our watersheds. The Plan represents the City’s commitment to environmental stewardship, building upon the progress made through the Clean Harbour Program.

The Plan is a framework to guide decisions and actions that protect, restore, and enhance natural resources, supporting healthy and resilient communities. It includes actions that focus on activities within the City's care and control. These actions aim to reduce pollutants like phosphorus and nitrogen from entering our waterbodies, improve stormwater management systems, promote green infrastructure, and foster community engagement in sustainable water management practices.

The Plan outlines the historical condition of Hamilton Harbour, the evolution in design standards, and the current status of the harbour, highlighting the need for concerted efforts to address non-point sources of pollution. It is informed by extensive engagement with internal City departments and external community partners, including Conservation Authorities, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, Indigenous peoples and communities, and the public. An Engagement Summary Report, attached as Appendix "B" to Report PW24069 summarizes all consultation activities that were completed as part of the development of the Plan.

The Plan includes 91 actions, 55 which are already in practice or underway and have established funding sources. The remaining 36 pending actions were prioritized based on a pre-established scoring matrix, developed with partners throughout the engagement process. An implementation strategy, including timelines, will subsequently be developed for each phase of the Plan. The Implementation Strategy for the First Phase of Pending Actions is attached as Appendix "C" to Report PW24069 that addresses 10 prioritized pending actions over the next three years. By implementing these actions, the City aims to improve the health of Hamilton Harbour, enhance natural habitats, and make it a safe and beautiful place of pride for the community.

To initiate all 36 pending actions, an estimated cost of \$40M has been detailed by the City's consultant, with a total of \$7.5M to be requested over the next three Water, Wastewater, and Stormwater Rate Budget cycles to implement the first phase of pending actions. The Project Team will also actively seek funding from higher levels of government including grants from federal and provincial partners. In addition, it is expected that part of the City's stormwater fee, starting in April 2026, will eventually act as the sustainable, fair, and equitable funding source for the projects identified in the Plan.

Staff from the Watershed Management section of the Public Works Department will oversee the administrative coordination of the Plan. This will include allocation of project funds, reporting on the progress of actions through coordination between City departments and reporting back to the General Issues Committee on a regular basis.

Alternatives for Consideration – See Page 7

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: Financial implications for the first phase of pending actions within the Plan are outlined in Appendix “C” to Report PW24069. A request for \$2.5M, under Project ID 5182368678, has been included in the 2025 Water, Wastewater, and Stormwater Rate Budget, with a total of \$7.5M to be requested over the next three budget cycles.

Staffing: There are no staffing implications with the recommendations of this report for 2025, but additional staffing resources may be required as prioritized actions are developed. Potential requests for additional staffing will come through future recommendation reports.

Legal: N/A

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The City has been a participant in the Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan since its inception in 1985 and has implemented many projects that contribute to the Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan objective: the formal delisting of Hamilton Harbour as a Canadian Area of Concern.

For many years, investments have been made by the City into reducing point-source pollution (pollution that comes from a single place, such as the effluent from a wastewater treatment plant) from entering into Hamilton Harbour through the Clean Harbour Program. Now for the first time in over 100 years, the Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan has indicated that the main source of pollution in the harbour is from watershed runoff. Therefore, the City’s Clean Harbour Program will expand by identifying and guiding actions to address non-point-source pollution (pollution that comes from many places rather than a discrete source and is harder to identify) and will focus on activities that are within the care and control of the City.

On November 27, 2019, and December 11, 2019, Council amended Item 8 of the November 20, 2019, General Issues Committee Report 19-024 which outlined items related to the combined sewage discharge into Chedoke Creek as a result of the Main/King Combined Sewer Overflow tank gate failures. Motion item (m) detailed that the City re-commit to the water quality objectives of the Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan. To support reaching these objectives, staff returned to a set of recommendations that were developed in 2016 through a collaborative Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan process. The recommendations that were assigned to the City were used as a starting point for actions to develop the Plan. Engagement for the Plan began in 2022 when the City assembled a Liaison Committee consisting of partners from local organizations, internal City staff and all four

Conservation Authorities, to develop the Plan based on recommendations from previous reports, studies and working groups. Further consultation with additional internal City departments and external community partners, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and Indigenous peoples and communities, also identified new ideas and concepts for City specific non-point source watershed solutions to ensure the actions in the Plan have the greatest influence on improving watershed and harbour conditions.

The Plan is a long-term strategy to support the recovery of watersheds within the City and Hamilton Harbour. The completion of the proposed actions may take time to cause noticeable changes within the watersheds, as the environment is very complex and will need time to respond and improve. There has been over 150 years of human impact on our local watersheds and Hamilton Harbour, but with support from our partners and the implementation of the Plan, we will start to see improvement for the better.

The focus of the Plan fits directly within the 2022-2026 City Council priorities where Priority 1: Sustainable Economic and Ecological Development details an outcome (#4) where City green space and waterways are protected. The listed measures of success for this outcome are all captured within the Plan, including the increase in tree canopy coverage, creating an inventory of City natural assets, and the acceleration of the City's water strategy and delisting of Hamilton Harbour as an International Joint Commission Area of Concern.

Hamilton Harbour represents one of the largest natural features in the community that should be safe and accessible to all residents. Significant investments have been made by the City in recent years to enhance the City's harbourfront. Addressing non-point pollution watershed issues will further improve the status of health, safety, and image within the City and will help bring more residents and visitors back to the water. While benefits to recreation and habitat are drivers for continued efforts, there is a keen interest in successfully contributing to the formal delisting process that identifies Hamilton Harbour as a Canadian Area of Concern.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

The development of the Plan is not associated with any policy or legislative requirements. As implementation of actions from the Plan are initiated, there may be a review of internal operational policies across many City departments. Any change to operational policies associated with implementation of actions will be communicated to internal staff and, if required, through Communication Updates or Reports to Council.

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

Partner and internal City staff engagement for the Plan began in 2022 when the City assembled a Liaison Committee, to develop the Plan based on recommendations from previous reports, studies and working groups. The Liaison Committee identified City specific non-point source actions that would have the greatest influence on improving watershed and harbour conditions. The resulting 36 pending actions were prioritized with a developed scoring matrix, based on a United States Environmental Protection Agency document called Prioritizing Wastewater and Stormwater Projects Using Stakeholder Input. The resulting scoring matrix evaluated the pending actions against three main criteria: environmental, economic, and social.

Following the General Issues Committee on June 28, 2023 (Report PW19008(u)), staff retained the consultation services of AECOM Canada Ltd. (the Consultant), to review and provide estimated cost analysis of the proposed actions of the Plan, complete a gap assessment, and to support ongoing partner and public engagement. A Communication Update was provided to the Mayor and Members of City Council on April 15, 2024 (HW.24.03), outlining the planned consultation strategy.

The City's Communications and Strategic Initiatives team supported the Plan with a communications strategy to ensure the public was kept informed. The Engage Hamilton platform was used to solicit public feedback. In addition to using this platform, a webpage, under the Clean Harbour Program, was also created to support ongoing communications. The webpage included a link to an ArcGIS story map to visually describe the current state of each watershed and how the actions from the Plan aim to address issues identified within those watersheds. To learn more please visit: www.hamilton.ca/watershedactionplan. In addition to the webpage content, two virtual public meetings, four in-person pop-up booths, and a community survey were also conducted to inform the community, gather feedback, and ensure a wide range of perspectives were incorporated into the Plan.

A detailed Engagement Summary Report for the Plan is provided as Appendix "B" to Report PW24069. The Engagement Summary Report details the extensive engagement with internal City departments and external community partners, including Conservation Authorities, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, Indigenous peoples and communities, and the public. Staff from the Biodiversity Action Plan and the Climate Action Strategy were also consulted to ensure that there were no overlapping efforts or resource requests between the respective action plans. This collaborative approach helps to support the adoption of the Plan and strengthen partnerships, to ensure the long-term health of our watersheds.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

In consultation with the Liaison Committee, staff have identified next steps for the City to resource and implement the 36 pending actions under the Plan.

To ensure there is shared knowledge and co-ordination between all City departments involved, staff from the Watershed Management Section of the Public Works Department will create a Steering Committee. The members of the Steering Committee will include cross-departmental senior leadership staff that can provide supervision, remove barriers, and hold their areas accountable for the implementation of their respective actions for reporting. The Liaison Committee will also remain as a technical working group to review any Plan changes, and to provide a balance of perspectives, knowledge, and expertise. No additional resources are required to facilitate the Steering or Liaison Committees. The Implementation Strategy for the First Phase of Pending Actions, to be undertaken by various City departments, are outlined in Appendix “C” to Report PW24069. Staff from the respective City departments will collaborate and work to implement their actions within the Plan.

To initiate all 36 pending actions, an estimated cost of \$40M has been detailed by the Consultant. In some cases, this will cover the entire cost to implement a pending action, and in others it details the costs for investigative and study work required to inform detailed designs for large capital works. In order to initiate the first phase of pending actions identified in Appendix “C” to Report PW24069, a total of \$7.5M will be requested over the next three budget cycles. A request for \$2.5M has been included in the proposed 2025 Water, Wastewater, and Stormwater Rate Budget to begin the implementation of the first phase of pending actions.

The Project Team will also actively seek funding from higher levels of government including grants from federal and provincial partners, to support resourcing and expanding the City’s capacity to complete all recommended pending actions. In addition, it is expected that part of the City’s stormwater fee, starting in April 2026, will eventually act as the sustainable, fair, and equitable funding source for the projects identified in the Plan. Future resources required to implement, maintain, and report on projects and progress will be identified, as needed.

Just as nature is dynamic, the need to address change must also be dynamic. Opportunities or needs for additional work programs that are not outlined in the Plan may also arise, in response to certain pressures like development, regulatory, policy or climate changes. Reporting on the progress of actions to the General Issues Committee will be coordinated by the Watershed Management Section of the Public Works Department through the support of regular action lead touchpoints.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

Prioritize additional actions to be addressed immediately under the Plan.
This alternative is not recommended as the work programs to implement the actions have been carefully considered by each City department, and additional actions may result in delays to the implementation of committed actions, or other work programs.

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: Further financial implications for prioritized actions of the Plan would result. Additional funding for the newly added projects will need to be referred to the 2025 and future Water, Wastewater, and Stormwater Rate Budgets under Project ID 5182368678. The full impact to the 2025 and future Water, Wastewater, and Stormwater Rate Budget cycles will be dependent on the quantity and scope of the newly added actions.

Staffing: Staffing implications for prioritized actions of the Plan may result, with the full impact dependent on the quantity and scope of the newly added actions.

Legal: N/A

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

- Appendix “A” to Report PW24069 – City of Hamilton Watershed Action Plan (2024)
- Appendix “B” to Report PW24069 – Engagement Summary Report
- Appendix “C” to Report PW24069 – Implementation Strategy for the First Phase of Pending Actions