Staff Report

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Report To: City Council

Report From: Jason Hoffman, Manager of Corporate Services

Meeting Date: July 27, 2026

Report Code: CR-26-075

Subject: Update on the Transition to Outdoor Public Water Stations

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CR-26-075 respecting an update on the transition to outdoor public water stations, City Council receives the report for information purposes.

Highlights:

- The City currently maintains a network of 22 water bottle refilling and fountain stations located throughout recreational and community facilities, parks and open spaces, and municipal and institutional locations.
- Maintaining outdoor infrastructure requires proactive seasonal winterization for seven existing units, which necessitates 28 hours of staff time per annual cycle.
- The City is transitioning water bottle refilling and fountain stations to visible, outdoor public-facing locations as directed by Council.
- While historical allocations have been $10,000 per unit, total costs for future installations may vary based on site-specific infrastructure requirements, which will be managed through the existing capital reserve to ensure fiscal responsibility.

Vision 2050 - Strategic Plan Alignment:

Strategic Plan Priority: City Building – Enhancing urban development, planning and place-making processes to create places and spaces that contribute to complete communities for existing residents, future residents and tourists.

Previous Report/Authority:

Resolution S-260623-011

"THAT in consideration of the presentation provided on June 23, 2026 from the Director of Corporate Services, Manager of Corporate Services, and Capital Asset and Risk Management Coordinator respecting the 2027-2031 Multi-Year Capital Plan, City Council directs staff to bring forward a report on July 27, 2026 respecting an update on a previous Council resolution to transition the water bottle refilling station program to outdoor public water bottle refilling and water fountain stations."

Background:

The water bottle refilling station program was originally established as a five-year commitment spanning 2017 to 2021. Following an assessment of the program's progress in early 2023, Council identified a need to refocus the initiative on high-traffic, public-facing areas to better serve residents and tourists.

During the February 7, 2023, meeting, Council expressed concerns regarding the installation of stations in locations with restricted public access, such as administrative or support facilities. Consequently, Council mandated a strategic shift in the program, directing staff to transition toward the installation of outdoor, public-facing, "combo" units that feature both a water bottle refilling station and a traditional drinking fountain.

The City currently maintains a network of 22 water bottle refilling and fountain stations. To support the transition to the outdoor program, staff continue to evaluate and identify optimal, high-traffic locations for these assets.

The current inventory is distributed across the following municipal locations:

- **Recreational and Community Facilities:** Harry Lumley Bayshore Community Centre (3), the Julie McArthur Regional Recreation Centre (1), Kiwanis Soccer Complex (1), and the Rail Museum (1).
- **Parks and Public Spaces:** Harrison Park (Inn and workshop), Kelso Beach at Nawash Park (1), Duncan McLellan Park washrooms (2), Kinsmen Ball Park washroom (1), and the outdoor fountain at

the Bicycle Parkette – located across from City Hall on 8th Street East (1).

- **Municipal and Institutional:** City Hall (3), Library (2), Tom Thomson Art Gallery (1), Public Works administration building (1), and the Water Treatment Plant (1).

As of June 2025, staff have continued to work toward identifying suitable locations and final designs that meet the outdoor requirements mandated by Council. This report provides the necessary update on this transition, ensuring the program remains aligned with the City's commitment to providing accessible, public-facing water infrastructure.

Analysis:

The transition to "combo" units, which integrate both a bottle refill and a traditional drinking fountain, remains the most effective strategy to fulfill Council's 2023 mandate for inclusive, public-facing water access. Unlike indoor-only installations, these durable, weather-resistant units are specifically designed for outdoor conditions, ensuring they can serve high-traffic areas frequented by both residents and tourists.

The transition of the water bottle refilling station program is an ongoing initiative. At this stage, staff have not finalized specific sites for new installations, nor are there immediate plans for the procurement of additional stations beyond the existing program framework. This deliberate approach allows staff to conduct the necessary due diligence, balancing public demand with the technical requirements for outdoor infrastructure. Identifying optimal locations requires detailed planning regarding site-specific plumbing, potential electrical service, and concrete pad preparation to ensure the longevity of the assets.

While the program has historically allocated approximately $10,000 per unit for station procurement, this figure does not capture the full cost of implementation for advanced, outdoor tower-style stations. Total project costs for these units, which feature a bottle filler, drinking fountain, and potentially dog bowl options, may significantly exceed this historical allotment due to scope along with substantial expenses associated with necessary site servicing, such as extending water lines and ensuring proper site preparation. Furthermore, the transition to outdoor units requires dedicated seasonal maintenance. Currently, seven units must be removed from their mountings and have their water lines winterized to prevent freeze damage. This lifecycle management introduces recurring operational needs, as each unit requires approximately four hours of staff time to winterize, remove, store in a heated facility, re-install, and prepare for spring activation, totaling 28 hours of staff time per seasonal cycle. Despite these operational requirements and the potential for higher-than-anticipated installation costs, financial stewardship remains a priority; per Council's previous direction, unspent capital remains within the designated reserve to support the multi-year implementation of these stations, ensuring that funding is available as suitable locations are confirmed.

This approach allows for the measured deployment of units as per the established capital planning framework, ensuring that the program is sustainable and responsive to Council's vision for public space enhancement.

Resource Alignment:

Financial Resources

The water bottle refilling station program is supported by established capital reserves, ensuring a sustainable funding source for the multi-year transition. While individual advanced tower-style combo units have an approximate capital cost of $10,000 per unit, total project expenditures may vary significantly depending on site-specific requirements. These total costs include initial procurement, as well as necessary infrastructure investment for plumbing extensions, electrical service, and site preparation. Ongoing operational expenses, including seasonal maintenance and potential contingencies, are managed within the department's existing budget framework to ensure long-term financial sustainability.

Human Resources

The delivery of this program requires dedicated staff capacity to manage the lifecycle of these outdoor assets. Currently, the transition and seasonal maintenance program, which includes winterization, removal, climate-controlled storage, re-installation, and spring preparation, requires 28 hours of total staff time per annual cycle for the seven existing outdoor units. As the program expands with new installations, staff will continue to monitor the workload to ensure that internal capacity remains sufficient to meet these maintenance demands without requiring additional permanent hiring or significant reallocation of resources.

Time and Scheduling

The transition schedule is determined by the capital planning framework and the completion of site-specific assessments. Milestones are prioritized based on staff capacity, capital resource availability, and the strategic goal of enhancing public access in high-traffic areas. This project aligns with the City's annual workplan, and timelines are adjusted as needed to accommodate other organizational priorities, ensuring that the transition remains responsive to Council’s directives.

Technology and Infrastructure

Existing municipal infrastructure, particularly at sites with proximity to existing water and sewer lines, will be leveraged wherever possible to reduce installation complexity. Future installations will continue to require assessment of site-specific utility availability. No additional specialized software or external platform dependencies are currently required to manage the infrastructure of these units.

Climate and Environmental Impacts:

There are no anticipated climate or environmental impacts.

Communication and Engagement:

This report has been posted to the City’s website with the agenda in advance of the meeting.

Report Developed in Consultation With:

Director of Corporate Services

Attachments:

None.

Reviewed by:
Kate Allan, Director of Corporate Services

Submission approved by:
Tim Simmonds, City Manager

For more information on this report, please contact Jason Hoffman, Manager of Corporate Services at jhoffman@owensound.ca or 519-376-4440 ext. 1240.