

Re. Outdoor Potable Water Usage Amendment Bylaw

To: Mayor and council

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Firstly, thank you for the opportunity to briefly speak at the beginning of yesterday's council meeting, March 19, 2024.

There really is not much time and it would be much better to be able to comment on the actual presentation and to councillors questions when the topic is on the table and an opportunity to clarify and respond accordingly.

I am following up with this letter to express the disappointment and frustration. The bylaw was approved as presented without having the opportunity to be properly heard with valid concerns. The proposed changes were emailed to only some of the main stakeholders with very short notice to even prepare a proper response or a presentation to council.

The RMOW missed the opportunity to consult and collaborate with industry and failed to access the combined experience and knowledge of those who work in the horticulture industry hands-on. There was also a misrepresentation during the presentation that those of us who had responded to RMOW staff with concerns, had 'just asked for more water'. This is simply not true.

We are asking for more flexible TIMES to water, not more water as in VOLUME per se.

To provide some context:

The new amended bylaw implements changes to Outdoor Potable Water Conservation Stages, in short, reducing watering to basically every other day depending on the neighbourhood during Stage 2 May1 – Oct 31.

This is all quite acceptable for most established landscapes. To clarify, we are NOT AGAINST water conservation or a bylaw.

We all understand that water is a valuable resource, and hot, dry summers increase and provide challenges in many ways. We work in it daily and truly understand and see the reality. We also understand horticulture. And we want to help to do this right but were not allowed to comment in detail or were not heard.

Some specific concerns (additionally to not being consulted) are related to timing as well as New Landscaping and Repairs and Watering Hanging Baskets/ Containers.

Whistler typically sees landscaping start in May 1 maybe standard in some jurisdictions but Whistler is just getting started then. This is a crucial time to start the gardens right, get moisture in the ground (and/or keep it there), give plants a good start for the hot and dry summers to come. There is no real water shortage quite yet at that time and we benefit from run-off from the mountains. We all agree that there may be less water running off with less snowpack and we are conscious of that.

If we truly want to conserve water, we must use it as efficiently as possible where we need it for the biggest impact:

We can only do repairs and plant new landscapes during most of our short growing season. After spring cleaning, this falls right into the May1-Oct 31 window.

Repairs and New landscapes simply cannot be done with watering every other day. We have to repair and re-seed or re-sod damaged lawns mostly along roadsides where often (actually RMOW) snowplows have caused damage. This is not possible within the new bylaw. Yes, permits are available, but require a lot of permits for many small repairs.

Many new plantings are in containers and hanging baskets. These are allowed with Hand/Drip Irrigation. These are also mainly falling into the May1-Oct 31 period and require watering to keep plants and soil (!) healthy. Many containers are used for planting edibles that supplement expensive fruit and vegetable purchases.

Those containers and hanging baskets are in many cases connected to an in-ground automatic irrigation system. These are designed to water efficiently at times ideal for watering. They can be controlled, inspected, and are used in 80-90% of Whistler's landscapes. If professionally installed and maintained, those systems can be equipped with rain sensors, sprinkler heads that use less water (proven save up to 50% of normal water use) and valves to hold water in the system (rather than draining out after use). Those come at a cost, but industry is recommending and implementing them. - **Why not allow exemptions with proven water reduction measures in place?! That's a real incentive to actually CONSERVE water.

Watering containers and hanging baskets by hand often is done during daytime hours with hoses that are often leaking. If not watered regularly enough, water will also run right through the now dry soil and truly WASTE water. If watered regularly by professional automatic systems, they can be controlled and watered with very small amounts as needed.

We ask that the bylaw recognizes this and allows exemptions for Repairs and New Installation as well as Hanging baskets/ Containers to be watered AS NEEDED – with automatic irrigation system in place.** Ideally, we would also consider Stage 2 June-October and request better communication. We may have to help review how this can be done while reducing the rest of the (established) garden to be watered less. Some systems allow to run different zones at different times. A full renovation to separate watering of baskets and containers would be like re-wiring or re-plumbing a house and may not be feasible, but we must try our best to keep plants and soils healthy all while keeping enough water for everyone.

There is another factor to this that addresses the ever-more-present FireSmart discussion. Dry plants will pose a fire danger. Dry soil and plants will NOT help cool our environment and INCREASE the risk for fire. Again, most established landscapes that have been installed properly will be fine. Poor or not sufficient soil, landscapes exposed to extreme sun or wind e.g. dry out faster, but most will survive with watering every other day. Containers and baskets, however, will dry out and new landscapes/ repairs will not establish properly. We have seen a container fire start last year when a cigarette butt was disposed into dry soil and plants behind a restaurant in Pemberton that was a scary reminder to keep things healthy (= watered).

There cannot be fearmongering that watering your garden is a bad thing! **Healthy plants HELP us** with fire danger. They HELP us keep our environment cooler and they keep moisture in the air. Plants provide oxygen we need and filter the air (think of the air quality during fire season). We NEED them. They HELP with Climate Change. Soils and plants sequester carbon more than we think, but they can only do that if they are HEALTHY = WATERED.

We all want to be safe if a (wild) fire occurs. We all need drinking water. We also are ALL affected by the environment that surrounds us. We need to work on this together. We cannot single out plants and landscapes. We need to look at everyone to conserve water so we can ALL have healthy plants with as little amount of water as needed.

Just please talk to us and listen. Let us HELP to make it work.

Ten-thousands of dollars worth of investment will be lost if amendments are not made. We simply cannot afford a person hand-watering in most cases. As laid out earlier it also does not make sense = can waste more. It simply can't be applied often enough to keep soil moist = waste water that runs through when soil gets too dry.

Plant choices and mulch applied at the right time help as well. We have many more beneficial horticultural practices that are suggested and applied already. Let's support this, not make it harder. New plantings and repairs, several organic treatments for pests and diseases need some water. We can apply this correctly only if allowed and if understood.

There is a lot more to it and Horticulture deals with Nature which is complex. We are here to inform and help so we can truly save and conserve water. The current version of the new bylaw, I'm afraid, does not capture all of that and will not avoid waste of water.

We need to do better! Together. As a community and for our community. Ask us!

On behalf of the Horticulture Industry and Whistler's environment,
Yours concerned,

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