



WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY REPORT

Information ☐	Recommendation X	Decision Request ☐	Councillor Activity ☐
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To: Mayor Zebian and Members of Council

Submitted by:

Date: December 2, 2025

Subject: Emergency Water Relief During Droughts Policy Recommendation Report

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Nova Scotia Municipal Government Act, Section 23 authorizes Council to make policies for municipal purposes.

RECOMMENDATION or DECISION REQUEST

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE RECOMMENDS COUNCIL ADOPT THE EMERGENCY WATER RELIEF DURING DROUGHTS POLICY RCOGE-004.00 SUBSTANTIALLY THE SAME AS PRESENTED AT THE DECEMBER 2, 2025 COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING.

BACKGROUND

Property ☒	Public Opinion ☒	Environment ☒	Social ☒	Economic ☒	Councillor Activity ☐
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In 2025, Nova Scotia experienced an extreme drought affecting the entire province, placing significant stress on water resources, including both municipal supplies and private wells. Residents who relied on drilled or dug wells were particularly vulnerable, with many households facing critical water shortages or, in some cases, completely dry wells.

West Hants was not immune to these impacts and staff took immediate steps to address the water shortage and assist those affected by the severe drought. This included monitoring watershed levels, providing emergency water distribution where possible, and communicating with residents about conservation measures.

DISCUSSION

On August 17, 2025, the Windsor Hants Regional Municipality (WHRM) initiated the Free Potable Water Program to support residents and households experiencing dry wells as a result of the 2025 drought. The program was coordinated and funded under the Department of Emergency Management (DEM) as part of the Municipality's emergency response efforts.

To ensure accountability and transparency, participating partners were required to submit biweekly reports and reimbursement requests. These reports documented water distribution and included receipts for all water purchases made under the program.

Initial uptake of the program was modest but increased rapidly as drought conditions worsened and awareness spread. At the outset, WHRM utilized existing summer staff to distribute bottled water throughout rural areas of the Municipality, including Vaughan, Brooklyn, and Summerville, as well as from the Municipal Office.

When the summer staff completed their work terms, the program transitioned to a collaborative model, with municipal staff delivering large quantities of water to local Volunteer Fire Departments and Fire Auxiliaries, who played a crucial role in maintaining the distribution network and ensuring residents' access to clean water.

By the first week of November, the program evolved into a voucher-only system, allowing residents to collect vouchers at 76 Morison Drive and redeem them for 4-litre bottled water at Sobeys in Windsor. Sobeys was selected as the primary retail partner due to their capacity to acquire and store the large quantities of water required to support rural households reliant on wells.

This transition was an important step in maintaining program sustainability. As WHRM's internal resources became limited and were redirected to other municipal projects, and as storage facilities such as the Couch House and Salt Dome were repurposed for winter material and salt storage, the voucher system ensured that service to residents continued without interruption.

Many individuals, volunteers, and organizations contributed to making the 2025 drought response efforts a success, but it quickly became apparent that challenges and limited resources created barriers for some residents. While staff were able to manage response efforts during the drought, the severity of the situation highlighted the need for a formalized approach to ensure residents have access to safe and sufficient water during emergencies.

It became evident that without a structured policy, response efforts could be delayed, inconsistent, or inequitable. The Municipality recognized that an Emergency Water Relief Policy would provide clear guidelines for activation, eligibility, and distribution of assistance, enabling a coordinated, timely, and transparent response in future drought events.

Additionally, the policy promotes public awareness, encourages responsible water use, and strengthens municipal preparedness for extreme weather events, which are expected to become more frequent due to climate change.

The policy is designed to ensure residents dependent on wells have access to safe and sufficient water during drought emergencies, establish clear eligibility criteria, including prioritization of primary residences and verification of residency and define roles and responsibilities for municipal staff, the Department of Emergency Management (DEM), and partner organizations.

NEXT STEPS

Should Council support the adoption of this policy, municipal staff will formalize the Emergency Water Relief Policy and establish protocols and partnerships with community vendors. The goal is to ensure that, in the event of a future drought or water emergency, vendors will be willing to partner with the Municipality and accept vouchers for bottled water, ensuring residents continue to have reliable access to potable water in all areas across the region.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this recommendation, as the policy would only be activated under the guidelines of the Department of Emergency Management (DEM). Any costs associated with providing bottled water or other forms of assistance would be reimbursed back to the municipality in accordance with DEM guidelines.

ALTERNATIVES

Option 1 – Provide additional direction to staff to enhance the policy and report back with an updated policy reflecting the directed amendments.

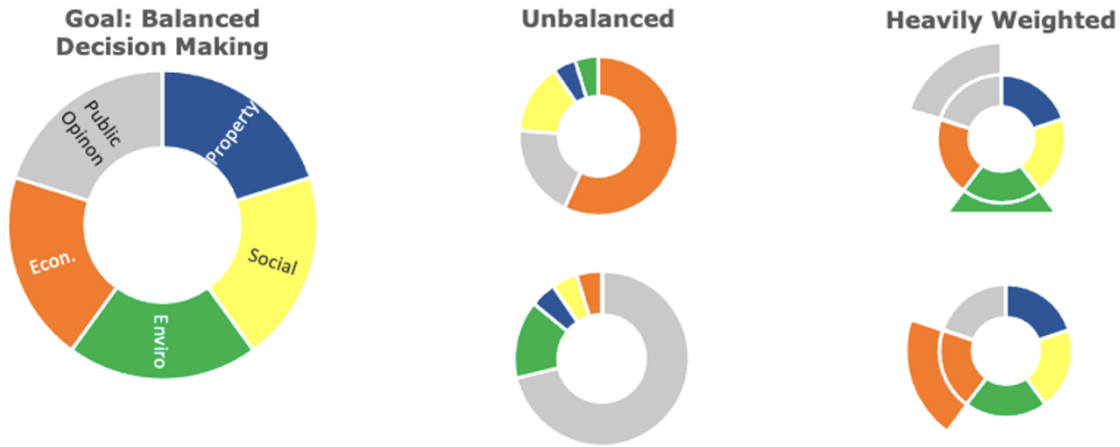
Option 2 - Continue Ad Hoc Emergency Response. The Municipality would respond to future droughts on a case-by-case basis, similar to 2025.

ATTACHMENTS

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CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER REVIEW

Council has been provided with a reference taken from the Meeting and Committee Procedural Policy , Appendix C “Decision Making by Council and Committee of the Whole” as a reminder of the principles highlighted for good decision making.



(For use if report is from a Councillor. CAO to provide additional comments on background, department/staff responsible and workload, budget, options, preferred strategy. State “Not Applicable” if report is from staff which already incorporates CAO review.)

Report Prepared by: _____

Report Reviewed by: _____

Report Approved by: _____



1.0 PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish clear guidelines for providing emergency water relief to West Hants Regional Municipality residents experiencing dry wells due to severe or prolonged drought conditions. The policy aims to ensure equitable access to potable water for essential needs, protect public health, and promote responsible water use during times of water scarcity.

2.0 POLICY STATEMENT

The West Hants Regional Municipality is committed to ensuring residents have access to safe and sufficient water during drought emergencies. When drought conditions reach critical levels, and under the guidance of the Department of Emergency Management (DEM), the CAO or designate will formally activate this policy, authorizing the provision of emergency water relief in coordination with the Public Works Department and other relevant agencies.

Upon activation, the municipality will implement emergency measures to supply water for essential needs while encouraging conservation and responsible water use.

3.0 SCOPE

This policy applies to:

- All residents, property owners, and tenants within the West Hants Regional Municipality boundaries who solely rely on drilled or dug wells as their primary source of water.
- Municipal operations, including water utility services and emergency response efforts.
- Partner organizations or contractors engaged in water distribution or drought response activities.

This policy shall take effect only when the Department of Emergency Management (DEM) officially activates in response to drought conditions or a declared water emergency, and in accordance with the guidelines established by the Department of Emergency Management.

4.0 DEFINITIONS

CAO means the Chief Administrative Officer of the West Hants Regional Municipality, or their designate;

Drought means a prolonged period of below-average precipitation resulting in water shortages that impact municipal water supplies, private wells, or agricultural operations.

Emergency Water Relief means the temporary provision of potable water to individuals, households, or communities experiencing critical shortages.



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Activation means the formal process by which the Department of Emergency Management activates to provide water relief during an officially recognized drought event.

5.0 ELIGIBILITY

Applicants must:

- A local or regional drought emergency has been declared by the municipality, province, or DEM.
- Residents are required to provide proof of residency in accordance with the guidelines established by the Department of Emergency Management.
- Be a resident of the West Hants Regional Municipality to qualify for support.
- Only a resident's primary residence is eligible to qualify for emergency water relief support.
- A household's private well or cistern has run dry and no alternative safe water source is available.

6.0 FORMS OF ASSISTANCE

The Municipality may provide vouchers or coupons redeemable at local stores, allowing residents to acquire potable water from local retailers, in accordance with the guidelines established by the Department of Emergency Management.

7.0 PROGRAM TERMINATION

The CAO has discretion to terminate a period of water support based on current water conditions, forecasts and program support uptake.

Notice to Council to close a program support will be provided at least 2 weeks before termination of the support.

Notice to the public to close a program support will be provided at least 1 week before termination of the support.

I, (Municipal Clerk Name), Municipal Clerk of the West Hants Regional Municipality, in the Province of Nova Scotia, do hereby certify that this is a true copy of the Policy as adopted by the Council of the West Hants Regional Municipality at a meeting duly called and held on the ____ day of _____ (month), _____ (year).

(Signature of Municipal Clerk)
(Typed name of Municipal Clerk)



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Adoption	
Notice to Council	Date
Approval	Date
Description	