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## Information Package Memo

**To:** Mayor Chopp and Members of Council

**CC:** Jason Burgess, CAO  
Shelley Darlington, Interim General Manager, Corporate Services  
Kathy Laplante, Acting Treasurer, Corporate Services  
Matt Terry, Director, Corporate Communications  
Jarrah Stefek, Communications Specialist

**From:** Tyler Wain, Financial Analyst – Cash Management

**Date:** November 10, 2020

**Re:** Report No. CS 20-44, Proposed 2021 Rate Operating Budget  
Attachment 2 – Norfolk County Rate Study - Preliminary Public  
Engagement Results

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At the October 13, 2020 Budget Committee meeting, Council authorized staff to proceed with online public engagement as part of the rate study process. On October 20<sup>th</sup>, the website was formally launched, linking to Norfolk County's Water and Wastewater Page.

### Webpage Format and Content

The Online Public Engagement webpage contains the following key elements:

- Overview of Norfolk County's infrastructure and systems
- Information on what a rate study is
- A Presentation, including voice-overs, explaining the key figures and outcomes of Norfolk County's rate study
- A Six-question survey garnering feedback around user location, service, and priorities/concerns for the water-wastewater system

- A link to the budget webpage, and information on providing feedback/deputations through the Clerk's Department

<https://www.norfolkcounty.ca/living/roads-water-wastewater/water-and-wastewater-rate-study/>

## Public Response to Public Engagement Website

Developed in consultation with the Communications Department, our engagement plan includes a mix of traditional and social media tactics designed to target as many rate payers as possible. In addition to the launch of a dedicated webpage, the plan includes a media release, regular paid and organic social media posts, and paid advertising on the Simcoe Reformer website. The plan has resulted in nearly 100 survey results so far, and we anticipate further engagement as advertising continues.

This memorandum is being prepared based on the feedback received through November 5<sup>th</sup> (end of day), however results will continue to be collected until November 20<sup>th</sup>. A supplemental (final) memorandum will be sent to Council November 23<sup>rd</sup>, for consideration as part of the November 24<sup>th</sup> Rate Operating Budget Meeting.

## Simcoe Reformer Website Homepage: November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020

The screenshot shows the Simcoe Reformer website homepage with a prominent banner for the Norfolk County Water and Wastewater Rate Study. The banner features the following elements:

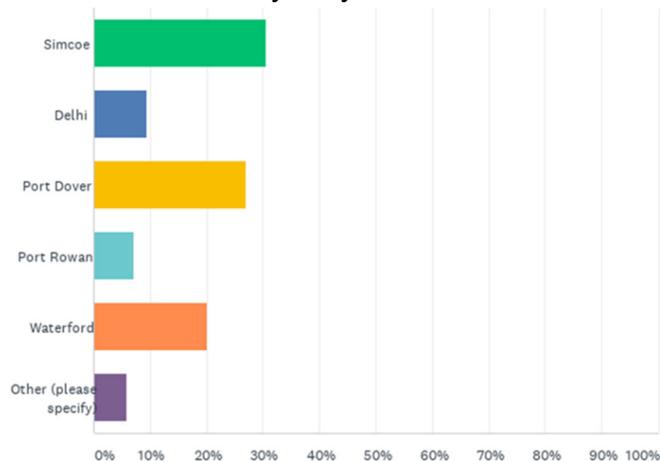
- Navigation Bar:** Includes links for FEATURED, COVID-19, Classifieds, Business Card Directory, E-Edition, Special Sections, Real Estate, Auction Advantage, Frugal Friday, Meet The Gr., and a Subscribe button.
- Main Headline:** "NORFOLK COUNTY WATER AND WASTEWATER RATE STUDY" with a sub-headline "VIEW PRESENTATION AND TAKE SURVEY HERE".
- Call to Action:** "CALLING ALL RESIDENTS! GET INVOLVED AND HELP US LEARN MORE. TAKE THE WATER AND WASTEWATER RATE STUDY SURVEY!"
- News Snippets:**
  - "Waterford museum receives \$30G bequest" with a photo of a woman on a motorcycle.
  - "LOCAL NEWS COVID case at Schuyler Farms" with a photo of a man speaking at a microphone.
  - "LOCAL NEWS Five new COVID-19 cases in H-N" with a graphic of COVID-19 particles.
- Additional Content:** A "Learn more" link with a right-pointing arrow, a photo of a building, and a "ROUTES TO ROOTS FILM FESTIVAL" sign.
- Footer:** "norfolkcounty.ca/water-and-wastewater-rate-study" and the Norfolk County logo.

## Questionnaire Responses

As of end of day November 5<sup>th</sup>, 85 responses had been received. 95% of respondents were owners, 5% were renters (**Q1**); 77% receive both water and wastewater, 18% only water and 4% were not on the system grid (ie) bulk water/well/septic) (**Q2**).

The following charts provide a summary of the responses received:

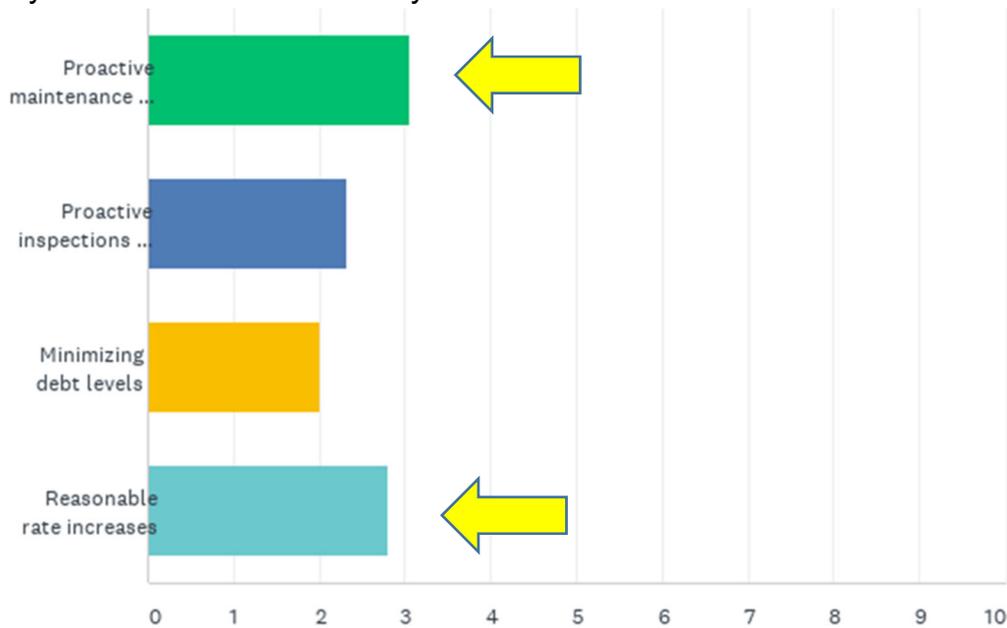
**Q3** – “In what area of Norfolk County do you live?”:



**Q4** – “At your current location, have you experienced any of the following?”:

	VERY FREQUENTLY	FREQUENTLY	OCCASIONALLY	RARELY	VERY RARELY	NEVER	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Water pressure issues	7.41% 6	1.23% 1	12.35% 10	16.05% 13	13.58% 11	49.38% 40	81	4.75
Discolouration	2.41% 2	3.61% 3	18.07% 15	21.69% 18	18.07% 15	36.14% 30	83	4.58
Odour	6.02% 5	4.82% 4	18.07% 15	15.66% 13	16.87% 14	38.55% 32	83	4.48
Service interruption	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	2.44% 2	17.07% 14	24.39% 20	56.10% 46	82	5.34
Sewer backup	0.00% 0	1.20% 1	1.20% 1	13.25% 11	14.46% 12	69.88% 58	83	5.51

**Q5** – “Rank the following issues from 1 to 4 (1 being most important) regarding Norfolk County’s water and wastewater systems?”:



\*\*Note: Not all respondents completed the full ranking, therefore additional emphasis has been put on the #1 ranked item (81 of 83), when comparing alternatives

## Key Insights

**Question 1** – Results are skewed slightly towards property owners (95%) over renters (5%) vs the County-wide population, but it is not expected that this is affecting the overall results.

**Question 2 and 3** – Results appear to be representative of the population distribution within the County

**Question 4** – Service levels appear to be at or above expectations in general (90%+ of respondents had only occasional service issues or less), but some “pockets” exist where Odour or Pressure issues do exist. Full results will be shared with Public Works to look to identify and correct areas of concern where appropriate

**Question 5** - Preliminary results would suggest two key points:

- 1) Respondents are more concerned with reasonable rate increases (48% of respondents ranked this as their top priority) than they are with minimizing debt (12% ranked this as their top priority)

- 2) Proactive Maintenance of Infrastructure (28% ranked #1) is prioritized over proactive inspections (11% ranked #1) (ie) maintaining all equipment on a set schedule, rather than inspecting equipment first, and then only maintaining equipment showing potential deficiencies)

The first key point under Q5 supports Staff's recommendation of phasing in rate increases over a longer-term. It must be noted, that a long-term phase-in of rate increases (over 10 years, rather than 2), does not come without risk and decreased financial flexibility. This decreased flexibility consequently causes an increased reliance on debt financing in the event unexpected failures occur.

**Question 6** – Please see pages 6 to 9 for a summary of all meaningful comments that were received. Of note, one of the minor trends observed, indicated that developers should look to be charged fully for services used.

- Based on comments received, a new user fee was added to the Proposed 2021 Rate Operating Budget, charging builders for new water meter installation, with revenue expected of at least \$50,000 annually to help support operations.

### **Next Steps**

Results will continue to be collected, and then shared when final with Council through a separate memo, prior to the Budget Deliberations on November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

Prepared By:

Tyler Wain  
Financial Analyst – Cash Management

## **Question 6 – General Comments Received (groupings based on primary concern stated):**

### **Service Quality**

“We have had install a softener because of black rings accumulated frequently in our toilets. Also our water had a taste not very present which was noticeable in coffee and tea. This presents extra cost on top of your water rates which we shouldn't have to bear.”

“Simcoe water has and still is very hard and must be softened to work in clothes washers and dish washers. It is also extremely expensive to use on the lawn as in the past dry summer. In my opinion we are paying a premium price for dirty water. Also, are we still subsidizing businesses as in manufacturing. If so, that must stop. We need clean water without jacking prices up.”

“Only regarding odour mostly in summer we seem to have a fishy smell to the water.”

“Just that I get brown coloured water frequently.”

“Water has a high chlorine smell/taste to it”

“County needs to seriously consider utilizing the significant capacity of the under utilized water treatment facility in Naticote not only to service Port Dover but also Waterford and Simcoe so eventually those two ground water sourced plants can be eliminated. The long term costs of each individual plant's capital, operating and maintenance needs to be compared to the long term debt servicing costs of plant consolidation and interconnectivity of the distribution systems along with the added environmental and single source water quality control benefits. Similar study on some plant consolidations for wastewater should also be undertaken. Ideally all of this should be incorporated into a Master Water Wastewater Servicing Plan to avoid a part meal approach where only a single component is considered in the absence of the potential interdependent efficiencies of the other systems. A master plan for both services collectively provides a far more strategic approach”

“It would be really nice if the county could send a letter or call us to let us know our water isn't safe to drink for a few days instead of putting it in the paper I don't read and finding out on Facebook when my water is already yellow. What a joke!”

“I live in east side of Simcoe.....when watering my gardens the water leaves a white film on my plants...either salt or chlorine.....I shouldn't have to purchase a reverse system...for what rates we're paying the water should be of better quality”

"I live in the older area (north end) of town. I have lived here for 22+ years. A few years ago we were forced to replace the water pipes from the road into our driveway. At least 6 houses on my street has had to do the same. This was very expensive and all out of pocket. All along we have heard this street was going to have the pipes in the roadway replaced. This of course has not happened. I am concerned because it is a matter of time before this is going to happen with the sewage pipes as well. I understand the county is broke but the old infrastructure needs to be replaced before we continue to build new for new housing. Our street and the surrounding streets are horrible. We have had to replace/repair many shocks/struts on all of our vehicles over the years and then with the water pipes on top, it's frustrating paying taxes, and increased taxes at that, but not see them used for my home or neighborhood."

### **Infrastructure**

"The most important matter for future growth is water/sewage capacity unused. Future growth should not be paid for by the existing population. Development charges in Norfolk are far too low."

"Build the pipeline to get water from the lake."

"Build a new water treatment plant in Port Dover instead of running a pipeline from Nanticoke Water treatment plant."

### **Cost Levels & Structure**

"The fees charged for water/wastewater be higher based on consumption or use. When you only use \$4.95 water use and \$6.70 wastewater why is my bill \$67 regularly when my usage is only \$11.65? Why do I pay a basic water charge 4times my usage waste and water use? Why is my basic charge not less than \$10 as I use less then for both. A \$30 water bill is more inline than \$67 - \$55 of my bill is basic charges and ridiculous. I am a single household and why are families not paying more for basic charges as more usage. I believe this should be addressed my water bill is more than more hydro bill and I am not on the budget."

"Do not like paying disposal fees for water that goes into maintaining our outdoor property. (Lawn and garden) it it not going into wastewater system."

"There should be 2 meters. One for the inside use and one for the outside use where there is no waste water charge."

“We have had major increases to our water and waste water for many years now. These large increases need to stop. Understanding the are regulations that need to be followed and the associated costs we need however to do a better job at finding efficiencies in our maintenance programs. When designing and implementing any new or rebuilds of our facilities we must look at all cost and reduce the asinine overages that always occur. We also need to have stricter guidelines on the bidding process. Our managers/ project managers need to be open minded when contractors make suggestions on cost reduction ideas. Example would be the bricking of Delhi where a suggestion was made to use a different block that would have saved costs but was refused. It was not an integrity or safety issue with the type of block but a cosmetic one that was not going to be an eyesore either. We need to charge developers more as they are part of the reason we need to increase our plants outputs. Bottom line is the costs of water and wastewater is getting out of hand and it would be more cost effective to install a well living in town.”

“Norfolk water and wastewater user rates are very high. Moving here from a city, I understand that population density causes costs per user to be higher. Since all county residents benefit from the jobs, etc., from companies that use the water system, perhaps some of the funding should come from property taxes as well as user fees.”

“Bulk water rates should be increased as soon as the other rates increased. Why are the only scenarios for bulk rates either 2023 or 2025? Bulk rates have been subsidized by others users for far too long. This should not continue! Playing favourites is what's dividing this County.”

“Less subsidy to those using waste water treatment plant separately like cottages and RV'S. Ensure debt collection for those hooked to the waste or water system only and may have slipped through the cracks because they had been on their own wells or tile bed systems before”

“Still unclear as to why we pay so much for delivery”

“Water and waste are over priced. I believe through poor management”

“I am really disturbed at the high water and sewer rates I am charged when I am away and have zero usage. I am a senior on a fixed low income and really struggle to pay these bills.”

“I just do not understand why the people coming in from places like Toronto, who have made a killing by selling their homes there and buying here, which is basically getting the same for less, do not have to bear the brunt of increases.”

“Developers need to pay more towards the water wastewater infrastructure. They are charging astronomical prices for the homes they are building. Some of that money should go to the infrastructures.”

“Water is way over priced in simcoe. If it goes up anymore I'll move”

“Keep the standard delivery rate but charge more for actual usage when you do increases”

“Do not place this expense on all property tax payers only those who consume the service”

“Perhaps try shifting the cost of the service requirement increases related to new build homes entirely to the developer.”

“Prices for water are ridiculous in Norfolk. Too expensive”

## **Billing**

“When will council address landlord tenant write-offs and implement section 398 of the municipal act.??”

“Please Bill landlords for any bills owed by tenants instead of billing everyone else that pay their bills. They can and could add an addition to rent to pay for this if separate meters are not in place. They receive the benefit of rent plus income tax deductions where the rest of us do not. Please be fair to all users.”

“I wish billing was back to Norfolk county. Erth is not customer friendly. Possibly a tender process for another provider if Norfolk can't take it back. Ensure lowest cost to consumers but with effective customer support & service.”