

# Council hears long term plan for water

By Pat Bailey

Robert Sharon has set the bar high for directors in the municipality when it comes to producing 'stellar' reports.

Leamington's director of infrastructure services managed to wow Council with his comprehensive report outlining the Strategic Direction of Leamington Water Services at the Mon. Jan. 23 meeting of Council.

Sharon told Council it is imperative for the municipality to develop a strategic plan to help manage the future of the system with the expected growth of the greenhouse industry, resulting in increased demand for water.

He told Council the long-term management strategy has several questions that must be answered:

1. How is the greenhouse sector currently consuming water and what is the anticipated consumption demands of existing customers, taking into account continued sector modernization and the effects of expanded electricity and natural gas infrastructure?

2. How much capacity remains in the system given this current and expected consumption – and where is this capacity located?

3. Given current customers and the expecting timing of the growth, when will the system reach localized and general capacity limits?

4. What consumption demand management strategies, and directed area growth strategies, can be implemented to maximize greenhouse acreage that can be serviced from existing infrastructure?

5. When and where should infrastructure be expanded to service future growth? What is the cost of the future expansion and how will expansion costs be funded?

6. How can LWS improve customer service and promote conservation?

Sharon told Council modernization of the system is key to its future success. He said that there are four large initiatives, ones that will have a major impact on the future of the system and the services to its customers.

The projects include: a complete water meter replacement; the installation of advanced metering infrastructure (AMI); the implementation of hydraulic modelling and data analysis software; and the completion of a comprehensive master planning exercise.

Sharon said the 2017 budget includes \$3 million for the replacement of water meters, most of which are now 21 years old. He said \$2.6 million will come from reserves, money collected as a fixed monthly surcharge on residents' water bills and earmarked for water meter lifecycle replacement. By the end of 2017, Sharon said that fixed surcharge is expected to fully fund the

initiative.

The installation of AMI, Sharon said, will translate to better data, hence better decisions.

He said AMI is an integrated system of smart meters, communications networks and data management systems. Its installation will drastically change how consumption data is read, as well as the frequency of data collected. He said the current system requires a meter reader to physically read each meter individually – 12 times annually in the urban area and 6 times annually in the rural area. AMI will eliminate the need for manual meter reading, and instead rely on radio frequency to transmit the customer's consumption data.

The collected data will be inputted into data management systems to generate monthly invoices for billing. Coupled with the implementation of hydraulic modelling software, readings will provide information of how consumers are consuming water and how the water system network is functioning.

This additional information will be used for a variety of purposes, including pinpointing peak demands and how to deal with those demands. This could result in rate reductions for consumers who choose to consume in off-peak hours.

Sharon said AMI would



Rob Sharon

also improve customer service, giving users the ability to log in and further understand their particular consumption habits. He said this could lead customers to take steps to reduce consumption. It can also alert consumers to possible signs of a leak, which they can then take steps to correct.

This concept, he said, will be used by LWS to identify underground leaks through area meters as well.

The implementation of hydraulic modelling and consumption data analysis would predict system capacity in individual areas within the municipality. This, Sharon said, would allow the determination of the effect on the system that additional greenhouse operations might have – they would use this information to approve or deny applications for further greenhouse development.

Sharon told the group that the development of a LWS distribution master plan is needed, since the last one was developed in 1999. Since then, there have been significant developments: substantial greenhouse growth; changes in greenhouse operations; and, of course, greater demand for water and changes in the UWSS treatment demands of the entire area serviced by UWSS.

"Updating the distribution master plan will be a critical step in the strategic way forward," Sharon wrote in his report.

With all of the proposed recommendations, Sharon said it will mean the need for additional staff. He said an additional water operator and a new water system analyst would have to be added.

Sharon told Council the timeline for these proposed projects are from 2017 to 2021. This year's plans include the replacement of the aged water meters and the implementation of hydraulic modelling and data analysis software.

The installation of AMI is proposed for 2018-2019 at an estimated cost of \$1.5 million and the completion of a comprehensive LWS master planning exercise in 2020-2021 at an estimated \$100,000.

Sharon's report was received by Council to rave reviews.



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