



Subject: *Funding Sources for Bottled Water Distribution During Drought Conditions*
To: Corporate and Residential Services Committee
Date Prepared: June 26, 2026
Related Motions: C26(90)
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Summary

At Council's Regular meeting on June 24th, 2026, Council directed staff to return with a report on information on organizations and bulk water carriers that could respond in a time of extreme drought need if necessary.

Council also indicates, whereas the province is no longer providing funding for bottled water assistance, council advised staff to not continue supplying bottled water to residents. Instead, efforts should focus on public education, water conservation, and municipal support programs to residents.

Staff discussed with organizations that supported their communities in the 2025 drought and also engaged with bulk water carriers to explore options for supporting potable water access in rural communities during periods of drought.

Discussions identified that while community groups may be willing to assist with local outreach and coordination, bulk water carriers have limited capacity due to existing weekly delivery commitments and a limited number of available trucks and drivers.

One carrier indicated they may be able to provide supplemental service on a limited basis. Any municipal support program would require further analysis of operational feasibility, service levels, liability considerations, and associated costs, including the cost of water and hourly driver rates. At this time, no established service model or pricing structure has been identified.

Staff also completed a jurisdiction scan on rain barrel programs which will be discussed within the report.

Financial Impact Statement

Should the Municipality choose to support bulk water delivery to rural communities during periods of drought, preliminary discussions with service providers indicate costs could be in the range of approximately \$2,000 per day for a bulk water truck and operator, subject to availability, travel distance, and duration of service.

Potable water could potentially be sourced through local fire stations using existing water fill points; however, any water supplied would result in additional utility costs and operational considerations for the respective fire department.

Recommendation

Staff recommend that Council place a focus on improving community resiliency, additional public education and preparedness. As part of Council's Municipal Climate Change Action Plan there will be recommendations on community resiliency for water access.

Staff recommend that Council direct staff to include a rain barrel program in their draft 2027-2028 budget for discussion.

Recommended Motion

That the Corporate & Residential Services Committee recommends that Council direct staff to include a Water Conservation Assistance Program with a total program budget of \$50,000 to support the purchase of rain barrels or water storage totes for eligible residential properties in the 2027-2028 draft budget for further discussion.

Background

On June 24, 2026, Council directed staff to explore options for supporting access to potable water if necessary for rural residents during periods of drought. Staff engaged with local community organizations and bulk water carriers to assess the feasibility of providing emergency water support. Discussions identified that bulk water delivery is not a service routinely provided by the Municipality and that local carriers have limited capacity due to existing residential delivery commitments and a limited number of available trucks and drivers. Staff also explored potential water sourcing options, including the use of approved water fill points at local fire stations. The information contained in this report is intended to provide Council with an overview of potential service delivery considerations, operational limitations, and associated costs should Council wish to pursue such a program.

Discussion

Staff consulted with local community organizations and bulk water carriers to assess the feasibility of providing potable water support to rural residents during periods of drought. While there is community interest in assisting residents experiencing water shortages, the availability of bulk water delivery services is limited. Most local carriers maintain regular weekly delivery schedules and have limited flexibility due to the availability of trucks and qualified drivers. A couple bulk water carriers indicated that supplemental support may be possible depending on existing commitments.

Should Council wish to establish a municipal support program, several operational considerations would need to be addressed, including eligibility criteria, service levels, delivery coordination, liability, staffing requirements, and cost recovery. Preliminary discussions indicate that the cost of a bulk water truck and operator could be approximately \$2,000 per day, in addition to the cost of potable water. Water may be available through approved fill points at local fire stations; however, this would create additional utility and operational costs for the respective fire department.

In 2025 there were 3 fire departments that chose to establish their own water service to the community. Enfield Fire set up a hose for potable water, Maitland Fire added a hose bib to the exterior of their building for community access and Mount Uniacke Fire offered showers and water to their residents. All of these services were implemented by the departments on their own.

The province has stated that drought conditions do not necessarily constitute an emergency and that private well ownership remains the responsibility of the property owner. Alternative measures, including public education, water conservation messaging, well and septic assistance programs, and coordination with community partners, may provide support while reducing municipal financial and operational impacts. Council direction would be required before any municipal water delivery program is developed or implemented.

Staff plan to continue to provide education initiatives, water conservation measures, well and septic loan program.

Council has loosely discussed the need for long-term plan for water security.

Climate Change Action Plan Update

The Municipality is currently updating the Climate Change Action Plan. The update includes the following draft action item to develop a Water Scarcity and Drought Resilience Plan.

A Water Scarcity and Drought Resilience Plan would coordinate initiatives to protect and conserve water quantity outside of that which supplies Municipal services. Groundwater is fundamentally a provincial responsibility, but impacts of water scarcity are felt locally. The Water Scarcity and Drought Resilience Plan would identify Municipal measures to support or enable actions that reduce negative impacts of water scarcity, such as, but not limited to:

- Robust education and awareness (e.g., water insufficiencies, conservation, low-water use technologies, well maintenance)
- Collaborations and networking with others working to understand, map, catalogue and protect natural assets (wetlands) that benefit recharge
- Monitoring water scarcity impacts
- Coordination of low-impact water retention programs (e.g., rainwater harvesting, rain gardens, biofiltration, bioswales, drought tolerant landscaping)
- Research (e.g., hydrogeological studies) through to implementation for community-driven solutions to help ensure reliable access to water (e.g., community wells, large-scale storage)

The updated plan will be presented to Council later this fiscal for review and adoption.

RAIN BARREL PROGRAMS IN NOVA SCOTIA

In June, Council had inquired about rain barrel programs. Staff were able to complete a jurisdictional scan of programs across Nova Scotia. As Council will see from the scan, there are various types of programs that could be duplicated in East Hants. If the desire is to establish a rain barrel program Council should direct staff to review program options as part of drafting the 2027-2028 budget. In addition to the programs below, local groups such as Youth Links have previously offered the sales of rain barrels as a fund raising program.

Jurisdictional Scan:

Types of Rain Barrel Programs

1. **Rebate/ Financial Incentive Programs:** The municipality or organization offers residents a cash rebate after purchasing their own rain barrel from any retailer. The resident buys and installs the barrel; the program reimburses a fixed amount on a first-come, first-served basis until funds are exhausted.
 - Pros: simple, resident choice of barrel, low admin (no inventory management)
 - Cons: Fraud, upfront cost from residents, slow uptake if not promoted well
2. **Subsidized/Discounted Sale Programs:** A municipality or non-profit partners with a vendor to offer barrels below retail price. Residents pre-order online; barrels are delivered by truckload or direct home delivery.
 - Pros: low admin (no inventory management)
 - Cons: pricing can vary
3. **Free Distribution/ Give-Away Programs:** The municipality or non-profit procures rain barrels and distributes them to residents at no cost, sometimes paired with a home visit or education session.
 - Pros: Maximum accessibility, highest uptake, strong community impact especially coupled with education
 - Cons: highest cost, requires purchasing and inventory, more staff time
4. **Education Based:** The municipality or organization does not offer a financial incentive but promotes rain barrel use through educational content (step-by-step guides, links to provincial resources, or stormwater awareness information).
 - Pros: no cost, raises awareness
 - Cons: Low uptake, no financial barrier removed

Nova Scotia Based Examples

Municipality/Organization	Type of Program	Status	Cost/Rebate	Budget	Notes
Town of Antigonish	Municipal Rebate	Active (2026-27)	\$50/barrel	\$2,500	- Up to 50 households - First come, first served - One rebate/household - In-person application
County of Antigonish	Municipal Rebate	Active (2026-27)	\$50/barrel	\$5,000	- Up to 100 households - One rebate/household - Pilot with expansion potential
Queens County	Subsidized Program	Active	\$25/ barrel \$125/ tote		- One rain barrel and tote per household <u>for free for low-income</u> - Max 2 rain barrels & one tote per household - First come, first served - Has community info sessions
ACAP - Cape Breton	Give-away	Expired	Free to participant	-	RBC Blue Water Project (\$ unknown)

There is a site called [Rainbarrel.ca](#). Its a vendor-operated discounted sale available across NS. Municipalities can partner with them at no cost to offer discounted barrels to residents. The town of Mahone Bay is an example of a municipality who access this service.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The program options within this report are within Council decision making ability.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Alternatives

Outline alternatives to the recommended action (Trebuchet MS - Size 10 font)

Attachments

N/A