

Region of Waterloo
Engineering and Environmental Services
Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Management

To: Regional Council
Meeting Date: August 12, 2026
Report Title: Draft Policy and Procedures for Groundwater Interference Complaints in the Region of Waterloo

1. Recommendation

For information.

2. Purpose / Issue:

Following a Council resolution on May 20, 2026, a consultant was retained to carry out an extensive consultation and jurisdictional scan of other local and international well interference complaint procedures. Staff are bringing forth a consultant report with detailed recommendations that led to the development of a draft Well Interference Policy, which will be brought back to Council in September for endorsement following additional engagement with interested stakeholders in August.

3. Strategic Plan:

This report supports all areas of the Region's Strategic Plan *Growing with Care*, Climate Aligned Growth, Equitable Services and Opportunities, Resilient and Future Ready Organization and Homes for All.

4. Report Highlights:

- Concerns raised by residents and staff during recent well interference complaint investigations highlighted the need to review the complaint process, appeal procedure and compensation amounts.
- As a result, and at the direction of Council, the Region hired a consultant to undertake a fulsome background review, conduct a jurisdictional scan, facilitate stakeholder engagement, complete a technical and regulatory alignment scan, review the current policy and recommend a revised policy.
- Groundwater is an important source of drinking water in Waterloo Region. The Region manages and monitors groundwater resources to help protect drinking water supplies and support long-term water needs.

- Investigating potential well interference is a requirement of the Region's Permits to Take Water and is one part of the Region's broader groundwater management responsibilities.
- Four in person engagement sessions were held over six weeks to gather input from interested stakeholders. One virtual meeting was also held during this time. An online survey was available on the Region's website, by phone and via paper copy as requested and at certain Region locations. Several social media posts, public notices, dedicated reach outs and emails, and newspaper ads were used to promote both the survey and the meetings.
- A total of 51 online surveys were submitted. Survey results and the feedback from all four stakeholder sessions are summarized in the report prepared by AECOM – see Appendix A.
- This feedback was considered, along with the detailed Council resolution from May 20, 2026, to develop a draft policy that is being presented to Council today- see Appendix B.
- In general terms, it was recommended to:
 - Modernize the policy framework.
 - Enhance accessibility and transparency.
 - Strengthen technical rigor.
 - Update compensation and mitigation.
 - Revise the appeals process.
 - Establish regular review cycles of the policy.

5. Background:

Large groundwater users, including municipal water supply wells, operate under provincial Permit to Take Water. When a water taker is accused of causing well interference, the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks requires the permit holder to investigate the issue and take appropriate action to restore the impacted water supply, if interference is confirmed.

Mutual interference occurs when pumping from one well causes water levels in a nearby well to decline, affecting its ability to provide water. This may result from groundwater pumping by municipal, agricultural, industrial, commercial or other nearby wells.

For the current well interference complaints process, the Region gathers all available information about the private well, reviews how much water has been pumped from nearby municipal wells (and whether it has changed), how both the Region well(s) and private well are built, how close the wells are to each other, determine whether the wells are completed in the same aquifer and/or may be hydraulically connected, review monitoring data from the Region's monitoring network and other scan for other activities (i.e. construction) that may be occurring in the area. Any information provided by a licensed Well Technician/Plumber or consultant is also reviewed.

Region staff then make an objective assessment based on the data/information collected to determine whether or not interference is occurring. The Resident is then informed of the outcome in writing and are advised of their appeal rights. The current well interference policy can be found here: [Policy and Procedure for Responding to Groundwater Interference Complaints \(May 5, 2015\)](#)

Feedback from Engagement:

A total of five information/input sessions were held over a six-week period. Four sessions were held in person, one was virtual and an online/paper/phone survey was available throughout this period.

In general, what we heard through the in person/virtual meetings and the survey was that some improvements to the current process could be made in the following areas:

- ✓ Increased transparency needed throughout the process.
- ✓ Easier access to investigation findings and data.
- ✓ Need for an independent appeal process.
- ✓ Opportunity to provide input before a decision is finalized/more involvement in process.
- ✓ A plain language explanation of investigation findings.
- ✓ Immediate access to emergency water for all residents on private wells.

For a more fulsome summary of the input received, see the report in Appendix A.

General Overview of New Policy Updates

- The Historic Compensation Zone and Groundwater Taking Area mapping were removed. Every complaint submitted under the new policy will have a preliminary evaluation on its own merit rather than location exclusively.
- The Historic Compensation Zone allocation of \$4000 has been removed.
- The involvement of staff in technical decision making has been removed.
- Clarity with respect to availability and duration of emergency water supply was included.

Assessment

- A Consultant will undertake a preliminary assessment of available data to determine whether a well interference complaint falls within the scope of the Policy and whether further investigation is warranted vs the previous approach where the assessment was carried out by HWP staff.
- The new draft policy adds a timeline of five days for the Consultant to advise the Resident if further investigation is required or not. This will be provided in writing, and they will make themselves available to the homeowner to explain the decision.

Site Visit

- If further investigation is required, the new draft policy has the Consultant and a Licensed Well Technician carrying out a site visit together. Under the previous

policy, site visits were limited to only the Licensed Well Technician in certain circumstances. Jointly, they will review the site setting, well mechanics - including the pump, pressure tank, water treatment system and other relevant accessible equipment or information will be inspected. They will also review any relevant information with the homeowner and review any well installation or available maintenance records.

Technical Evaluation and Reporting

- After the site visit, a more fulsome technical evaluation will be carried out by the Consultant using relevant data, information, Resident interview notes, site visit observations, records, on site water levels, as available, regional pumping and monitoring data, climate data, etc.
- The new draft policy sets a 21 calendar day timeline for the Consultant and Well Technician to provide a technical evaluation document, which will include an evaluation and conclusion as to whether or not the impact on a private well is deemed likely attributable to the operation of the Region's well and proposed solutions, if applicable, to both the Resident and the Region.

Remedy/Compensation

- Where impact on a private well is deemed likely attributable to the operation of the Region's wells, the Consultant and Licensed Well Technician will propose solutions to the Resident and Regional staff. While this new draft policy does not have a compensation cap, reimbursement will be fair and reasonable taking into consideration such factors as what is reasonably necessary and the typical market costs for the needed work.
- The new draft policy outlines that where the Consultant and Well Technician propose works that exceed \$40,000, the recommendation will proceed to the Region's Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) for approval.
- The new draft policy requires that remedial work be completed within a reasonable timeframe of up to 6 months and that invoices, receipts and quotations be submitted by the Resident to the Region within 90 days of the approved remedial work being completed. The Region maintains the right to audit any information provided for eligibility, prior to processing the payment in accordance with the Policy and Letter of Acknowledgement.

Well Interference Appeal Committee:

Throughout the engagement process and through the scan of comparable policies, it was determined that the composition of the Well Interference Appeal Committee could be carried out in several different ways. Various avenues were explored including the use of the Region's existing Licensing and Hearing Committee or the use of a single legal arbitrator. However, after a full review the following structure:

Creation of a new Well Interference Appeal Committee

Purpose:

The purpose of the Well Interference Appeal Committee is to hear appeals submitted by private well owners who believe their well is being impacted by Regional pumping. It could be an appeal of the initial assessment, the findings of the Consultant/Licensed Well Technician, or a disagreement on the proposed remedial recommendation to resolve the issue.

Appeals Process

- The new draft policy requires an appeal to be filed with Regional Clerks within 30 calendar days of receipt of the letter report.
- The Appeal Committee will be provided and expected to review all related technical information prior to the appeal hearing and will listen to verbal submissions from both parties prior to rendering a recommendation to Council.
- The Appeal Committee will be delegated the authority to make recommendations to Council for ratification.
- A closed hearing will be scheduled and all relevant technical information provided to the Committee members in advance. The Resident and/or their representative may provide evidence and/or make submissions for consideration.
- Regional staff and/or their consultant will also provide evidence and/or make submissions to the Appeal Committee, as appropriate.
- The Appeal Committee will have the ability to ask clarifying questions of both the Resident, the Region's technical staff and the Region and Resident's technical advisor(s) during the appeal process to clarify or interpret the information provided.
- The Appeal Committee would be given the authority to deny the appeal and/or make recommendations on remedial compensation for final Council approval.
- The decision of the majority of Committee members will decide the outcome/recommendation to Council.
- Once ratified by Council, the decision is final with no further right of appeal.

Membership:

The Well Interference Appeals Committee shall consist of the following members:

- Regional Chair.

- Chair of the Sustainability, Infrastructure and Development (SID) Committee.
- One Regional Councillor from the affected Area Municipality where the complaint originated, or their designated elected delegate.
- Two Regional Councillors appointed by the Regional Chair (with consideration given to one representative from a City and one from a Township).

Benefits:

- a. Meets the requirements of the motion- Includes members of Council and Area Municipalities and consideration for independent hydrogeological or technical expertise to be given.
- b. Decision is independent of Regional staff involved in the initial complaint.
- c. Clerks supported.

Drawbacks:

- a. Time to implement.
- b. Any recommendation of the Committee must go to Council for ratification.
- c. Nomination and approval processes and Terms of Reference would need to be developed.

6. Communication and Engagement with Area Municipalities and the Public**Area Municipalities:**

A meeting with Area Municipal representatives was held on June 23, 2026. Representatives from Cambridge, Wilmot, Woolwich and Waterloo were present. The City of Kitchener chose not to participate. The current policy and processes were reviewed, followed by questions to gather input on the recommended municipal involvement in the process and any feedback on changes needed to the policy.

Public:

A dedicated EngageWR page was created for the Groundwater Interference Complaints policy review, providing a plain language overview of the process and access to more information (<https://www.engagewr.ca/groundwater-interference-complaints-policy-update>).

To gather input from the public and key interest holders, two public information sessions were held. A virtual public information meeting was held on June 24, 2026, and an in person public drop-in meeting was held at Regional Headquarters on July 14, 2026. The meeting was advertised in local newspapers.

In person meetings with the Citizens for Safe Groundwater were also held on June 18th and July 23rd.

An online survey was available on the Region's EngageWR and paper copies available upon request and at Regional libraries. The survey could also be carried out by phone with a member of the Water Services team. Social media, public notices, dedicated email reach outs and newspaper ads were utilized to promote both the survey and public meetings throughout June and into July.

To provide clarity and ensure transparency, a new landing page on the Region's website will be created to provide information on the well interference complaint process in plain language. Residents can call our Service First Contact Centre at 519-575-4400 to start the process, which is laid out on the first page of the policy and throughout. Scripts for the SFCC will be updated to support smoother intake and expedited transfer to HWP staff.

Financial Implications:

	Current Year	Future Year(s) (Max)
Budget Impact?	Not anticipated	~\$106,000 per year + any approved remedy costs. (Max based on 10 events, for detailed breakdown, see below)
Capital Plan Impact?	As no operating budget was anticipated for this in 2026, other hydrogeological related capital budgets will be used ~\$150,000	Not anticipated

While the anticipated costs are difficult to predict, the following worst-case assumptions have been made for future budgeting years (based on 10 complaints received).

Well Interference Complaints - Costs that May Be Incurred by the Region (Estimates)

- Site investigation and report preparation/site: \$8,500 consultant fee /each.
- Well plumber investigations: \$400/ each.
- Well appeal hearing: \$800/each.
- Temporary water supply hook-up: \$500 Tank & install + \$400 per water delivery.
- A recommended remedial solution (installation of a new well, deepening a well, new pump etc). Costs will vary considerably depending on the recommendation from the Consultant and Well Technician.

7. Conclusion / Next Steps:

Following the May 20, 2026, Council resolution, an extensive background review, jurisdictional scan, stakeholder engagement (5) and technical and regulatory review, a

draft **Policy and Procedures for Responding to Groundwater Interference Complaints** has been developed and brought to Council today (See Appendix B).

While the draft policy is complete, due to time constraints, staff were not able to share a copy of the draft policy with Council or other interested parties, prior to it being added to the agenda. Staff received extensive feedback from the public during the various engagement sessions that they would like an opportunity to review the draft policy, ask questions and provide additional input before it is finalized. As a result, staff are recommending one additional in-person public meeting to be scheduled by the end of August to review the revised policy to answer any questions and solicit final feedback.

After an additional round of engagement and refinement, staff anticipate they could bring an updated and final draft policy for recommendation and endorsement in September.

Upon final endorsement, the Policy would be finalized and a Terms of Reference for the Well Interference Appeal Committee developed using best practices and in line with other comparable municipal well interference models reviewed. Members of the new Committee would then need to be appointed.

Annual updates will be brought back to Council and will include the number of well interference complaints received the year prior, the status of the complaint, number of appeals, outcomes/decisions, trends and any mitigation measures undertaken by the Region as a result.

8. Attachments:

Appendix A: AECOM- ROW WIC Policy Update, Executive Summary 2026-07-30
(Link to full report: [Well Interference Complaint Policy Update Recommendations Report](#))

Appendix B: DRAFT – Policy and Procedures for Responding to Groundwater Interference Complaints

*Appendix C: Presentation – Well Interference Complaint Policy

Prepared By: Amy Shaw, Director, Water and Wastewater Operations

Reviewed By: Karl Belan, Acting Manager, Hydrogeology and Water Programs

Leslea McKie, Senior Hydrogeologist, Hydrogeology and Water Programs

Approved By: Kenneth Brothers, Interim Commissioner, Water and Wastewater Services