

City's water use still too high: watershed group

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The committee responsible for overseeing Charlottetown's only source of water says they still feel too much is being extracted.

Don Mazer, co- chair of the Winter River- Tracadie Bay Watershed Association, said the watershed can't sustain long term what the city is taking out of it.

Mazer's comments come just after Coun. Eddie Rice, chair of the city's water and sewer utility, said water consumption levels have dropped this year and that the city has not exceeded withdrawing more than 95 per cent of what it is allowed to under permit by the provincial government.

"We feel too much water being extracted," Mazer said.

He said more attention needs to be paid to what is sustainable for the watershed and less on whether the city is staying within what it is allowed to take out based on permits.

Mazer said recent data shows water consumption in Charlottetown went up 6.6 per cent in 2012 compared to 2011.

He acknowledged the extremely dry summer of 2012 may have been a factor. That's when the city brought in actual water restrictions, which it has not done yet this year.

Mazer adds that while the city is within permitted levels overall, it did extract more than it was allowed to from two of its water wells.

"In 2012, they were over their permit levels for the well fields in Union and Suffolk."

The city has water pumping stations at Brackley, Union, Suffolk, is Malpeque Road and Mount Edward Road and is getting close to beginning engineering and site plan work on a new well field in Miltonvale, which will not draw from the Winter River- Tracadie Bay watershed, next month.

It should be noted the city has brought in a number of water conservation methods such as a toilet replacement rebate program, volunteer metering program and a rain barrel sale this past spring.

Mazer said his group anxiously awaits the new well field coming on line but it will take a few years to complete the project before any water actually starts to flow.

“From what I’ve heard, things seem to be moving along but we’re probably a minimum of three years before we see that, assuming all the funding falls into place.”

Mazer refers to the need for provincial and federal infrastructure money to help complete the estimated \$ 18- million price tag.

And, as Mazer also notes, more new wells will be needed to cope with an ever-developing city.

In the future, Mazer said his group would prefer to see more emphasis from the provincial government and the City of Charlottetown on setting permit levels at what is sustainable for the watershed.

Mazer noted that other projects, such as the water and sewer separation project underway right now, got a head start on the new well field.

“Think we’ve always perceived more urgency than what seems to be the case on the part of both the municipality and the province.”