

Water everywhere?

Town hall told city residents need to reduce consumption.

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- BY GEORDIE CARRAGHER



Charlottetown MP Sean Casey discusses updates on Charlottetown's water system as Ramona Doyle, water conservation co-ordinator for the City of Charlottetown, watches at a town hall forum held in Charlottetown Wednesday night. The panel discussion...

Imagine putting water in a swimming pool one metre wide and one metre deep, and then trying to swim from Charlottetown to Brackley Beach.

That's how much water is consumed each day in Charlottetown, and we need to use less, said Don Mazer, cochair of the Winter River-Tracadie Bay Watershed Association, at a town hall held in Charlottetown Wednesday night.

Approximately 50 people attended the forum, which focused on water conservation, wastewater management, river health and nitrates.

The issue took root this summer when two major tributaries in the Winter River watershed dried up.

"You could have mistaken it for a good hiking trail," Mazer said.

Branches of the Winter River watershed system have dried up over each of the last three years, as well as the main branch drying up in 2001.

"This summer was not an isolated incident, but a reflection of long- standing issues relating to the water-extraction practices," Mazer said.

Despite record rainfalls in September, the water accumulated wasn't enough to restore the supply.

“By the time we see a problem at the surface, the problem is already thoroughly exacerbated because it’s an underground problem relating to a long history of extraction,” he said.

“Because the water is pumped out of the watershed, contrary to flow, it’s unavailable to recharge and replenish the city’s water supply,” Mazer said.

P. E. I. faces unique challenges in terms of its water supply because of its composition, said Megan Harris, co-ordinator for the West River watershed.

“Most other places rely on great big lakes or glacial melt for their water,” she said. “But we don’t have that luxury here. We only have groundwater.”

Residents need to connect the dots in terms of water issues like nutrient loading, Harris said.

“We can’t solve our issues with water if we consider them in isolation from one another.”

Island residents must hold each other accountable, Harris said.

“We are all each other’s neighbours, no matter what watershed we’re from.”

The city has been taking steps to try and combat the issue.

In July, the city unveiled guidelines for residents in the hopes of encouraging them to use less water.

City residents are making the adjustment, said Ramona Doyle, water conservation co-ordinator for the City of Charlottetown.

“I like to think people heard what we were saying, and they responded by reducing their demand,” she said.

Charlottetown MP Sean Casey also commended the city’s efforts.

“The steps the City of Charlottetown took with respect to raising awareness, educating our citizens, getting people to buy into the whole conservation program was a silver lining in a dark cloud this summer,” he said.

“I feel like the city has done a very good job, and the populace has responded to the need for us to change our ways as a result of the demand we’re putting on the water source.”

The city offers various support programs to customers, including water conservation kits, aerators, shower kits and rain barrels.

“We offer them at low cost so people who want to make the changes can do so themselves without significant investment,” Doyle said.

The new Miltonvale watershed will provide a 30 per cent increase in the city’s water supply, but Doyle said the increase in supply shouldn’t be seen as a green light for consumers to start consuming higher levels of water again.

“Miltonvale isn’t going to provide us another whole supply,” Doyle said.

“It’s another small piece, it’s an important piece, but it is just one piece, so we can’t rely on that as the solution to all of our water issues.”

Despite evidence suggesting issues with water supply, the provincial and federal governments have been reluctant to provide assistance. Casey said he wants to ensure the federal government steps up and contributes to ensuring the city’s water infrastructure is brought up to date.

“I see it as my role to be initially constructive, and if that doesn’t work, I’ll be a thorn in their side.”