

2022 MUNICIPAL ELECTION & ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

Prepared by the Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph Blue Community Program



PURPOSE

This guide is to both inform members and allies of the CSJ Blue Community program about how our mandate relates to municipal governance and to advocate this awareness in democratic processes at the local level. Visit our website for more resources and a growing list of inspired projects and voices that model the kinds of change we can act upon.

This guide can help inform your participation in the democratic processes of:

- Asking questions at public forums
- Contacting candidates directly
- Sharing your thoughts to the media
- Posting messages to social media
- Inviting conversations with friends, family, and colleagues

MUNICIPALITIES

- Clean and distribute tap water
- Treat and release sewage water and manage stormwater
- Protect lands and waters for ecological and human health via policies, permits, and cleanups
- Test beach water quality
- Consult and plan new projects and developments with a variety of stakeholders
- Support recreational activities that need water and waterways
- Sort and manage various waste streams (garbage, recycling, composting)
- Engage with local First Nations and Indigenous communities as a municipal Treaty partner



USE THIS GUIDE

Explore this guide to educate and advocate for a better relationship with water. Learn more about our Mandate, see our prepared questions for your local candidates, and be inspired by over 20 projects and voices that have already made a difference.

Our Blue Community program reflects the Congregations of St. Joseph's (CSJ) charism of unity and reconciliation. We honour our responsibilities to protect water as a human right, shared commons, and sacred gift. Through reflection, education, advocacy, and service, this program centers and strengthens our respectful relations to all the waters circulating our common home.



WATER IS A HUMAN RIGHT

Water is not just a resource, but a source of life. In 2012, Canada recognized the United Nations declaration on the human right to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. Globally, there are 2.4 billion people who are denied this right including many people in Canada. As of September 2022, there were 17 long-term drinking water advisories in Ontario on First Nations reserves. This doesn't include short term advisories (no clean water for less than one year) and many other non-Indigenous communities without safe drinking water. While drinking water on reserves is a Federal responsibility, when municipalities pollute local waters, Indigenous downstream neighbours feel the impact.

Ontario is home to hundreds of lakes and rivers including the Great Lakes which contain 20% of the world's surface freshwater. 3 million of the 15 million people who live in Ontario rely on groundwater as their vital source of water. 80% of people in Ontario rely on tax-supported municipal infrastructure to deliver their tap water and to treat their wastewater.

Clean water and sanitation are not only a right, but a source of human dignity and a foundation for the full expression of other human rights. Rising levels of poverty and homelessness in your municipality restrict people's access to clean water since there is limited access to public taps, toilets, and showers. The alternatives are bottled water and using public spaces and waterways for sanitation. According to the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario, 12.6 billion dollars are needed to bring drinking and wastewater systems up to a good state of repair. Because much of this infrastructure is underground or on the edge of town, people and politicians often devalue this kind of investment.

WATER IS A SACRED GIFT

Each municipality has a founding story and that story is based on the availability of water. This foundation could have been for industry, transportation, military advantage, trade, or agriculture and was definitely needed for the daily needs of local residents. Water is a gift, but how do we give gratitude for this foundation of life in the places we call home?

97% of the world's water is salt water, leaving only 3% as freshwater. But only 0.5% of the earth's water is freshwater and also available for most life on earth (not frozen, polluted, stored in the atmosphere, or too far underground). While 70% of the earth is covered in water, water scarcity is a real and a growing threat with almost 8 billion people now on earth and another 140 million added every year. Canadians are ranked near the top of the list for how much water we consume both directly in the home and indirectly from our lifestyles. The global average is 1.4 million litres a year, while Canadians consume 2.3 million litres a year.

We are born in water and throughout our lifecycle, water is our medicine for connection and vitality. Our reverence for water can be seen in cross-cultural and multi-faith ceremonies, but also in our fondness for local beaches, lakes, shorelines, rivers, and ravines as we swim, stroll, boat, fish, gather, and play. We are each about 60% water and after just a few days, our body water matches the water bodies spiralling around us. What we do to the waters we do to ourselves. Just like each breath we take thanks to the oxygen-giving trees, we live an ancient, ancestral, and mystical kinship with water.



WATER IS A SHARED COMMONS

Humans clean and treat our water in various ways, but the rest of creation cannot. There are no taps or bottles for the winged, the four-legged, and the finned. Just as we inherit past legacies of environmental pollution, decisions today will affect many generations to come when considering housing types, transportation options, flood management, food security, energy consumption, and a regenerative and fair economy. Clean water is not a single issue, but a critical link and sensitive marker between dynamic and living systems.

The water cycle exceeds the size of municipal borders, since watersheds naturally flow and political borders are artificially fixed. The water cycle also extends our relationship to time. Four year election cycles and political mandates struggle to govern water issues that take decades and even centuries to wisely manage, respect, and align with.

Water is for life, not for profit. Yet, Canadians consume 2 billion single-use plastic bottles of profit-based bottled water every year. Companies pay \$503.71 for a million liters of ground water in Ontario making millions of dollars, while public water systems do not have the investments needed to provide clean water and sanitation for the needs of today and the growing needs of tomorrow. Public tap water is tested more rigorously than bottled water, but trust in tap water wanes due to a lack of education and investment. Some municipalities even sell their public water to private corporations for bottling with these bulk water contracts often hidden from public view and scrutiny. The Ontario government gives these permits and takes the payments without the consent or shared decision making by First Nations.

Researchers estimate that there will be more plastic in the ocean in 2050 than fish (by weight). Each of us also consume thousands of microplastics everyday through our water and food diets. Plastic does not biodegrade and is continuously being absorbed into larger living systems - including us. Only 50% of plastic water bottles are recycled with the remainder littering local walk and waterways. Tax-funded recycling programs struggle to process this growing amount of plastic waste, while companies selling the plastic water bottles keep all the profit.

Water is a shared commons because it connects and supports all life, calls upon our inter-generational responsibilities, and teaches us about larger life-giving systems. If municipal governments want to uphold the spirit of the Treaties, then respecting a shared commons also requires shared responsibility and shared benefit between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.



QUESTIONS FOR YOURSELF

- Where does your tap water come from and where does your wastewater go?
- What local water issues are important to you or affect society's most marginalized?
- What water issues might be critical for future generations and your non-human neighbours?
- Does your Municipality have a Land Acknowledgement that honours the territory and the Indigenous nations as the ancestral guardians? How does this acknowledgement include water?



QUESTIONS FOR YOUR LOCAL CANDIDATES

- Can you talk about the importance of protecting our local waters, how you would prevent them from being polluted, and how you would repair historical damages?
- Can you talk about how you would be an honourable Treaty partner with local First Nations when it comes to decisions that affect the human right to water and the health and sacredness of water for all of creation?
- Can you talk about how you would connect people to our watershed? How would you promote residents being better water guardians through either more recreation, celebration, ceremony, education, or inspiration?
- Can you talk about how you would better connect people to municipal tap water so that they can better access and have trust in this water both at home and across the community?
- Can you talk about how you would promote water for life (not for profit), help eliminate access to bottled water at municipal and municipally funded locations, and reduce the need for bottled water across the municipality?
- Can you talk about the rise of more plastics in our local watersheds and what you would do to reduce this form of 'forever' pollution?
- Can you talk about how you would ensure the human right to clean water and sanitation for everyone in the municipality, including the homeless who rely on public spaces and infrastructure for drinking water, toilets, and showers?
- Can you talk about the current state of the municipal water infrastructure and the types and levels of investment you would advocate for to ensure safe, trusted, affordable, and accessible water for all and for future generations?
- Can you talk about your personal connection to local waters and your commitment and curiosity for being a water guardian?

EXAMPLES TO INSPIRE ADVOCACY ACROSS ALL MUNICIPALITIES

Getting informed about your drinking water

<https://www.knowyourh2o.com/indoor-2/get-informed>

Peterborough Children's Water Festival

<https://pcwf.net/>

Guelph 2 Rivers Festival

<https://www.2riversfestival.org/>

Greater Sudbury plans on spending \$1M to install 132 water bottle refilling stations

<https://www.sudbury.com/local-news/city-phasing-out-single-use-plastic-water-bottles-5671672>

Tiny Forests are Emerging in Hamilton

<https://greenventure.ca/tiny-forests-are-emerging-in-hamilton/>

Toronto's Indigenous Affairs Office

<https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accessibility-human-rights/indigenous-affairs-office/>

BlueWptbo provides easy access to free drinking water in the Peterborough area

<https://kawarthanow.com/2022/07/07/bluewptbo-provides-easy-access-to-free-drinking-water-in-the-peterborough-area/>

City of London Bulk Water Access

<https://london.ca/living-london/water-environment/water-system>

Toronto's H2O To Go Water Trailer

<https://www.toronto.ca/services-payments/water-environment/tap-water-in-toronto/request-an-hto-to-go-water-trailer/>

Ontario's 14 Blue Communities

<https://canadians.org/bluecommunities/>

Native Land is an app to help map Indigenous territories, treaties, and languages.

<https://native-land.ca/>

London's Antler (Thames) River Rally cleanup

<http://www.antlerriverrally.ca/2022/07/august-cleanup-location-tbd.html>

Sault Ste. Marie source water protection:

<https://ssmrca.ca/source-water-protection/about-source-water-protection/>

What's wrong with land acknowledgments, and how to make them better

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/land-acknowledgments-what-s-wrong-with-them-1.6217931>

Map of long-term drinking water advisories on public systems on reserves

<https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1620925418298/1620925434679>

Ontario map of all drinking water advisories

<https://watertoday.ca/maptest4.asp?province=8>

Water crisis in First Nations communities runs deeper than long-term drinking water advisories

<https://theconversation.com/water-crisis-in-first-nations-communities-runs-deeper-than-long-term-drinking-water-advisories-148977>

Swim Drink Fish initiatives help people protect their local waters

<https://www.swimdrinkfish.ca/initiatives>

City of Kingston helps residents monitor bacterial sewer overflow

<https://utilitieskingston.com/Wastewater/SewerOverflow/Map>

Milwaukee Water Commons

<https://www.milwaukeewatercommons.org/>

Water Teachings. Decolonizing Water Project

<https://www.waterteachings.com/>

Why lakes and rivers should have the same rights as humans

https://www.ted.com/talks/kelsey_leonard_why_lakes_and_rivers_should_have_the_same_rights_as_humans

Past, Present, and Future series on Land Back (3 videos)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3sVg0Cvqh3k&t=1s>

UPCOMING EVENT

November 19th, Watershed 2022: a one day digital convention where environmental practitioners, grassroots groups, and intersectional movements gather for Water Justice.

https://www.wellingtonwaterwatchers.ca/watershed_2022



**IF YOU HAVE OTHER EXAMPLES OF WATER
PROTECTION, JUSTICE, AND KINSHIP PROJECTS,
PLEASE GET IN TOUCH AND WE CAN ADD THEM TO OUR LIST.**

**VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THESE ISSUES AND TO
DOWNLOAD COPIES OF THIS MUNICIPAL WATERS GUIDE.**

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