

To: COUNCIL

Meeting Date: 6/17/2025

Subject: **25-033-CRS Regional Working Group Firework Recommendations**

Submitted By: Danielle Manton, City Clerk

Prepared By: Elisabeth Slusarczyk, Manager of By-law Compliance

Report No.: 25-033-CRS

File No.: C11

Wards Affected: All Wards

RECOMMENDATION(S):

THAT Report 25-033-CRS Regional Working Group Fireworks Recommendations be received;

AND THAT Council approves the three key recommendations to: reduce the permitted times of fireworks discharge; restrict the sale of fireworks in the City of Cambridge starting January 2026 and increase the administrative penalties.

AND FURTHER THAT staff be directed to report back to Council with an updated Fireworks By-law following approval of report 25-033-CRS Regional Working Group Firework Recommendations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with recommendations and findings related to the regulations for the sale and discharge of fireworks from public engagement conducted and from the regional working group.

Public surveys were conducted; City of Cambridge in March 2024 and January 2025 by regional municipalities which show support for more restrictions related to fireworks. The working group also gathered information from a municipal scan.

Key Findings

Throughout the consultation and in discussions with Regional municipalities, it was evident that regional alignment within each respective Fireworks By-law would be a benefit across the region to the public.

A new fireworks by-law aligning with regional partners will support actions being taken by Municipalities within the Region of Waterloo but also throughout Ontario and aids in providing a consistent, accessible, and fair approach to Municipal By-law Compliance. The recommendations for this report represent a continued support to improving the safety and livability of our community

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications at this time related to this report.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT:

☒ Strategic Action

Objective(s): VIBRANT NEIGHBOURHOOD - Promote, facilitate and participate in the development of safe and healthy neighbourhoods with a range of housing options

Strategic Action: Encourage safe and healthy neighbourhoods

OR

☐ Core Service

Program: Not Applicable

Core Service: Not Applicable

BACKGROUND:

The City of Cambridge last approved a Fireworks By-law in 2004. Since that time, the by-law has had several amendments in 2014, 2017 and lastly in 2023.

The most notable amendments include:

October 20, 2015: Diwali was added to the list of permitted days for setting off fireworks.

August 29, 2023: The inclement weather clause was removed, restricting fireworks to Victoria Day, Canada Day, and Diwali. Additionally, a timeframe was established, allowing fireworks only between dusk and 11:00 PM on these approved days.

As part of the Municipal By-law Compliance strategy, in late 2023, staff began a comprehensive review of the Fireworks By-law. In 2024, staff conducted public consultations, including four open houses and a survey to gather feedback from the community. Following this, in October 2024, Municipal Compliance staff were tasked with collaborating with other municipalities within the region to discuss a regional approach to fireworks regulations.

ANALYSIS:

The Regional Working Group

In early 2024, the staff from all municipalities and townships within Waterloo Region developed a staff working group to share information and insights related to Fireworks By-laws. The Regional Working Group (“the Group”) met monthly and focused discussions on best practices, local events related to fireworks, and studying municipal comparator both in Ontario and nationally. The Group identified the benefits to aligning Fireworks regulations across the three cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo as well as the four townships, North Dumfries, Wellesley, Woolwich and Wilmot.

The City of Kitchener provided information on outreach they had conducted with municipalities that had banned the sale and use of fireworks. This information is provided in Appendix C.

The Group also engaged with an industry representative from the Canadian National Fireworks Association and studied the effectiveness of other regulatory approaches.

The Group considered options for more consistency within the Region. A full ban on both the use and sale of fireworks was discussed but not considered, as it did not align with all area municipalities.

The Group was in strong agreement that consistency was paramount as a first approach to aligning the regulations across the Region. Consistency helps all Regional municipalities and townships ensure that the same message is actively promoted throughout the Region and provided the ability for Municipal Compliance to focus efforts in a streamlined manner.

Public Engagement

The City of Cambridge conducted a Fireworks Bylaw survey in March 2024 attached as Appendix A which was promoted through the EngageWR platform, and the Group conducted a public survey in January-February 2025 attached as Appendix B, the survey was conducted through the EngageWR platform in the region. The survey noted that the City of Cambridge survey had already been conducted to ensure that the public was made aware.

More than half of those who responded to both surveys supported stricter regulations and 64 percent of those surveyed in the City of Cambridge supported new regulations around firework safety. Some of the common suggestions for improvements to the current regulations were to implement restricted hours, require permits for private fireworks, and allow for fewer days that fireworks can be sold and enforcement.

General Statements/Preferences:

56 % believe there are too few regulations. (60% Regional Survey)

21 % feel the current level is appropriate. (21% Regional Survey)

12% think there are too many regulations. (16% Regional Survey)

64 % support additional restrictions (Regional 75 %) Time, location, sales, days

73% support higher fines

41 % support banning fireworks

One noteworthy comment was the repeated request to bring back more public fireworks, Cambridge and surrounding residents miss this tradition. This leads staff to believe there is a desire for public fireworks displays and increased enforcement efforts.

Industry Perspective:

Members of the Group met with Aleem Kanji, Chief Advocacy Officer of the Canadian National Fireworks Association (CNFA), to gain insight into industry perspectives.

Kanji expressed concerns that bans are not effective, and that education and increased fines and enforcement efforts are the best way to curb complaints outside of the regulations. He cited that many cities that had banned fireworks, such as Caledon, Brampton and Vancouver found that those restrictions had not eliminated the issues, and those bans were being reconsidered. In follow up with those cities with bans, none indicated that they planned to reverse their decisions, however they acknowledged that a reduction in complaints is gradual as public awareness improves.

Kanji did recommend expanding public education efforts through billboards, radio ads and vendor training that was the approach the City of London took. He further recommended enhancing enforcement efforts at peak times.

Education:

Many municipalities, residents and industry representatives have stated that enhanced education is essential to improving compliance with fireworks regulations.

To ensure there was a continued focus on education, staff will be working with neighbouring municipalities and internal communications divisions to expand public awareness and other community engagement.

City of Cambridge Fireworks Complaints

Year Total

2022 39

2023 17

2024 79

It should be noted that some fireworks calls may be categorized as general noise and not captured in these statistics.

There are impacts to receiving additional calls on the broader community including overwhelming the Waterloo Regional Police Dispatch and increasing the wait time for police non-emergency calls.

There are numerous safety concerns around the use of fireworks that include:

- Fireworks being used as a weapon and shot at a people or out of moving vehicles
- Increase in risk to city property when they are set off in parks, on roadways and sidewalks
- Damage to private property, including homes and vehicles
- Fire hazards due to improper use
- Environmental impacts
- Distress to pets, wildlife and those experiencing PTSD or auditory sensitivity
- Carelessness from those using them
- Safety to users and those in surrounding areas

The City of Cambridge hosts a Canada day fireworks display in Riverside Park each year. Neighbourhoods and other groups are permitted to apply for a display fireworks permit should they wish to host an event.

The following is a summary of the recommendations to Council for consideration:

1. Further restrict the time to display fireworks on permitted days

Staff recommend a two (2) hour window for each holiday when the use of fireworks would be permitted on the designated days. This time window would be adjusted for the time of year to align with the approximate sunset time.

The current Fireworks By-law states that fireworks are permitted between dusk and 11pm on the following days:

- Victoria Day
- Canada Day
- Diwali

The proposed changes would state:

- Victoria Day from 9:00pm-11:00pm
- Canada Day from 9:00pm-11:00pm
- Diwali from 8:00pm-10:00pm

Cambridge, Kitchener and Wilmot only permit fireworks for one day of Diwali. Only Waterloo and Wilmot permit fireworks on the Lunar New Year and there are no plans from the other municipalities to add this holiday. North Dumfries, Woolwich, and Wellesley do not permit fireworks on Diwali in their current by-laws and do not plan to add this holiday.

2. Prohibiting the Sale of Fireworks

Municipalities, under the authority of the Municipal Act 2001, may prohibit and regulate the sale of fireworks and the setting of fireworks. Staff are recommending that the sale of fireworks be prohibited in Cambridge. The Group discussed this as a measure to reduce access to fireworks and require individuals to plan the purchase and use of fireworks, rather than purchasing them impulsively.

The current fireworks bylaw permits the sale of fireworks on the permitted days and ten days preceding each of the permitted days. There is currently a fireworks (retail sale) business licence requirement for businesses who wish to sell fireworks, the permit only permits the sale of fireworks on the permitted days and during the preceding ten (10) days prior to permitted days. In 2024, there were ten (10) licences issued.

To ease in the transition and consider inventory that some businesses may already have, staff are recommending the ban on sales begin in January of 2026. This would also provide adequate time for public education on the change. The working group acknowledged that some residents may still obtain fireworks online or purchase from other municipalities and territories, however this would require advance planning and proof of age for online purchases and is expected to gradually decrease local usage over time.

3. Increasing Administrative Penalties

To improve compliance and enhance enforcement, staff are recommending that Council consider increasing the administrative penalties for fireworks related infraction.

Currently fines are \$250 per violation, with \$100 for a second offence and \$200 for a third offence with a 24-month period. Staff are recommending that fines be increased to \$1000 for the first offence and subsequent offences fees added as per administrative penalties bylaw fee structure.

In exceptional circumstances, staff could issue a summons requiring an individual to appear in provincial court with the potential of a higher fine being imposed by a Justice of the Peace. It is recommended that the maximum fine under the Provincial Offences Act be set at \$25,000 for an individual and \$50,000 for a corporation.

EXISTING POLICY / BY-LAW(S):

The City regulates the discharge of fireworks through Fireworks By-law #40-04, as amended.

The City also licenses the sale of fireworks within City limits through the Business Licensing By-law#142-16, as amended. The regulations include:

- Storage, transportation, and sale of fireworks shall conform with the federal Explosives Act
- Not sell any fireworks to someone under 18 years of age
- Only permitted to sell fireworks during the preceding ten (10) days prior to Victoria Day, Canada Day and Diwali.
- Require zoning approval
- Require fire approval

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no financial impact.

PUBLIC VALUE:

Sustainability:

Does not apply.

Leadership:

This report represents a meaningful step forward for the City of Cambridge in aligning with a regional approach to fostering inclusive, safe, and healthy neighbourhoods. Introducing an updated fireworks by-law will help strengthen community pride by establishing regulations that reflect the diverse needs and values of all residents.

Collaboration:

Collaboration will be key to the development of the updated fireworks by-law. This process will involve working with staff from Legal Services and the Cambridge Fire Department, to ensure the final recommendations are effectively implemented and reflect the needs and priorities of all stakeholders

Transparency:

To ensure transparency, staff will also be promoting compliance and a communication plan for public education of the rules so that members of our community are informed.

Engagement:

The community was invited to participate in the review of the fireworks by-law and invited to review the surveys and by participating in engagement sessions to bring community and staff together to brainstorm ideas, hear experiences and build solutions that will be presented to Council for approval in 2024. Hearing and checking in with our community partners at regular intervals will be an important part of the by-law review and ensures we stay relevant and fresh.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE INPUT:

Not applicable.

PUBLIC INPUT:

This report was posted publicly as part of the report process.

INTERNAL / EXTERNAL CONSULTATION:

Staff conducted a public survey in March 2024 with City of Cambridge residents. Staff were involved in a working group with regional municipalities such City of Kitchener, City of Waterloo Townships of North Dumfries, Wellesley, Woolwich and Wilmot who

conducted a survey in 2025 and provided recommendations. The opportunity to understand what respective communities are experiencing related to Fireworks is an important piece to next steps.

CONCLUSION:

The recommendations outlined in this report represent the views of those who participated in the survey and ensure consistency across the Region of Waterloo, should Council approve this report, staff will provide an updated bylaw to Council in July 2025.

REPORT IMPACTS:

Agreement: **No**

By-law: **Yes**

Budget Amendment: **No**

Policy: **No**

APPROVALS:

This report has gone through the appropriate workflow and has been reviewed and or approved by the following as required:

Director

Deputy City Manager

Chief Financial Officer

City Solicitor

City Manager

ATTACHMENTS:

1. 25-033-CRS Appendix A – City of Cambridge 2024 Survey Responses
2. 25-033-CRS Appendix B – Region working group 2025 Survey Responses
3. 25-033-CRS Appendix C – Various City Bans