



To: General Purposes Committee
From: Roeland Zwaag
General Manager, Engineering and Public Works
Elizabeth Ayers
General Manager, Parks, Recreation and Culture
Date: May 12, 2026
File: 10-6060-01/2025-Vol 01
Re: **Greater Vancouver Water District (Metro Vancouver) Watering Restrictions**

Staff Recommendations

1. *That during Stage 2 Restrictions and Stage 3 Restrictions under the Water Use Restriction Bylaw No. 7784 (the “Bylaw”), enforcement be temporarily suspended until October 15, 2026, in respect of watering otherwise prohibited by the Bylaw, where:*

- a. the person would qualify for a permit under section 3.1.1 of the Bylaw if that section applied during Stage 2 Restrictions;*
- b. the person has contacted the City through email to savewater@richmond.ca and submitted receipts and any other supporting documents required by the City demonstrating that the person would qualify for a permit under section 3.1.1 of the Bylaw if that section applied during Stage 2 restrictions;*
- c. the person has received written confirmation from the City that the request has been accepted;*
- d. the written confirmation is affixed to a post facing the street servicing the property, beside the principal driveway or if there is no driveway, in a visible location in the front yard of the property;*
- e. the watering occurs only within the 21-day period stipulated in the written confirmation from the City, and only while Stage 1, Stage 2, or Stage 3 restrictions are in effect; and*
- f. the City has not revoked or cancelled its approval of the request; and*

2. *That during Stage 3 Restrictions under the Water Use Restriction Bylaw No. 7784 (the “Bylaw”), enforcement be temporarily suspended until October 15, 2026, in respect of watering of public lots otherwise prohibited by the Bylaw, where:*

- a. a water management plan is in place for Watering lawns and grass boulevards; and*
- b. a water management plan is in place for Watering trees, shrubs, decorative planters, and flowers, excluding edible plants.*

Executive Summary

This report provides information on Metro Vancouver's Stage 2 watering restrictions effective May 1, 2026, expected activation of Stage 3 watering restrictions in June, and provides options for implementing policy and operational changes.

Richmond's Water Use Restriction Bylaw No. 7784 generally aligns with Metro Vancouver's Drinking Water Conservation Plan and supports the City's strong water conservation position. Under this bylaw, Watering Exemption Permits are issued only during Stage 1 restrictions. In moving directly to Stage 2, no exemption permits are currently being issued. Staff note that this has generated concern from residents who had either invested in new lawns or purchased nematodes based on the usual seasonal Stage 1 restrictions but are now not eligible for permits under Stage 2.

Activation of Stage 3 would restrict the City's ability to maintain its extensive tree inventory due to the configuration of its existing sprinkler systems.

A regional review found that while most Greater Vancouver Water District (GVWD) member jurisdictions have bylaws that conform to Metro Vancouver's staged restrictions, some municipalities have bylaw language which allows permitting during Stage 2 restrictions. In practice, a few municipalities are deviating from regional guidance. However, other municipalities in the region are currently considering advancing amendments to provide more flexibility during Stages 2 and 3 and clarify other allowable water uses.

Staff Report

Origin

Metro Vancouver announced on April 24, 2026, that the region will proceed directly to Stage 2 water restrictions on May 1, 2026, rather than beginning at Stage 1, marking the first time Metro Vancouver has taken this step. Metro Vancouver has also publicly communicated they expect to move to Stage 3 restrictions in early June this year. This report provides information on public feedback, potential impacts to City operations and municipal actions in the region.

Metro Vancouver's Drinking Water Conservation Plan (DWCP) is a regional policy developed with member jurisdictions and other stakeholders to manage the outdoor use of potable water during periods of high demand, water shortages, and emergencies.

The DWCP is managed through four levels of staged water restrictions. Under the DWCP, Stage 1 water restrictions automatically take effect between May 1 and October 15 of each year, while higher stages are activated by the Greater Vancouver Water District Commissioner following criteria identified in Metro Vancouver's *Drinking Water Conservation Policy*. Some of these factors include in-season precipitation, reservoir storage levels, regional water demand, snowpack, and transmission system performance.

The DWCP provides guidance for member municipalities. Implementation and enforcement of water restrictions is done by each individual municipality through their municipal bylaws.

Richmond has taken a proactive approach to water conservation, as demonstrated by several programs that support sustainable water use. These initiatives include water pressure management, rain barrel programs, toilet rebates, and leak adjustments. The City is also a recognized leader in the region with regards to water metering, with approximately 83% of the City's water use currently metered. Consistent with this approach, the City has largely adopted the recommendations of the current DWCP into its Water Use Restriction Bylaw No. 7784.

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan 2022-2026 Focus Area #5 A Leader in Environmental Sustainability:

Leadership in environmental sustainability through innovative, sustainable and proactive solutions that mitigate climate change and other environmental impacts.

Analysis

Water Use Restrictions Stages 1-3 Summary Table (Attachment 1) summarizes the differences between Stages 1, 2 and 3 in the City's Water Use Restriction Bylaw No. 7784.

Watering Exemption Permits

A number of residents have communicated to staff that they have either invested in new lawns or purchased nematodes with the expectation that Stage 1 water restrictions would be activated as of May 1, and that they would be able to obtain a Watering Exemption Permit in accordance with Bylaw No.7784. With Stage 2 in effect, the bylaw does not allow for permits to be issued.

Under Bylaw No. 7784, the City can issue Watering Exemption Permits under Stage 1 restrictions for newly installed lawns, newly installed landscaping, or for nematode treatment to control European chafer beetles. Permits issued under Stage 1 are valid for 21 days, and extension applications can be submitted for newly installed lawns or landscaping for an additional 21 days while Stage 1 restrictions are in effect. No new permits or extensions are issued during Stage 2 or higher restrictions, and all issued permits expire upon activation of Stage 3 restrictions.

Table 1 identifies the number of watering exemption permits issued over the past 5 years.

Table 1 – Issued Permits

Year	Number of Permits Issued
2025	94
2024	105
2023	170
2022	180
2021	110

Watering Exemption Permits in Other Municipalities

Staff conducted a regional scan to assess whether members of the GVWD have language in their bylaws allowing them to issue permits during Stage 2 restrictions, and whether those permits are being issued this year. Of the 19 GVWD member jurisdictions, 6 members have language within their bylaws that allow them to issue permits during Stage 2 water restrictions. The member jurisdictions are identified below.

Members with Conforming Bylaws:

- Richmond
- Vancouver
- City of North Vancouver
- Delta
- Coquitlam
- Township of Langley
- Langley City
- Surrey
- Burnaby
- Pitt Meadows
- Tsawwassen First Nation
- New Westminster
- Port Moody

Members with Permissive Bylaws (Bylaws give staff the discretion to issue permits under Stage 2):

- District of North Vancouver
- Maple Ridge
- Port Coquitlam
- West Vancouver
- Anmore
- Belcarra

Two municipalities continue to issue permits under Stage 2 restrictions (Maple Ridge and Port Coquitlam). Maple Ridge implemented a grace period as a temporary measure to accommodate residents impacted by the short notice for moving to Stage 2 restrictions, allowing residents to

apply for permits until May 8, 2026. Port Coquitlam is continuing to issue permits throughout Stage 2.

City Trees

Many of the City's boulevards with trees are equipped with single zone sprinkler systems that water the entire boulevard. Under Stage 2 restrictions, Bylaw No.7784 allows the City to use these sprinklers to water trees in accordance with a water management plan approved by the General Manager, Engineering and Public Works. The Bylaw does not allow this under Stage 3.

Potential Changes in Other Municipalities

Staff have discussed this issue with other municipalities in the region, and similar public feedback has been received and is being considered. Surrey City Council approved proposed amendments to their bylaw on May 11, 2026 to address the impacts of this year's early implementation of Stage 2 restrictions, along with other housekeeping amendments. These changes include:

- Removing the automatic activation of a water restriction stage in Surrey after announcement from the GVWD commissioner;
- Allowing flexibility in the issuance of Surrey's equivalent of Water Exemption Permits during Stage 2 with these permits remaining valid if Stage 3 is activated during the time period allowed by the permit;
- Allowing pool filling and top-up during Stage 3 for small residential pools 5,000 litres or less;
- Exempting municipal pools, spray parks, parks and sports fields from water restrictions; and
- Clarifying permitted water use for municipal operations and construction during Stages 1, 2 and 3.

The text of the bylaw amendments was not available at the time this report was prepared.

Options for Consideration

Staff have identified options for consideration below to manage the City's implementation of watering restrictions.

Option 1 – Status Quo

Under this option, no changes would be made to Bylaw No. 7784. No new Water Exemption Permits would be issued while Stage 2 or 3 restrictions are in effect. Homeowners that had anticipated receiving permits will need to rely on rainfall under Stages 2 and 3. Under Stage 3 the City would rely on hand watering trees, shrubs and flowers in areas where drip irrigation systems are not installed. Also, should Metro Vancouver announce Stage 3 in early June as they have indicated, the additional water use restrictions summarized in Attachment 1 would come into effect.

Option 2 – Temporarily Suspend Enforcement of Portions of Bylaw No. 7784 (recommended)

Under this option, Council would adopt a resolution temporarily suspending enforcement of some sections contained in Bylaw No. 7784. Should Council wish to pursue this option, staff would recommend that certain sections of Bylaw No. 7784 be suspended. Homeowners and developers would be able to apply for Water Exemption Permits to support new lawns and chafer beetle mitigation measures, and the City will be able to better maintain the health of its extensive tree inventory.

To allow for Water Exemption Permits under Stage 2 and extension into Stage 3, the following resolution is recommended:

1. That during Stage 2 Restrictions and Stage 3 Restrictions under the Water Use Restriction Bylaw No. 7784 (the “Bylaw”), enforcement be temporarily suspended until October 15, 2026, in respect of watering otherwise prohibited by the Bylaw, where:

- a. the person would qualify for a permit under section 3.1.1 of the Bylaw if that section applied during Stage 2 Restrictions;*
- b. the person has contacted the City through email to savewater@richmond.ca and submitted receipts and any other supporting documents required by the City demonstrating that the person would qualify for a permit under section 3.1.1 of the Bylaw if that section applied during Stage 2 restrictions;*
- c. the person has received written confirmation from the City that the request has been accepted;*
- d. the written confirmation is affixed to a post facing the street servicing the property, beside the principal driveway or if there is no driveway, in a visible location in the front yard of the property;*
- e. the watering occurs only within the 21-day period stipulated in the written confirmation from the City, and only while Stage 1, Stage 2, or Stage 3 restrictions are in effect; and*
- f. the City has not revoked or cancelled its approval of the request.*

To allow for City watering of street trees in boulevards using existing sprinkler systems:

2. That during Stage 3 Restrictions under the Water Use Restriction Bylaw No. 7784 (the “Bylaw”), enforcement be temporarily suspended until October 15, 2026, in respect of watering of public lots otherwise prohibited by the Bylaw, where:

- a. a water management plan is in place for Watering lawns and grass boulevards; and*
- b. a water management plan is in place for Watering trees, shrubs, decorative planters, and flowers, excluding edible plants.*

Option 3 – Amend Bylaw No. 7784

Implications of this option to homeowners and the City are similar to Option 2. Under this option, Council would direct staff to amend Bylaw No. 7784 to permanently incorporate the revisions outlined in Option 2. An amendment bylaw would need to be prepared, and four

readings would be required. Expediting this process would also require Special Council Meetings to ensure timely adoption and implementation. Enforcement of the relevant sections in the bylaw would be suspended under this option until the bylaw amendments are adopted.

Budgetary Implications

None.

Conclusion

Metro Vancouver’s early implementation of Stage 2 watering restrictions has created challenges for residents, businesses and developers who have made investments into lawn and landscaping treatments, with the expectation that watering exemption permits would be accessible under Stage 1 conditions starting May 1. Richmond’s water use restrictions bylaw largely aligns with the regional DWCP and reflects the City’s strong position on water conservation. A regional scan shows that several members of the GVWD have flexibility within their water conservation bylaws to manage local water use. This report provides options for Council to maintain the status quo, provide temporary relief, or implement permanent bylaw amendments.

Respectfully submitted,

Milton Chan, Engineering

Todd Gross, Director, Parks Services

Report Contributors

This report was prepared by Jason Ho, Manager, Engineering Planning, and reviewed by Public Works, Law, Parks Services, and Community Bylaws and Licencing Departments.

Endorsed by Serena Lusk, CAO

Att. 1: Water Use Restrictions Stages 1-3 Table

Water Use Restrictions Stages 1-3 Summary Table

	Water Use	Stage 1 Restriction	Stage 2 Restriction	Stage 3 Restriction
Residential Lots	Watering lawns	A person may only water at the following times: - Even-numbered civic addresses: on Saturdays from 5 am to 7 am if automatic watering, on Saturdays from 6 am to 9 am if manual watering. - Odd-numbered civic addresses: on Sundays from 5 am to 7 am if automatic watering, on Sundays from 6 am to 9 am if manual watering.	Prohibited.	Prohibited.
	Watering new lawns or lawns being treated for the European Chafer Beetle	A permit holder may water outside restricted lawn watering days if in compliance with a permit.	A permit holder may water outside restricted lawn watering days if in compliance with a permit issued when Stage 1 restrictions were in force, until the permit expires. No new permits issued or renewed.	Prohibited. All permits issued for lawn watering are revoked.
	Watering trees, shrubs, decorative planters, and flowers, excluding edible plants	A person may only water from 5 am to 9 am on any day if using a sprinkler. A person may water on any day, at any time, if using a handheld hose, soaker hose, water container, or drip irrigation.	A person may only water from 5 am to 9 am on any day if using a sprinkler. A person may water on any day, at any time, if using a handheld hose, soaker hose, water container, or drip irrigation.	Prohibited if using a sprinkler or soaker hose. A person may water on any day, at any time, if using a handheld hose, water container, or drip irrigation.
	Washing impermeable surfaces (sidewalks, driveways, fences, walls, roofs, or other outdoor surfaces)	No restrictions.	Prohibited except if: - for health or safety reasons; - to prepare the surface for painting, sealing, or similar treatment; - to prevent or control fires; or for aesthetic cleaning by a commercial cleaning operation.	Prohibited except if: - for health or safety reasons; - to prepare the surface for painting, sealing, or similar treatment; or - to prevent or control fires.
	Topping up or filling aesthetic water features	No restrictions.	Prohibited.	Prohibited.

	Water Use	Stage 1 Restriction	Stage 2 Restriction	Stage 3 Restriction
Residential Lots	Topping up or filling pools and hot tubs	No restrictions.	No restrictions.	Prohibited.
	Washing vehicles, boats, trailers and other motive equipment	No restrictions.	No restrictions.	Prohibited, except to clean windows, lights, mirrors, licence plates, and boat engines for safety.
Non-Residential Lots	Watering lawns	A person may only water at the following times: - Even-numbered civic addresses: on Mondays from 4 am to 6 am if automatic watering, on Mondays from 6 am to 9 am if manual watering. - Odd-numbered civic addresses: on Tuesday from 4 am to 6 am if automatic watering, on Mondays from 6 am to 9 am if manual watering.	Prohibited.	Prohibited.
	Watering new lawns or lawns being treated for European Chafer Beetle	A permit holder may water outside restricted lawn watering days if in compliance with a permit.	A permit holder may water outside restricted lawn watering days if in compliance with a permit issued when Stage 1 Restrictions were in force, until the permit expires. No new permits issued or renewed.	Prohibited. All permits issued for lawn watering are revoked.
	Watering trees, shrubs, decorative planters, and flowers, excluding edible plants and turf at turf farms	A person may only water from 4 am to 9 am on any day if using a sprinkler. A person may water on any day, at any time, if using a handheld hose, soaker hose, water container, or drip irrigation.	A person may only water from 4 am to 9 am on any day if using a sprinkler. A person may water on any day, at any time, if using a handheld hose, soaker hose, water container, or drip irrigation.	Prohibited if using a sprinkler or soaker hose. A person may water on any day, at any time, if using a handheld hose, water container, or drip irrigation.
	Watering golf courses	No restrictions.	Watering of fairways is allowed on no more than one day in a seven-day period, except if operating under an approved water management plan.	Watering of fairways is prohibited except if operating under an approved water management plan.

	Water Use	Stage 1 Restriction	Stage 2 Restriction	Stage 3 Restriction
Non-Residential Lots	Washing impermeable surfaces (sidewalks, driveways, fences, walls, roofs, or other outdoor surfaces)	No restrictions.	Prohibited except if: - for health or safety reasons; - to prepare the surface for painting, sealing, or similar treatment; - to prevent or control fires; or for aesthetic cleaning by a commercial cleaning operation.	Prohibited except if: - for health or safety reasons; - to prepare the surface for painting, sealing, or similar treatment; or - to prevent or control fires.
	Topping up or filling aesthetic water features	No restrictions.	Prohibited.	Prohibited.
	Topping up or filling pools and hot tubs	No restrictions.	No restrictions.	Prohibited except for pools and hot tubs operating in accordance with written permission issued by an authorized health authority.
	Washing vehicles, boats, trailers and other motive equipment	No restrictions.	No restrictions.	Prohibited except to clean windows, lights, mirrors, licence plates, and boat engines for safety.
	Commercial vehicle washing	No restrictions.	No restrictions.	Prohibited except if operating under the following conditions: - facilities that installed an automatic vehicle wash system before November 1, 2017: operating on a basic wash and rinse cycle only; - facilities that installed an automatic vehicle wash system after November 1, 2017: operating using a water recycling system that achieves a minimum 60% water recovery rate over the full wash cycle; or - hand wash and self-service facilities: operating using high-pressure wands or brushes that achieve a maximum flow rate of 11.4 litres per minute.

	Water Use	Stage 1 Restriction	Stage 2 Restriction	Stage 3 Restriction
Public Lots	Watering lawns and grass boulevards	Watering is only allowed at the following times, except when watering in accordance with an approved water management plan: - Even-numbered civic addresses: on Mondays from 4 am to 6 am if automatic watering, on Mondays from 6 am to 9 am if manual watering. - Odd-numbered civic addresses: on Tuesday from 4 am to 6 am if automatic watering, on Tuesday from 6 am to 9 am if manual watering.	Prohibited except when watering in accordance with an approved water management plan.	Prohibited.
	Watering new lawns or lawns being treated for the European Chafer Beetle	A permit holder may water outside restricted lawn watering days if in compliance with a permit.	A permit holder may water outside restricted lawn watering days if in compliance with a permit issued when Stage 1 restrictions were in force, until the permit expires. No new permits issued or renewed.	Prohibited. All permits issued for lawn watering are revoked.
	Watering trees, shrubs, decorative planters, and flowers, excluding edible plants	Watering is only allowed from 4 am to 9 am on any day if using a sprinkler. Watering is allowed on any day, at any time, if using a handheld hose, soaker hose, water container, or drip irrigation.	Watering is only allowed from 4 am to 9 am on any day if using a sprinkler. Watering is allowed on any day, at any time, if using a handheld hose, soaker hose, water container, or drip irrigation.	Prohibited if using a sprinkler or a soaker hose. Watering is allowed on any day, at any time, if using a handheld hose, water container, or drip irrigation.
	Watering soil-based playing fields	Watering is only allowed from 7 pm to 9 am on any day, except if: - watering newly over-seeded fields in compliance with a permit; or - watering in accordance with an approved water management plan.	Watering is allowed on no more than four days in a seven-day period and only from 7 pm to 9 am, except if: - watering newly over-seeded fields if in compliance with a permit; or - watering in accordance with an approved water management plan.	Watering is allowed on no more than 3 days in a 7-day period and only from 7 pm to 9 am, except if: - Watering newly over-seeded fields if in compliance with a permit; or - Operating under an approved water management plan.

	Water Use	Stage 1 Restriction	Stage 2 Restriction	Stage 3 Restriction
Public Lots	Watering sand-based playing fields	Watering is only allowed from 7 pm to 9 am on any day, except if: - watering newly over-seeded fields in compliance with a permit; or - watering in accordance with an approved water management plan.	Watering is only allowed from 7 pm to 9 am on any day, except if: - watering newly over-seeded fields if in compliance with a permit; or - watering in accordance with an approved water management plan.	Watering is allowed on no more than 5 days in a 7-day period and only from 7 pm to 9 am, except if: - Watering newly over-seeded fields if in compliance with a permit; or - Operating under an approved water management plan.
	Flushing water mains	Prohibited	Prohibited.	Prohibited.
	Operating water play parks and pools	No restrictions.	Prohibited except water play parks with user-activated switches.	Prohibited except water play parks with user-activated switches.
	Topping up or filling aesthetic water features	No restrictions.	Prohibited.	Prohibited.
	Topping up or filling pools and hot tubs	No restrictions.	No restrictions.	Prohibited except for pools and hot tubs operating in accordance with written permission issued by an authorized health authority.
	Washing vehicles, boats, trailers and other motive equipment	No restrictions.	No restrictions.	Prohibited except to clean windows, lights, mirrors, licence plates, and boat engines for safety.