



REPORT

TO: Mayor Lawlor and Members of Council
FROM: Alex Fuller, Director of Communications
DATE: October 28, 2024
REPORT NO.: ADMIN-2024-014
SUBJECT: Fireworks Survey Results

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report No. ADMIN-2024-014 dated October 28, 2024 regarding Fireworks Survey Results be received;

AND FURTHER THAT Council:

a) approve that Fireworks By-law 2023-0032 remain status quo;

OR

b) amend Fireworks By-law 2023-0032 to ban the sale of family fireworks (low hazard) in Halton Hills;

OR

c) amend Fireworks By-law 2023-0032 to ban the sale and discharge of family fireworks (low hazard) in Halton Hills.

KEY POINTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- The Town contracted Forum Research to conduct a statistically valid survey of residents view of Fireworks in Halton Hills
- 450 surveys were completed providing an accuracy level of +/- 4.62%.

- The survey results included 40% of respondents in favour of a complete ban on the sale and use of family style fireworks and 60% of respondents not in favour.
- Information about the fireworks issue (impact report, staff reports etc.) was placed on the Town's engagement platform letstalkhaltonhills.ca for residents to learn more. The site also reminded residents that comments could be shared with the Mayor and/or their Ward Councillors.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

For many years, the Town's by-law regarding family fireworks did not change. Residents were allowed to purchase and discharge fireworks at their homes on specific days.

The Halton Hills Fire Department began looking at updating the current by-law and a series of reports were brought forward to Council:

On **March 6, 2023** Council heard Report No. FIRE-2023-002 which identified challenges and opportunities to consider when updating Fireworks By-law 2004-0122. The information report discussed a municipal scan that was conducted by staff in order to update and amend the Town's fireworks by-law. The report listed opportunities to explore which included banning the sale and use of fireworks in Halton Hills. Councillors' comments were collected during the discussion with staff to return at a later date with a recommendation report.

On **April 17, 2023** staff returned to Council with recommendation Report No. FIRE-2023-004. The report recommended:

- The addition of Diwali, Lunar New Year and New Year's Eve as dates fireworks could be discharged;
- A ban on the sale of family fireworks in Halton Hills;
- Time restriction for the discharge of fireworks to be 11pm; and
- Other housekeeping amendments.

Council voted to remove the section which prohibited the ban on the sale of fireworks and provided further directions to staff:

Direction to Staff (#1)

THAT staff consult with other municipalities on the impacts of banning the sale of fireworks, the impact fireworks have on wildlife and the potential for safe spaces for the discharge of fireworks;

AND FURTHER THAT staff bring back a report to Council outlining the findings at a future meeting date.

Direction to Staff (#2)

THAT staff include a public consultation strategy when staff reports back to Council.

At the **May 8, 2023**, Council meeting the report received final disposition and the new by-law was adopted by Council. However, at that meeting, the direction to staff was further amended to read:

Direction to Staff (#3)

THAT staff research the impacts fireworks have on livestock, the environment and noise, with or without the ban or sale of fireworks;

AND FURTHER THAT the public consultation also seek input on the dates and times fireworks may be discharged;

AND FURTHER THAT staff research an outright ban of fireworks and other options or models other municipalities may be using in place of the discharge of fireworks.

All other recommendations were approved by Council and the newly amended Fireworks By-law 2023-0032 was adopted on **May 8, 2023**.

As part of the research that staff conducted on the impacts fireworks have on livestock, the environment and noise, staff retained Dillon Consulting Limited to provide a literature review. At a Council workshop on **April 8, 2024** the results of that review were provided to Council along with further information staff obtained through municipal scans. The Dillon report spoke to the negative impacts on animals and the environment. At the conclusion of the workshop, Council provided a direction to staff to “bring forward a recommendation report, leaving the current fireworks by-law status quo until a public survey can be conducted”.

On **May 6, 2024** a staff recommendation Report No. FIRE-2024-003 was presented to Council along with the Dillon Consulting review. The consultant’s literature review contained findings with substantial negative impacts. The recommendation contained in the report was that staff retain a consultant to conduct a statistically valid survey to determine the community’s thoughts on whether or not to implement a ban on the sale and/or discharge of fireworks (given the results of the impacts on the wildlife and environment report.) A motion was put on the floor to amend the recommendation and to immediately ban the use, sale, offer, display, purchase, distribution, possession, and discharge of low hazard fireworks or explosives with the Town. The following amended motion was carried:

THAT Report No. FIRE-2024-003 dated April 9, 2024 regarding Response to Council Referred Matter – Fireworks, be received;

AND FURTHER THAT Council repeal By-law No. 2023-0032 to immediately ban the use, sale, offer, display, purchase, distribution, possession, and discharge of low hazard fireworks or explosives within the Town of Halton Hills effective September 1, 2024;

AND FURTHER THAT staff investigate and present back to Council, possible alternatives to registered community groups high hazard fireworks display.

At the **May 27, 2024** Council meeting the recommendation did not get adopted by Council, therefore the motion failed. With no recommendations for fireworks on the floor, Councillor Racinsky indicated through a Notice of Motion that he would bring a Notice to the following Council meeting directing staff to obtain a public survey.

On **June 17, 2024** the following motion was adopted by Council:

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council direct staff to retain a consultant to conduct a statistically valid survey as soon as possible to determine the community's thoughts on whether or not to implement a ban on the sale and discharge of fireworks (given the results of the impacts on the wildlife and environment report);

AND FURTHER THAT Council directs staff to bring forward a report at a future meeting to present the results of the survey including any comments received, with options for Council to consider to make a decision how to proceed with fireworks in Halton Hills.

SURVEY:

Council directed staff to retain a consultant to conduct a statistically valid telephone survey to understand residents' views about the sale and discharge of fireworks in Halton Hills. This direction then moved the file from the Fire Department to Communications.

Communications staff issued a Request for Quotation (RFQ) and awarded the project to Forum Research who conducted the telephone survey between August 6-24. A total of 450 surveys were completed to provide a level of accuracy within +/- 4.62%.

The survey was facilitated over several weeks in August, for the purposes of soliciting input on two key points:

- i) whether or not the Town should ban the sale of fireworks in Halton Hills, and
- ii) whether or not the Town should ban at home, family-type fireworks in Halton Hills.

A copy of the survey questions is attached as Appendix A.

A copy of the consultant's report is attached as Appendix B. The following points reflect the consultant's key findings.

Usage and Awareness

60% of the respondents are aware of the Town of Halton Hills' fireworks by-law, which regulates the purchase and discharge of consumer/family fireworks. Additionally, 57% of respondents are also aware that a permit is required for setting off fireworks outside of designated holidays such as Victoria Day, Canada Day, Lunar New Year, Diwali, and New Year's Eve.

In the past year, 33% of respondents have attended a public fireworks display in Halton Hills. Additionally, 19% have attended a consumer/family fireworks event, while 11% have purchased or used consumer/family fireworks themselves.

Concerns and Issues

When it comes to concerns about consumer/family fireworks in Halton Hills, 28% of respondents indicated they were not concerned at all. Meanwhile, nearly three-quarters of respondents (72%) expressed some level of concern. Of those, 34% cited personal safety or injury as their primary issue. Other significant concerns include noise pollution (23%), irresponsible use (21%), fire hazards (21%), and disturbances to pets and wildlife (21%).

Preference for Regulation

On regulation of fireworks, 40% of respondents are in favor of a complete ban on the sale and use of consumer/family fireworks. Among them, 82% believe that the Town should increase enforcement and/or penalties to support such a ban, even if it incurs additional costs. If a ban is not implemented, 12% of respondents believe that increased by-law enforcement is necessary, while 9% each suggest increasing penalties for rule-breakers and/or limiting where fireworks can be used.

More than 1 in 4 respondents (NET Positive: 27%) anticipated positive impacts if fireworks were banned, with benefits for animals and wildlife being the most frequently mentioned (10%). On the other hand, a nearly similar proportion of respondents (NET Negative: 24%) expected negative impacts, with loss of enjoyment (14%) emerging as the most cited. Additionally, 3 in 5 respondents (62%) indicated that a fireworks ban would have no impact on them.

COMMUNICATIONS

Staff promoted the survey in advance to ensure that those members of the public who received a call about it understood that it was a legitimate request. Promotion also included messaging that information about the fireworks issue was available on letstalkhaltonhills.ca and that comments could be submitted to the mayor and/or ward councillors. Communications included a media release, social media posts and advertising.

The Town's engagement platform was used to house the various fireworks-related reports as well as links to Council meeting discussions. The page did not allow for input but rather included the contact information for the Mayor and Council should the public wish to share their thoughts. This decision was made in discussion with the consultant, who noted concern about soliciting online qualitative data while concurrently conducting a statistically valid survey by telephone.

The project page was launched on July 22, 2024. As of October 18, there have been 331 visits to the page (51 stemmed from social media promotion). Of note, there were no clicks or downloads of the consultant's literature review/impact study.

COMMENTS RECEIVED BY MAYOR & COUNCILLORS

Some residents chose to submit their comments about fireworks to the Mayor and/or their Ward Councillor. These comments have been collated by the Mayor's office with any identifying information redacted and are attached to this report as Appendix C.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report is administrative in nature and does not have an impact on the Town's Strategic Plan

RELATIONSHIP TO CLIMATE CHANGE:

This report is administrative in nature and does not directly impact or address climate change and the Town's Net Zero target.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Public engagement included use of the Town's engagement platform letstalkhaltonhills.ca for the purposes of educating the public and serving as a repository for housing information related to the fireworks issue.

INTERNAL CONSULTATION:

For the writing of this report, staff consulted with the Fire Chief and Commissioner of Fire Services, Town Clerk and Director of Legislative Services and the Fire Prevention Officer.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

This report is administrative in nature and does not have any financial implications.

Reviewed and approved by,

Chris Mills, Chief Administrative Officer

Appendix A