

## Facilitate access to free drinking water in public places

### A tool to achieve it.

**T**hrough their land use and services, municipalities have a large influence on their citizens' health, lifestyle, and quality of life, not to mention the environment. In this regard, making water fountains more accessible to the population can be highly beneficial not only for the health and quality of life of citizens, but also in terms of waste reduction, sensible resource management, and the promotion of municipal water, among other things.

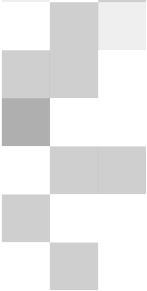
Besides being in sync with the spirit of the *Virage bleu* (Go blue) initiative embraced by various institutions, this measure is also very popular, as evidenced by the fact that 96% of the popu-

lation deems it is important to have access to a water fountain in public places. However, nearly 50% of Quebecers find that sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB) are easier to come by than a water fountain when they wish to drink something<sup>1</sup>.

### Enabling healthy hydration

Though the over-consumption of SSB is strongly associated with obesity, poor dental health, and numerous chronic illnesses, our food environment tends to encourage the consumption of these beverages.

Facilitating access to water fountains makes it possible to offer citizens a genuine healthy,



economical, and eco-friendly hydration option. Increasing the number of water points in public places can be beneficial for municipalities as well. Indeed, such a measure can help reduce the use of single-use containers, such as water or SSB bottles, which ultimately end up in municipally managed community recycling depots or garbage dumps.

### **Adopting a resolution: a coherent and promising measure**

In a factsheet titled *Fontaine, je boirai de ton eau* (Never say never to tap water), the Direction de santé publique de la Montérégie (Montérégie regional public health board) calls on municipalities to offer drinking water in public places, including

municipal buildings, parks, playgrounds, sports facilities, and near bicycle paths<sup>2</sup>. Adopting a resolution to favour access to free drinking water is a measure that can help promote drinking-water consumption and healthy hydration among citizens.

Such a measure places municipal water back on the marquee, aside from being consistent with other initiatives embraced by numerous Quebec municipalities, such as the *Programme d'excellence en eau potable* (PEXEP; program for excellence in drinking water)<sup>3</sup>, the Blue Communities Project<sup>4</sup>, the *Municipalité axée sur le développement durable* (municipality focused on sustainable development) approach and action plan<sup>5</sup>, and *Municipalité Active* (Active municipality)<sup>6</sup>.



## **INSPIRING INITIATIVES**

### **Map of existing water fountains**

The City of Vancouver has produced a map of where its water fountains are located in order to render them accessible to everyone. The map is available online to enable citizens to find a drinking water point quickly, when needed<sup>7</sup>.

### **Improve access to water at special and popular-holiday events**

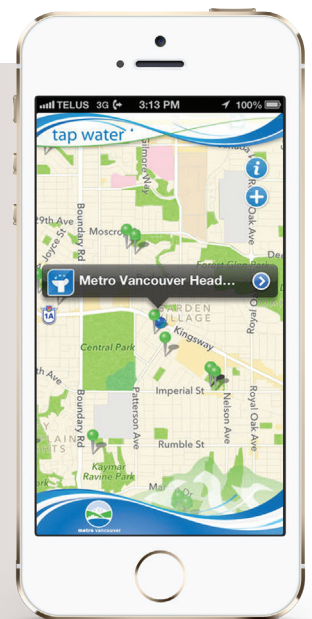
There are temporary drinking water installations available that allow adding to the regular supply of drinking water at special or popular-holiday events and during heat waves, for example. The City of Longueuil, for instance, owns a mobile water fountain that it deploys at certain public events<sup>8</sup>. Drinking water cisterns can be rented as well.

### **A fountain in every park!**

Some municipalities have opted to install at least one water fountain in every park. This makes it easy for residents to locate a fountain when need be. It also encourages park users, particularly children, to enjoy healthy hydration.

### **Bornéo system**

The Montreal borough of Plateau Mont-Royal has installed a new device that makes it possible for citizens to drink from fire hydrants. Approved by the City of Montreal Water Department and Fire Safety Department, the Bornéo system helps make drinking water more easily accessible, which can contribute to healthy hydration and the wellness of the population.





# ACCESS TO DRINKING WATER IN PUBLIC PLACES

WHEREAS (name city/town) is actively involved in promoting the health and wellness of its citizens by way of its municipal policies, land use, and services offered;

WHEREAS, from a health perspective, water is the ideal beverage for healthy hydration and its consumption must be encouraged and enabled;

WHEREAS it is important for the vast majority of citizens to have access to drinking water in public places, whatever the season;

WHEREAS the water of (name city/town) is safe, clean, and of excellent quality (specify any certification obtained, such as from the PEXEP);

WHEREAS (name city/town) has embraced an approach centred on sustainable development;

WHEREAS the bottling of water and other beverages in plastic containers and their distribution have a harmful impact on the environment;

WHEREAS only a small portion of single-use plastic bottles are recycled and that said bottles end up in the streets, parks, and waterways of the municipality, in addition to cluttering up landfill sites;

WHEREAS the elimination of bottled water must be compensated for by adequate access to municipal water in order to maintain the quality of life of citizens;

WHEREAS the municipality does not wish to promote the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages by increasing their visibility and accessibility following the removal of bottled water from its vending machines;

It was so moved by \_\_\_\_\_, seconded by \_\_\_\_\_, and further resolved by (unanimous/majority) vote that:

The city/municipality of (name of city/town/municipality):

- 1- Undertake to maintain existing water fountains properly;
- 2- Eliminate the option of bottled water in municipal buildings and parks, as well as at special events, and replace it with access to public tap water rather than with other bottled drinks, such as sugar-sweetened beverages;
- 3- Encourage the use of water bottles and re-usable containers;
- 4- Provide for the presence of water fountains when planning new public spaces, particularly near parks, playgrounds and sports facilities and along bicycle and pedestrian paths.

\* To take it further:

- 5- Ensure that at least one water fountain is available in every public place, building and park under municipal jurisdiction.
- 6- Make public a map of locations where citizens can drink water for free.

## Conclusion

Municipalities play a strategic role in the promotion of health and wellness and in the prevention of obesity and many diseases through their interventions, which have an immediate impact on the environment and the lifestyle of citizens. Whether it be to improve food options and access to healthy food and beverages, to encourage active transportation and the use of public transit, or to increase access to sports facilities, the possibilities for action are numerous and varied for municipalities. Enhancing access to free drinking water in public places is a useful and coherent endeavour that meets with citizen approval.

In order to make matters easier for municipalities that would like to implement a policy favouring access to free drinking water in public places, a model resolution to this effect has been made available to them (see page 3). Every municipality is free to use it, adapting it to its specific needs. ■



## Endnotes

1. Online omnibus survey conducted by Ipsos on behalf of the Quebec Weight Coalition among a representative sample of 1001 French-speaking respondents from Quebec, 18 to 74 years of age (November 12 to 20, 2012).
2. Direction de santé publique de l'Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de la Montérégie (ed.). *Fontaine, je boirai de ton eau!* [Never say never to tap water].
3. Réseau environnement (2014). [Programme d'excellence en eau potable](#) [Program for excellence in drinking water]. Consulted on June 25, 2014.
4. Coalition Eau Secours, Conseil des Canadiens & SCFP (eds.). *Guide du projet Communautés bleues du Québec* [Quebec blue communities project guide]. Consulted on April 27, 2014.
5. Ministère des Affaires municipales et de l'Occupation du territoire (ed.). *Municipalité axée sur le développement durable* [Municipality focused on sustainable development]. Consulted on June 25, 2014.
6. Kino-Québec (ed.). *Municipalité Active* [Active municipality]. Consulted on April 27, 2014.
7. City of Vancouver (2013). *Water Fountains*. Consulted on September 19, 2013.
8. Ville de Longueuil (2011). *Valorisation de l'eau potable. À Longueuil on boit à la source, un concept innovateur et unique!* [Marketing municipal drinking water. Tap water is top in Longueuil: An innovative and unique concept!] Consulted on June 25, 2014.



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