

Engagement Summary

Dark Sky By-law Review

Summary of feedback

City staff worked with Sage Solutions as a consultant to conduct community engagement following direction from Council to explore the need for a by-law to address light pollution in Guelph. Through an initial phase of engagement, staff sought to understand community interest related to the topic of light pollution and develop a short list of options to present for further community input. A second phase of engagement which consisted of a survey to validate phase one findings and get feedback on options. Detailed engagement results are compiled in three separate reports:

- Sage Solutions Survey Summary
- Sage Solutions Engagement Summary Report
- Sage Solutions Meetings, November 9 and 14, 2023

This summary is a snapshot of all engagement findings relating to a by-law to address light pollution. It describes what we did, what we heard, and what action we will take as a result of our research; a scan of municipal best practices; and other information we gathered from the community.

What we did

The City of Guelph hired Sage Solutions to conduct community engagement related to a by-law to address light pollution.

The project team hosted two community engagement meetings: one held in person at City Hall on November 9, 2023, and one virtual meeting on November 14, 2023. These meetings aimed to gauge the community's views on whether light pollution affects them, whether the City should regulate it and—if regulation is required—how it should be done.

Based on this first phase of engagement, staff created the following range of options under consideration for regulations or interventions in our city:

- regulation of all lighting, some lighting (such as specific light qualities or temperatures), or exclusively light trespass (issues caused when light is cast on a neighbouring property or structure)
- applying lighting regulations to a range of property types, including:
 - all, or only new residential and commercial,
 - all, or only new industrial, and/or
 - schools and institutions (such as hospitals and other campuses).
- establishing recommended guidelines for some or all the identified property types instead of regulations

We also asked the community if other property types, specific property or building sizes, or other intervention methods should be considered.

These options were shared in detail for in an online survey with the broader community for feedback between January 16 and February 25, 2024 on haveyoursay.guelph.ca.

What we heard

Sixty-two people attended the scheduled meetings and 704 people participated in the online survey. Sage Solutions has compiled the collected results in three reports:

- Sage Solutions Survey Summary
- Sage Solutions Engagement Summary Report
- Sage Solutions Meetings, November 9 and 14, 2023

Some key takeaways from the second phase of community engagement:

- Overall, the position on light pollution being an issue in Guelph was split, however most respondents (62.1 per cent) felt light pollution is at least somewhat a problem in our community.
- There is interest in regulation for residential properties:
 - Most respondents (58.9 per cent) want a by-law to regulate some or all forms of light pollution for existing residential units. Of those, a majority (31 per cent) are seeking a by-law to regulate all outdoor lighting from existing units to some extent.
 - There was a larger desire for regulating light pollution in new residential units, with 65 per cent of respondents seeking regulation for some or all forms of light pollution. Of those, a majority (44.7 per cent) want a by-law to regulate all outdoor lighting from new units to some extent.
- Similar patterns were seen in sentiment toward both business and industrial regulations with a majority of respondents interested in regulating some or all forms of light pollution, and most of those supporters interested in regulating all outdoor lighting to some extent.
- In both situations, like with residential, there was increased interest in regulations for new buildings.
- It is important to note that interest in regulating all outdoor lighting was highest for new and existing industrial buildings, with 54.9 per cent and 50 per cent supporting regulations respectively.
- When examined separately from other demographics, business or industrial property managers and owners in Guelph (101 respondents) fell largely in line with the rest of the respondents on the matters surrounding regulation of business and industrial properties, with 50 per cent of these respondents interested in regulations for light pollution, and 43 per cent specifically interested in regulations around light trespass in new industrial builds.

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- The main concerns with potential regulations were safety and security issues with potentially reduced lighting, followed by enforcement limitations and possible costs to taxpayers. Twenty-seven people explicitly noted they had no concerns.

The engagement results, overall, show that Guelph's residents and businesses support regulating outdoor lighting but are concerned with potential safety risks.

What we are doing

Staff will review community's feedback alongside research results and municipal best practices to share in a staff report and presentation to the Committee of the Whole on July 3, 2024. Upon presenting the recommendations in that report, staff will look to Council for further direction around development of a potential new by-law to regulate light pollution.

What we are not doing

Staff heard concerns from many residents about overly bright headlights and the dangers they pose to other motorists and pedestrians. Staff understand and appreciate these concerns but due to limited municipal powers, the City cannot address issues related to motor vehicles.

Next Steps

Staff will present a staff report providing data-driven recommendations to the Committee of the Whole on July 3, 2024. The community is invited to review the report ahead of the meeting and to delegate or submit correspondence if they have additional input they would like to submit for consideration.

Find more information on the delegation process and contacting Council on guelph.ca.