

Enhancing the City's Approach to Reporting, Tracking and Communicating Odour Issues at the Ashbridges Bay Treatment Plant

Date: June 17, 2026

To: City Council

From: Deputy City Manager, Infrastructure Services and Chief Communications Officer

Wards: 14 - Toronto - Danforth

SUMMARY

Following City Council direction to report back to June Council ([IE29.9](#)), this report outlines the actions taken and planned to enhance the City's approach to reporting, tracking, and communicating odour issues associated with the Ashbridges Bay Treatment Plant, following an odour event in April 2026.

Improvements include the introduction of a new service request through 311 for plant- or wastewater-related odour concerns to support consistent tracking, follow-up, and improved transparency for residents. A new communications strategy has been developed in partnership with Communications Division, which focuses on proactive community notification, supported by clearer trigger criteria and expanded outreach tools.

Toronto Water is also strengthening its internal incident escalation and notification processes to ensure more consistent application across operational events and more proactive notification for Councillors when issues arise. Planned capital investments, including primary tank refurbishments at Ashbridges Bay Treatment Plant and a future odour control facility on Coxwell Avenue, will further support the long-term mitigation of odour impacts in the surrounding community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Deputy City Manager, Infrastructure Services and Chief Communications Officer recommend that:

1. City Council receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of the recommendation contained in this report.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on May 20 and 21, 2026, City Council directed the Deputy City Manager, Infrastructure Services and the Chief Communications Officer, in consultation with the General Manager, Toronto Water and the Executive Director, Customer Experience Division, to create the necessary action plan to enhance the City's approach to reporting, tracking and communicating about odour issues at the Ashbridges Bay Treatment Plant and report directly to the June 24, 25 and 26, 2026 meeting of City Council to confirm that the following is in place: a new 311 Service Request for odour concerns related to the Ashbridges Bay Treatment Plant, as distinct from sewer odour, across all existing 311 channels, to be implemented by June 4, 2026, enabling regular reporting through 311 dashboards and enhanced tracking; a Community Notification Protocol, to be developed in consultation with the local Councillor, to ensure those within the airshed of the Ashbridges Bay Treatment Plant are notified of odour issues at the appropriate time and public messaging is provided; a Councillor Notification Protocol that ensures local Councillors are notified promptly of odour issues; that the largest primary tanks at the Ashbridges Bay Treatment Plant will undergo refurbishing in 2028 and the remaining primary tanks will be refurbished between 2028 and 2031; and the timeline for the installation of the odour control station on Coxwell Avenue.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2026.IE29.9>

At its meeting on May 6, 2026, the Infrastructure and Environment Committee requested the General Manager, Toronto Water, in consultation with the Deputy City Manager, Infrastructure Services, the Deputy City Manager, Corporate Services and the Chief Communications Officer to report directly to the May 20, 21 and 22, 2026 meeting of City Council with an initial framework for an improved community notification protocol for issues arising from the operations of the Ashbridges Bay Treatment Plant and a clear portal that captures and tracks all service requests related to its operations, and to include information in this report on whether there are any requirements in the Environmental Compliance Approval for a community notification protocol with the surrounding community. <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2026.IE29.9>

COMMENTS

The Ashbridges Bay Treatment Plant (ABTP), one of four wastewater treatment facilities operated by the City of Toronto, serves an equivalent population of approximately 1.39 million residents. In April 2026, a mechanical issue occurred involving one of the plant's primary treatment tanks, requiring the tank to be taken out of service for nearly two weeks. During this period, odours in the surrounding area became more concentrated, resulting in complaints from nearby residents. These concerns were shared with the City through multiple channels, including 311, direct contact with plant operations staff, and correspondence with the local Councillor's office. Interim operational measures were implemented to mitigate impacts, and repairs were subsequently completed, returning the tank to service.

During this scenario, opportunities were identified to improve the public notification process and ensure that the community and elected officials are made aware of odour issues more proactively from the surrounding wastewater treatment facilities. An initial community notification framework and approach to reporting and tracking odour issues at ABTP was brought forward for City Council consideration at their May 20 and 21, 2026 meeting, and direction was provided to report back with an action plan for enhancements to the City's existing approach. Below are additional details on the specific areas where enhancements have been or are in the process of being implemented in response to that direction.

Community Notification Protocol

Communications Division has developed a notification strategy that focuses on strengthening how the City communicates with residents and Councillors about odour and operational issues associated with wastewater treatment plants, with an emphasis on improved transparency, consistency, and proactive engagement. It responds to recent public and media attention and recognizes that odour impacts are complex, localized, and influenced by multiple factors, including plant operations, sewer infrastructure, and weather conditions.

To support this approach, a range of tactics are being implemented on a phased basis beginning in June 2026. Actions to date include geo-targeted social media ads beginning on May 15, 2026, and the creation of an updated, dedicated web page for ABTP, which went live June 5, 2026, and includes a link to the new online Sewer or Treatment Plant Odour service request form. ABTP was prioritized, but similar dedicated web pages are in development for the other three wastewater treatment plants. Additional tactics planned include web alerts linked to operational triggers, template-based e-updates on plant-specific information and news, and the rollout of supporting communications materials for Councillors to enable consistent engagement with constituents.

Implementation considerations highlight the need for improved coordination and data-driven decision-making. The current complaint intake process is fragmented across multiple channels, limiting the City's ability to track trends and respond consistently, and will need to be streamlined to support effective and timely communications. The

strategy also recognizes that not all odour events have a clear operational cause or warrant immediate notification, requiring the establishment of clear trigger points to balance transparency with appropriate escalation. Continued coordination between the Communications, Toronto Water, and Customer Experience divisions will help ensure consistent information and data are used to support public communications when issues arise.

Next steps include finalizing the community notification framework and associated trigger criteria and rolling out new communications tactics, including web content, e-updates, and proactive media engagement and bulletins. Work will also continue to develop standardized messaging, establish processes for timely alerts, and explore additional engagement opportunities, such as community outreach initiatives. Collectively, these actions are intended to support a more proactive, coordinated, and transparent approach to communicating with residents and Councillors regarding odour and operational issues.

Councillor Notification Protocol

Toronto Water maintains a plant-specific odour notification protocol to guide internal escalation and external communication during odour-related incidents. Building on lessons learned from recent events, Toronto Water will strengthen the application of this protocol to support more timely, consistent, and coordinated notification of all plant issues, including odour and noise.

While the protocol provides a solid foundation, its application has not been consistent. Introducing a 311 service request supports this notification protocol by ensuring Toronto Water has this data and information in their backend system. Reviewing this plant-specific odour notification protocol will establish clearer and more standardized notification triggers, escalation pathways, and decision points, while reinforcing expectations for when and how divisional senior leadership, TWCC, and the Communications Division are notified of plant-related issues. Improved and more proactive notification will also help ensure the applicable Councillor(s) are informed and equipped to respond to resident inquiries when plant-related issues arise.

Toronto Water also maintains broader internal incident identification, escalation, and response protocols through the Toronto Water Information for Serious Times and Emergency Responses (TWISTER) framework, which is designed to support the timely management of operational issues with potential service, environmental, regulatory, or public impacts across the entire division (e.g. major spills, large-scale service disruptions, etc.). The recent odour event identified opportunities to strengthen and modernize how the framework is applied in practice.

While TWISTER is structurally sound, its current implementation relies significantly on staff interpretation and experience, which can result in variability in how incidents are assessed, escalated, and communicated. To support more consistent and coordinated decision-making, Toronto Water will be undertaking work within the division between now and the end of 2026 to develop clearer incident triggers, escalation thresholds, notification requirements, and defined roles and responsibilities, as well as updating training and guidance materials for a variety of incidents. TWISTER is used for all

manner of incidents, including potential odour issues arising from plant operations impacting the community. This would be the first incident type to be reviewed as part of this work, which is underway now.

311 Service Request Enhancement for Reporting and Tracking Odours

Customer Experience Division (CXD), in collaboration with Toronto Water, has added a new service request to the City's 311 service request system to improve how residents report and track odour concerns related to wastewater treatment plants.

Customers are now able to submit service requests through all 311 channels (phone, website, email and mobile app) for odour concerns related to wastewater treatment plants, including ABTP. The new service request for Sewer or Treatment Plant Odour launched on June 4, 2026. Requests can now be formally tracked within the City's systems, allowing a customer to monitor the status of their submission and enabling the City to report on service request volumes, locations (including wards and specific wastewater treatment plants), and trends.

Using the new service request and clearly identifying whether an odour originates from a treatment plant or another source helps Toronto Water respond more quickly and effectively and will improve service for customers. To support this new service request, and to enhance existing processes for triaging requests, Toronto Water has implemented a more streamlined intake and investigation process. Sewer or Treatment Plant Odour requests will be initially triaged by 311 based on information provided by the customer about the odour in question, and its potential source. This information will be included in the service request, which is directed to Toronto Water's Customer Care team (TWCC) to further investigate. A customer may identify a treatment plant or sewer as the source of an odour when submitting a service request.

If a sewer is identified, 311 directs the service request to TWCC for investigation in accordance with the current process. Following review of the complaint, TWCC may contact the customer to obtain additional details, and field staff are dispatched to investigate local sewers to confirm the source of the odour.

If the customer identifies a wastewater treatment plant as the source of the odour, TWCC will investigate by first engaging the treatment plant to determine whether operational issues, capital projects, or other factors may be contributing to odour issues in the area. If the plant confirms it is the source of odours, TWCC will work with plant staff to gather information on planned mitigation measures and expected timelines to address the issue. TWCC will then follow up with the customer to share the findings of the investigation.

If the odour issue is determined not to originate from the identified treatment plant, TWCC will work with 311 to notify the resident that the issue is not plant-related, while advising that further investigation is underway. TWCC will then support additional investigation to identify the source of the odour and will work with field staff to gather further details and assess potential local sources. If the odour is determined to originate from a local sewer, appropriate mitigation measures will be assessed and implemented.

TWCC will then follow up with the resident to share the results of the investigation and the actions taken to resolve the issue.

During this process, Toronto Water will work with the Communications Division and the applicable local Councillor's office to notify them of odour issues, including those that originated from 311 service requests, that are determined to be severe or expected to persist for an extended period of time. This engagement will be replicated where proactive issues with the plant or local sewers are identified by Toronto Water, where there are no associated service requests or complaints, but it is determined the local community should be made aware. Staff continue to refine the triggers and workflows to support consistent implementation of this process.

Together, these enhancements represent a coordinated, cross-divisional effort to enhance service delivery, strengthen accountability, and improve the overall customer experience for residents.

ABTP and Odour Control Infrastructure Investments

Capital work planned in and around the ABTP will help further manage odours, and there are additional details below about the specific projects supporting this:

Primary Tank Repairs at ABTP

Six primary tanks at the ABTP (shown in Figure 1) will be refurbished in the coming years including replacement of all mechanical and electrical equipment. Tanks 10 to 12 will be refurbished by 2028 and Tanks 7 to 9 will be refurbished between 2028 and 2031. The projects are occurring in stages to ensure there are no impacts on plant operations.

These upgrades are essential in maintaining uninterrupted wastewater treatment service, while modernizing key infrastructure. It will also help reduce the risk of equipment failures that may contribute to local odour issues.



Figure 1 - Planned Tanks for Refurbishment at ABTP

Odour Control Facility (OCF) for the Coxwell Sanitary Trunk Sewer

The Coxwell Sanitary Trunk Sewer is a large diameter pipe that carries sanitary sewage from East York as well as parts of North York and Scarborough to ABTP for treatment. It services approximately 750,000 to 800,000 people in the city. Operation of this sewer can release odours through manholes at ground level in parts of the Coxwell-Rhodes Avenue community, which can lead to sewer odour complaints. A Municipal Class Environmental Assessment Study identified the property at 480 Coxwell Avenue as the preferred location to construct an OCF to address the sewer odour complaints in the area, and the expropriation of the property was approved in 2021.

Engineering and Construction Services is managing the construction project, which is currently in design. Based on the current schedule, construction is expected to begin in Fall 2027. The 2026-2035 Capital Plan includes costs for construction of the odour control facility, which are estimated to be \$15 million. Prior to construction beginning, a public consultation will be held next year, in coordination with the local Councillor's office. A rendering of the future OCF can be seen in Figure 2.



Figure 2 - Rendering of Future Odour Control Facility on Coxwell Avenue

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS
