

# Implementation Review of the Noise Bylaw

## Public Meeting 4 (of 6) General Noise (Virtual)

Via Zoom  
Tuesday, September 19, 2023



On Tuesday, September 19, 2023, the City of Toronto hosted the fourth of six public meetings to seek public input into the successes and challenges of implementing the Noise Bylaw amended in 2019, and to present and seek feedback on draft potential refinements to the Noise Bylaw. This meeting focused on seeking feedback on General Noise, including unreasonable and persistent noise, waste collection, and power device. 141 members of the public attended the meeting. Representatives from Municipal Licensing and Standards (MLS), including the Noise Enforcement team, also attended.

This summary was written by Third Party Public Inc., the engagement team retained by the City to facilitate the public meetings. It was subject to participant review before being finalized. It reflects the points discussed verbally, as well as written comments received at the meeting.

**The intent of this summary report is to capture the range of perspectives that were shared at the meeting. It does not assess the merit or accuracy of any of these perspectives nor does it indicate an endorsement of any of these perspectives on the part of Municipal Licensing and Standards or the City of Toronto.**

Note that the numbering of the points is intended for ease of reference only and not intended to imply any type of priority. Responses from MLS are *in italics*.

## FEEDBACK SUMMARY

The points below summarize the overall feedback received at the meeting. More details related to each point follow.

### OVERALL

1. **Most participants said that their experience with noise in the city has changed for the worse since 2019**, with many references to the stress and health issues noise creates.
2. **Many concerns related to the city's growth**, with interest in seeing the City require back-up beepers to be replaced with broad band reversing alarms, take more proactive measures to address noise through the Building Code, re-route heavy truck, clarity on how the Night Economy Review overlaps with the noise bylaw, etc.
3. **Stronger enforcement is necessary**. Crowd sourcing data collection for disturbing noise, increasing fines, and several other suggestions were made.
4. **The exemption granted for private garbage collection negatively impacts many**, with support for its removal.
5. **The vibration component of sound is a big problem**, and it needs to be addressed in the bylaw.
6. **Noise from leaf blowers has reached excessive levels**, with support for the ban on 2-stroke engines.
7. **Harbourfront noise is horrible** and needs addressing.
8. **Other comments focused on a range of issues**, from considering noise an equity issue to private and public trucks, including overnight delivery trucks, noise from modified vehicles, festivals, air conditioners and stationary sources, and support for having this section of the bylaw address sound from multiple sources.

## DETAILED FEEDBACK

1. **Most participants said that their experience with noise in the city has changed for the worse since 2019.** Many said noise pollution is very stressful and that refinements and change are needed now. There is also concern that there are many types of noise that impact residents that the City does not have the power to regulate. Daytime noise can be challenging for shift workers and those working from home. Some focused on noise as a health issue, with impacts on physical and mental health, career, and social life.

There were exceptions, with a small number of participants who said their experience with noise had improved since 2019.

2. **Concerns that the city is getting noisier as it grows.** Several participants talked about densification as a problem because sounds of entertainment are so close to housing. There is also:

- More noise from alarms, back-up beepers, construction, and wind echoing that impacts new condo developments.
- Noise from air conditioners and other stationary sources was also raised as a public health concern. It was suggested that the City propose revisions applying to air conditioner and stationary sources.
- Activities such as CafeTO and festivals make the city noisier.
- The night economy may be good for business but it's terrible for some residents. People spill out into the street and there are big noise impacts, including restaurants that are functioning as night clubs. For some, it means having to move rather than stay and live in an unpeaceful situation. Specific areas mentioned with noise issues included: Trinity-Spadina Parkette, King and Portland, King and Niagara.
- There was a participant who reported an ongoing unbearable noise issue in Scarborough with a factory operating 24/7 and means she is barely able to sleep.

Suggestions included:

- Clarity on how the Night Economy Review overlaps with the noise bylaw, including the requirement for establishments to create a Noise Control Plan.
- The City should require broad band reversing alarms instead of backup beepers.

- Use the Building Code to minimize noise in new builds, especially given the trend to live in closer quarters with our neighbours. For example, the City should be proactive in requiring soundproof windows and doors as part of the building code for bars and restaurants. Look to New York as a resource for ways to reduce sound and work with surrounding communities.
  - Do more to limit noise from air conditioners and exhaust fans, including those at restaurants.
  - Find alternate routes where heavy traffic of large diesel trucks can be rerouted for some days of the week so that there are some respite days for all neighbourhoods.
  - Developers should be asked to provide noise mitigation plans that consider tall buildings and noises above the fourth floor. They should also be asked to provide compensation for high-noise construction activities since it seems that they're thriving and making profits from activities which put physical health, mental health, and reasonable enjoyment at risk.
  - Apply a universal design approach to reducing noise and vibrations.
  - A participant with an event programmer's perspective noted that they appreciate the City's ability to cultivate art and culture. They suggested including organizations and artists in these consultations because many have their own professional dB readers and respond to community feedback.
3. **Stronger enforcement is necessary.** This was a major theme in the feedback received, with many frustrations related to the experience of reporting noise complaints and not receiving adequate enforcement responses. Some feel the Noise Bylaw is adequate and the refinements are good, but they will only look good on paper if there isn't effective enforcement. There were participants who said that reporting noise violations felt like a part-time job and affected their mental health, especially when they had to connect to multiple departments (311, fire, police) and wait for days for enforcement officers to respond to persistent noise requests.

Several participants suggested that the City consider crowd sourcing data collection for disturbing noise, with standardized ways that residents can monitor and report noise. Take pressure off the City's enforcement team and

the police by having community members measure noise, especially when there is persistent noise from neighbours. The iPhone dB reader is pretty accurate. The City should consider creating a system where residents take photos and collect audio info and then send to 311.

Other participants focused on the fact that fines are too cheap. The consequences need to be higher. Small fines are insufficient to deter repeat offenders. Construction companies are working on Sundays and holidays without regard for the rules because they can afford to pay the fines. Suggestion to create escalating fines with increased consequences, for example, the first fine would be \$500, the second fine \$700, the third fine \$1,000, and the fourth fine \$10,000.

Additional suggestions included:

- More clearly defining unreasonable and persistent noise.
  - Measure sound at the source and at property limits, not just at the point of reception.
  - Consider automated noise and vibration measurement systems.
  - Address business transfers as they are a huge loophole when owners want to avoid paying fines.
  - Increase the number of Noise Bylaw enforcement officers.
  - Provide clarity on who is responsible for what.
  - Have enforcement officers available at 1am. *Officers are available until 2am during certain shifts.*
  - Have City enforcement respond in the moment, not after the fact. 72 hours is too long to wait for enforcement.
  - Create a proactive, solution-based model, with teams actively monitoring noise by patrolling different neighbourhoods and monitoring noise proactively, without having to rely on residents to make complaints.
  - Any noise longer than 10 minutes should be considered persistent and unreasonable.
  - Concern technology being used by enforcement officers do not pick up sound accurately, particularly related to persistent noise. No refinements to the Bylaw will help if equipment is not effective.
  - If modified exhausts are illegal, why are police not cracking down on drivers?
- Some said they did not want to have to call police for noise issues. It was also suggested that Noise Bylaw officers should be the first responders to non-emergency noise complaints.
  - Make data transparent. Strong interest in knowing how many complaints are being made, even if they are outside the mandate of bylaw enforcement officers.
4. **The exemption granted for private garbage collection negatively impacts many, with support for removing the exemption.** Many participants said that they are consistently being consistently deprived of sleep from overnight waste collection. They said:
- Picking up and putting down dumpsters is very noisy – both the sound (banging and clanking) and vibration wake people up. This is a mental health and physical health issue.
  - It was surprising to learn that the exemption was granted because of “safety”, which made them wonder about whether anyone considered that the negative impact of waste collection noise on sleep and well-being was also considered as a safety issue – and if not, it should have been.
  - GFL waste collection trucks are very noisy. The waste collection industry benefits from the revenues they receive from residents and taxpayers, so they should have to use some of that money to invest in noise-dampening.
  - The statistic in the City’s presentation that said 60% of residents surveyed are ok with waste collection noise at night was questioned by some participants who wondered if these are people who experience this noise.
  - The City should consider prohibiting waste collection in residential areas overnight.
  - Garbage collection trucks should be subject to the same regulations as motor vehicles, due to their loud banging, clanking, noises from hydraulic lift, truck bed shaking, revving of the truck engine, and other related noises.
5. **The vibration component of sound is a big problem.** Several participants raised concerned about the vibration component of noise, in addition to sound. They raised concerns with base frequencies in general, and specifically subwoofers from bars and clubs, the moving and dropping of large free weights in gyms, and

windows shaking and furniture moving because of these vibrations. Some expressed support for adding tonal considerations to the bylaw.

6. **Noise from leaf blowers has reached excessive levels.** Many participants expressed appreciation for the ban on 2-stroke engines, including leaf blowers. Concerns were raised about consistent noise from landscaping in the Spadina and St. Clair area, Monday to Friday, all day, disturbing nearby neighbours. The City should consider mufflers for leaf blowers to reduce noise. It was suggested that cleaning machines also be considered power devices and given time constraints/reasonable hours for their use. Some also emphasized that noise from leaf blowers and other lawn equipment during the day and at 'reasonable hours' can still be a disruption to those working remotely from home, and a total ban or decibel limits would be a better solution.

7. **Harbourfront is horrible now.** It is difficult to sleep due to noise, lights, and waste collection. Party boats, and noise from Helitours out of Billy Bishop. The City needs to work with the Port Authority and others to address these noise sources. The Harbourfront Centre stage is disturbing to residents in the surrounding condos. Sound noisier over water

8. **Other comments** included:

- The need for the City to consider noise as an equity issue. Noise makes it difficult for people with accessibility requirements to function, especially for people with low vision or blindness.
- Delivery trucks noise is a problem, especially overnight. They cause noise, vibration, and pollution when they idle.
- Festivals are great but create a lot of noise so the City should consider moving them out of residential areas. Nuit Blanche is especially bad because it runs overnight.
- Support for updating the bylaw to apply to multiple sources.
- Support to use dBC and dBA limits for noise. *The City uses both dBC and dBA limits.*
- Issues with noise in Regent Park related to waste collection and noise from sidewalk cleaning equipment. There should not be exemptions for this type of noisy activities.
- Snow clearing, outdoor swimming pools, and illegal backyard fireworks are

problematic noise generators for some participants.

- Airplane noise is an issue, including from the airshow (which can be shortened in duration from 5 to 3 days and planes directed to fly over the lake rather than residential neighbourhoods), and from commercial planes accessing Pearson.
- Noise from vehicles including noise from stunt racing and modified exhausts. Screeching streetcar noise is very unpleasant and persistent. Loud beeps when some cars are locked and unlocked are also a problem.
- Construction noise in various areas of the city is a problem.
- Concern about exemptions granted for construction activity, and the need for applicants to provide notice of their request for exemption directly to the affected residents.
- City should increase its public education efforts with respect to noise and the Noise Bylaw.
- Noise from the diesel engines of GO trains which run through residential areas in the city was expressed as an issue for some participants.
- It was suggested that garbage trucks use sound mufflers.
- Consider having different Noise Bylaws and standards for different areas of the city, since different areas have different needs and noise levels.

## NEXT STEPS

The City thanked participants for attending and reminded them of the opportunity to share additional comments with MLS by October 15, 2023, to be considered as part of the Review. MLS will bring forward a staff report with recommendations to Economic and Community Development Committee in the coming months. To subscribe for e-updates about the Implementation Review, add your email on the City's website [www.toronto.ca/noisereview](http://www.toronto.ca/noisereview).