

Implementation Review of the Noise Bylaw

Public Meeting 1 (of 6) General Noise (In-Person)

Metro Hall, 55 John Street
Room 308/309
Tuesday, September 12, 2023



On Tuesday, September 12, 2023, the City of Toronto hosted the first 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. 46 members of the public attended the meeting. Representatives from Municipal Licensing and Standards (MLS), including the Noise Bylaw Enforcement team, also participated.

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 were at the meeting because of frustration with increased noise in the city.**
2. **Many participants expressed concern that noise complaints aren't logged by 311 if the City can't enforce.** As a result, participants expressed concern that there are more noise issues than reported.
3. **Waste collection noise is a serious problem for many participants.** Most would like the City to remove the exemption for private companies, though a handful disagreed.
4. **Noise from leaf blowers is a major irritant,** with support expressed for the ban on the use of two-stroke small engine equipment.
5. **Frustration with 311 and concerns about enforcement.**
6. **Concern about the number of exemption permits granted.**
7. **Other comments** noise from waterfront party boats, air conditioners, sirens, and delivery trucks; noise as an equity and health issue, how the city can be designed to proactively minimize noise, the need for more education, etc.

DETAILED FEEDBACK

1. **Most participants were at the meeting because of frustration with increased noise in the city.** Participants understand that the City is growing, and they don't want the vibrancy of the city to go away, but quality of life has been deeply and negatively impacted the last four years. A participant flagged that there are no decibel limits referenced for "Unreasonable and persistent noise" (Bylaw 591-2.9), which makes it unclear what noise levels residents are expected to live with. They noted that for amplified sound there are decibel limits that can be enforced, noting that sound does not need to be amplified to disrupt quality of life. Decibels are not always the best measurement for noise because when compared to ambient noise, the difference can be significant enough to disrupt peaceful living and yet still be under the Bylaw threshold.
2. **Many participants expressed concern that the noise complaints aren't logged by 311 if the City can't enforce.** This was provoked by the noise complaints data shared by the City during the meeting, which participants said understates the issue because of the noise-related calls that are not counted. There was support for the City to collect and report on all noise complaints data.
3. **Waste collection noise is a serious problem for many participants.** Most would like the City to remove the exemption for private companies, though a handful disagreed.
 - Council's granting of the waste collection exemption without public consultation was shocking to many.
 - Waste collection noise is impacting participants in the overnight hours, with frequent references to midnight, 1am, 2-4am, with noise lasting 20-40 minutes at a time, as many as 6-7 nights per week.
 - There were participants who said that GFL trucks are louder than other companies.
 - Use of quieter vehicles was suggested.
 - Those that disagreed with removing the exemption identified two concerns, (i) that waste collection costs would increase if vehicles were forced to operate when roads are busy (as opposed to overnight), and (ii) this could hurt private companies that are already struggling to come back from the pandemic.
4. **Noise from leaf blowers is a major irritant,** with support expressed for the ban on the use of two-stroke small engine equipment, and support for encouraging the use of alternatives like electric leaf blowers and rakes.
 - Concerns about impacts on shift workers, young mothers, people with debilitating illnesses and mental health issues, and pedestrians.
 - Golf course exemptions for leaf blowers make it unbearable for those living in houses nearby.
 - Support for banning commercial leaf-blowers, starting with limits on their use during shoulder seasons only, and not in the summer.
 - Concerns about commercial leaf-blowers that produce a lot of noise. Landscaping lobby seems more powerful than the voice of residents.
 - Concerns about corollary air pollution and dust from gas leaf blowers.
5. **Frustration with 311 and concerns about enforcement.**
 - Several participants expressed frustration with their experiences with 311, including the process for registering complaints and waiting days or weeks for enforcement officers.
 - Concern that the current system of managing noise is contributing to tensions between neighbours and between neighbours and businesses. A better system is needed for managing these tensions, outside of legal avenues.
 - Strong support for additional resources dedicated to enforcement, including enforcing 24/7 and hiring more Bylaw enforcement officers and investing in technology, including:
 - Use apps to crowdsource data that could inform enforcement efforts.
 - Employ "sound sensors" that specifically target leaf blowers that routinely violate Noise Bylaws.
 - Enforcement officers should take action proactively when a noise violation occurs, and need not depend on complaint calls only.
 - Use a multi-pronged lens to enforcement, including environmental, physical health, and mental health. Interest in seeing the City study the effect of noise on residents from these perspectives.

- Link business licensing to requirement to abide by Noise Bylaws.
- Create opportunities for community groups to deal with noise complaints as a collective rather than requiring enforcement officers to resolve situations.
- Increase fines for those who break the rules. Serious fines are the only way to deter people from ongoing noise violations.
- Support for sound monitoring at the source/point of origin or closest possible to the source, not the point of reception.
- Support for allowing noise violations to be reported on public properties such as streets or public realm.

6. Concern about the number of exemption permits granted.

- Noise Bylaw violations incurred during an exemption permit should be registered and inform any/all future requests for exemptions.
- Need continuous monitoring and enforcement, not just one-time.
- Concern too many exemptions are being granted (though it's better than 2019). Request that the City share data on exemptions.
- Suggestion that the City let people in the surrounding neighbourhood know when an exemption has been granted. *This is an existing City of Toronto requirement.*
- Frustration with the current exemption permit process. Councillors should not be involved. It's not fair that the City Councillor can overturn the advice of City staff.

7. Other concerns raised included:

- Waterfront noise related to party boats that disrupting residents at all times of the day, and especially late in the night. Request that the City license, regulate, and monitor this activity regularly, with consequences for non-compliance. There was also a suggestion to relocate the party boats away from the residential area of Queens Quay.
- Air conditioner noise was a problem for several participants. Suggestion that the City consider incentives to reduce noise (e.g., with loud air conditions, provide financial incentive/rebate to the neighbour to buy a new air conditioner).
- Noise is an equity issue and a health issue. Health and safety need to be considered when this report goes to Committee, not just

economic issues. Excessive noise is a health hazard and an equity issue. Medical authorities should recommend permitted decibel levels. It's proving to be an issue for some participants, worsening their mental health. It's an accessibility and equity issue for those with vision impairments. Also, not all people have the opportunity to be able to get away from noise sources or move into different neighbourhoods when noise gets worse. Concern that City Council makes decisions driven by economic factors over community impact (as done with the 2022 bylaw change without public consultation).

- Designing the city to prevent noise, not just enforce it. This means proactive noise prevention, including new technology that provides quieter alternatives (like replacements for back-up beepers on vehicles) and designing new buildings with better soundproofing, and using better construction materials. Also think about how noise is considered in new development and especially in taller constructions.
- The need for more education about the Noise Bylaw, including raising awareness of any restricted hours. The bylaw should use words that people understand, like "infringe on reasonable enjoyment of home" as opposed to decibel levels which might not make sense to everyone. It's a real human issue, not just numbers. Clarity on who is responsible for resolving noise issues, whether that falls on landlords (TCHC), police, or bylaw officers. As well as clarity on noise issues from government activities.
- Sirens from emergency vehicles and police at 4am (is it an option to lower the volume in the evenings when the streets are empty)
- Delivery trucks at 3am are a problem.
- Street racing is an issue.

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.