

Province will be approached for funding for clean-up

By Bill Rea

Peel Region is joining with other municipalities in seeking Provincial and federal funding to help clean up after last month's ice storm.

Mayor Marolyn Morrison confirmed earlier this week that mayors and regional chairs from throughout the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) will be meeting with Provincial officials Friday to push the case for funding.

That was one of the results of an update Regional councillor received last week in the aftermath of the storm.

Regional CAO David Szwarc told councillors the total cost of the storm in Peel (including the costs endured by the area municipalities like Caledon) were estimated at that point to be about \$83.1 million, and there are going to be future complications involved with the cleanup. Caledon councillors had been told last Tuesday the cost to the Town from the storm was close to \$600,000 at that point, and expected to grow.

Szwarc said there were efforts to get ready for problems as the storm was anticipated. There were also meetings with Regional Chair Emil Kolb and the local mayors in the days that followed.

The main priorities were listed as restoring power while looking out for the safety of both the public and staff. Other priorities were maintaining public services, clearing roads and sidewalks, etc. Szwarc said they were able to keep most Regional roads open, although Forks of the Credit Road was closed for about 33 hours because of the complex cleaning job involved. Part of Winston Churchill Boulevard in Brampton was also closed for a time too, he said.

Szwarc said the plan is to carry on with the scheduled two-week waste collection exemption period, and Christmas tree pick up is going ahead this week as planned.

There have been other accommodations implemented by the Region, including waiving fees at community recycling centres to drop off food waste and storm-related debris. Szwarc said some 60 tonnes of both items had been collected. He also said there were tentative plans to start the yard waste collection program early this year.

Szwarc stressed the effort not to duplicate work being done by the municipalities. He said the Region is not equipped to do forestry work, as it has one small chipper and 26 chain saws in its inventory.

Morrison told her Regional colleagues a major problem is going to be with flows in the Credit River, and to a lesser extent in the Humber. Trees have fallen into the river and along the banks. She said the Town can't get them out, adding there is a lot of damage on municipal property that needs to be addressed.

Morrison wasn't sure what would happen with the flows, considering the log jams and anticipated ice melts. She warned there could be torrents of water to the south, and she added the conservation authorities don't have the money to clean these things out.

The mayor stressed the need to get the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) to be part of the effort, pointing out the waterways belong to them.

Morrison also raised concerns that had been brought up at Town council that the Toronto media (especially radio stations) concentrated mainly on what was going on in the city.

She also recalled hearing Premier Kathleen Wynne saying she had talked to all the municipalities in the GTA.

"I don't know who she talked to in Caledon," Morrison said, pointing out the premier knows about the town because commercials have been shot of her running along local roads. "I'm really irritated."

The mayor said she got more support from her colleagues on the Greater Toronto Countryside Alliance and the Top Aggregate Producing Municipalities of Ontario.

Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion commented that co-operation between the Region and three area municipalities during the storm was "excellent."

She also stressed the need to get mayors and chairs from throughout the GTA together for a coordinated message to the province. McCallion also agreed with Morrison's concerns about Toronto radio. She said she was able to get on the air, but said the GTA municipalities should make a coordinated approach to the media on how to deal with situations like that in the future.

As well, McCallion said she was worried about possible flooding from the Credit. She pointed out the federal government offered aid last year when there was flooding in Calgary.

"We can't let them off the hook," she declared, pointing out federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty has announced the government has a surplus, without spending on infrastructure. She charged the government is out of touch with what's going on in the municipalities.