

Storm has cost Town almost \$600,000 so far

By Bill Rea

Estimates state the recent ice storm in Caledon has already cost the Town about \$557,000, and that figure's expected to increase. Town Treasurer Fuwing Wong made the announcement Tuesday at a special meeting of Town council. The session was called by Mayor Marolyn Morrison to address the aftermath of the incident.

Regarding the finances, Wong said the biggest cost to the Town so far involved overtime staffing for employees brought in for emergency relief. That amounted to about \$286,000. The operation of the warming centres came to about \$6,000; the emergency relief for food water and other supplies was roughly \$137,000; additional security costs, such as police overtime, was about \$2,000; and repairs to public facilities will cost about \$21,000.

He also said these figures were based on preliminary cost estimates, and will be adjusted as invoices and other documents are available, and there are costs that have not yet been determined.

Council passed a motion to seek financial assistance from the Province. The motion also asks Peel Region to include the Town in any request for assistance it might make.

Town CAO Doug Barnes told councillors what comes next is a crucial issue that needs to be considered.

"The ice storm is over," he commented, "but the recovery period is going to be quite extensive."

The meeting included reports from several members of Town staff on the efforts that were employed to deal with the storm, including the establishment of an Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) at Town Hall early in the morning of Dec. 22, the day after the storm. Bethany Lee, communications manager for the Town, said the aim was collect information and coordinate activity, including that involving Hydro One and Peel Region. She also said more than 20 media statements were sent out in the days that followed in an effort to keep people informed.

Lee said the Town is still in communication mode, establishing contacts and providing status reports.

"The work continues," she said.

Leo Butko, acting director of public works for the Town, said the department dealt with such matters as plowing and salting roads, dealing with downed trees, and addressing road closures throughout town. He added places like Belfountain, Cataract, Caledon East, Palgrave and Mono Mills were most significantly impacted by downed trees.

Parks Manager and Landscape Architect Brian Baird told councillors staff were on deck, with all seven of the Town's sidewalk machines deployed every day except Christmas. Parks and recreation staff also assisted public works with tree removal.

About 200 Town-owned trees were impacted by the storm, with urban canopy destruction reported in Bolton, Caledon East and Valleywood.

Deputy Fire Chief Darryl Bailey said between Dec. 21 and Jan. 2, the department dealt with 234 emergency incidents. There were 70 such incidents during the same period last year. He added there were eight house fires reported in town, and two of them were major.

He also said there were ongoing efforts to keep track of vulnerable people, such as those in seniors' residences. Personnel from several stations, including Alton, Bolton, Caledon East, Inglewood, Palgrave and Valleywood carried out site visits, and staff coordinated volunteers to help cover the warming station that was established at the Bolton station.

Heather Flaherty, manager of facilities, programs and community development for the Town, said warming centres were opened Dec. 23 at Mayfield Recreation Complex, Caledon Centre for Recreation and Wellness (CCRW), Town Hall and Albion-Bolton Community Centre (ABCC). CCRW saw the most use, with 89 visitors, but she said most of them were interested in showers or food. Those centres closed at 8 p.m. Christmas Eve, but the centre at the fire hall in Bolton remained open.

Barnes also said the Caledon OPP detachment offices were available as a warming centre if needed, but they weren't.

He also praised staff of the finance department for making sure the authority was granted to buy food for the warming centres.

Barnes commented on some of the issues that were identified. He said the mapping provided by Hydro One was misleading. It indicated there were massive outages in Bolton and Orangeville, but the mapping was based on distribution centres rather than municipality. Most of the outages listed for Orangeville really impacted customers in west Caledon and the Bolton numbers were more in areas like Palgrave and King Township.

He also cited communication restrictions, pointing out there is no radio station in Caledon, and the Toronto media was more focused on the situation there.

In addition, Barnes pointed to the lack of back-up power at Town facilities. If the facilities in Bolton and Mayfield had gone down, the only back-up would have been at Town Hall and the OPP station.

In terms of debris removal, Barnes said it was determined that the Town was responsible for roads, sidewalks, parks and public buildings, while the Region is responsible for supporting property owners through such things as the operating of recycling centres and taking storm debris for free, as well as starting curb-side pick-up. Private property owners are responsible for trees and debris on their lands.

The Town has been able to bring in resources from municipalities that weren't as hard hit. Barnes said Kawartha Lakes, Georgina and Brock have lent equipment for dealing with trees.

Barnes said the clean-up work is ongoing.

"We don't know how long it will take," he said.

He added staff should have a further report ready for council later this month.

Deborah Martin-Downs, CAO of Credit Valley Conservation (CVC) told council there are problems anticipated during the coming spring melt because of all the debris that ended up in the Credit River. She also said there is debris on the trails that will pose a hazard to users and staff.

Councillor Allan Thompson stressed the need for collaboration between various agencies, such as CVC, Ministry of Natural Resources, etc. He pointed out a lot of property owners don't have the expertise to remove large downed trees.

"We do need to collaborate," Barnes told him, adding he expects more details on that in the next couple of weeks. He added Toronto and Region Conservation Authority to be in on that too.

Thompson also shared the concerns about the problem of getting Caledon information on the Toronto radio stations. He suggested an effort from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and Federation of Canadian Municipalities could help.

"We need to get it out to our residents the best way we know how," he said.

Councillor Nick deBoer pointed out a lot of people might not have the equipment needed to transport debris to recycling centres.

He also pointed to the need for people, especially those in rural areas, to be prepared for something like this.

"My cows did better than I did because my cows have a generator," he remarked.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli warned that climate change could mean more incidents like this.

Councillor Patti Foley agreed this can't be viewed as an isolated event. She wondered if there could be some kind of emergency preparedness seminar held, as a lot of people were not as well prepared as they could have been.

"We all have lessons learned after the fact," Thompson observed. "I think there were a lot of good lessons learned."