

## King passes resolution to seek disaster relief funding

**By Angela Gismondi**

The aftermath of the severe ice storm which hit the Township of King and the GTA was the first topic discussed by King council in 2014.

Under the new business portion of the meeting, Mayor Steve Pellegrini asked council to support a resolution for the Township to seek disaster relief funding through the Ontario Disaster Relief Assistance Program (ODRAP), an assistance program designed to help municipalities get back on their feet after a natural disaster.

The resolution states the ice storm resulted in substantial damage to municipal property and infrastructure. As a result, King council requested the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to declare the whole geographic area of the Township of King as a disaster area, which would make the municipality eligible to apply for the public component of the ODRAP.

The resolution also stated that the Township will seek consideration for any other federal or provincial funding program made available to assist municipalities with the costs of response to the weather event, whether in addition to or as an alternative to funding available through the ODRAP.

The reason Pellegrini brought the matter forward at the committee meeting Monday was the deadline to apply for to the Ministry for funding was Jan. 14. A similar resolution was passed by York Region on Jan. 9.

At a special working session held before the meeting Monday, council was given a recap of the ice storm. The meeting was an opportunity to reflect on how the situation was handled by the Township and how they can improve efforts next time. Recovery efforts were also discussed at the meeting, including handling debris and trees which were brought down by the storm.

"We actually didn't do too badly," said Township CAO Susan Plamondon. "Our residents are resilient and think about emergency preparedness ... Aside from the major loss of trees, the long lasting effects of the storm are limited."

What made things even more difficult is that the municipal offices had closed for the holidays just before the storm started.

"The efforts that were made by your staff were extraordinary," said Plamondon adding the staff reacted in a knowledgeable and professional manner. "If they saw something that needed to be done they got it done. They gave up time with their family during the holidays to make sure the residents of King Township were safe."

Although staff did an amazing job, there is always room for improvement, Plamondon said.

"There are a number of things we can improve on should we find ourselves in that situation again and we'll do even better the next time around," she said.

Fire Chief James Wall reported King Fire and Emergency Services (KFES) responded to 166 calls for service between the start of the storm and New Year's Eve. Those calls included two fires, motor vehicle accidents and over 50 hydro-related incidents. There was also one fatality in the Township resulting from a car accident. In a typical month, KFES responds to 83 calls.

Plamondon pointed out Wall was on call 24/7 and was proactive by checking in with the seniors residences to see how they were doing during the storm. The fire department also made sure that residents with medical equipment had generators so they could use their machines.

"They were very, very proactive and they gave up a lot of personal time because they care about the residents of this Township," said Plamondon.

Rob Flindall, director of public works for the Township, reported his first order of business during the storm was to make sure that streets were safe for residents. That meant plowing the roads and clearing away any snow, ice and fallen trees. One of the challenges faced by his department was the staff levels. Flindall said the Township needed to bring in additional resources to deal with the damage but that it was difficult to find contractors because there were so many areas affected across the region and the GTA.

Clean-up efforts are expected to continue well into the spring, he added. Once the snow and ice has thawed Township staff will focus their attention on clearing the trees from public areas and roadways, chipping and composting them.

Although waste collection was not directly impacted by the ice storm, the storm combined with the prolonged cold snap and the holidays delayed service. The icy road conditions affected the speed of the collection and access was also difficult in some areas of the township. Flindall reported the contractor was caught up as of Monday. The contractor has agreed to pick up limbs from broken trees during waste collection the week of Jan. 27. Furthermore, residents are encouraged to use the Bloomington Road Yard Waste Service which is free of charge to all residents. Staff was planning to meet with the contractors Tuesday and will report back to council.

Plamondon said communicating with residents was difficult during the storm and she is looking for ways to improve that before the next emergency situation. The Township updated its website throughout the storm but she is hoping to find ways to push the

information out to the residents instead of passively posting updates on the site. She suggested the Township look into getting a Facebook page and Twitter account specifically for emergency situations.

?We need to make sure we continue to communicate even if we don't have any answers yet but, we can tell people we're working on it,? said Plamondon.

She also plans to focus on educating the public on emergency preparedness in a proactive way, suggesting some information be posted on the website, including some tips and tools for residents to use in an emergency.

Pellegrini suggested preparing the Trisan Centre in Schomberg in case another emergency does occur. While the centre was open, it could not accommodate people overnight because there was no generator.

?There's nothing like experience to teach you some important lessons and establish some priorities to get you in a better position to respond,? responded Plamondon. ?We should identify one facility in the Township we use as a warming or cooling centre and have a permanent generator there.?

All members of council thanked staff for their efforts during and after the ice storm and congratulated them on a job well done and their continued recovery efforts.