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Council asks Province to extend deadline for ice storm recovery funding

By Angela Gismondi

Whenever a storm hits, there is always a big clean up effort needed afterward. Whether that's getting tree work for any damaged trees in the area, cleaning the street of debris, or replacing broken windows and fences. And the latest storm to hit the area is no different. Residents have found themselves looking for a local roofing service similar to TrueWorks Roofing in order to aid them with repairs after an ice storm hit the region.

Ice storm cleanup efforts are taking longer than anticipated and King Township is asking the provincial government to give them some leeway on the deadline to submit eligible costs for recovery funding.

At the council meeting on May 12, Councillor Debbie Schaefer requested an update on the status of the cleanup in the Township, particularly the wood chipping efforts. The Township retained a contractor to collect all the large limbs from local properties and make them into wood chips.

Rob Flindall, director of engineering and public works, explained the cleanup has not been easy.

"It's been a huge challenge for us," said Flindall adding the contractor is focusing on one residential area at a time, but when they think they've completed the area, they return the next day to find more limbs at the curb of the same properties waiting to be picked up and chipped. "People are bringing it out as fast as we can move it."

In February, Linda Jeffrey, then Ontario Minister of Municipal Affairs, announced a $190 million one-time funding grant to assist municipalities with ice storm clean up. The funding is expected to cover direct costs including warm-up centres, staff overtime and cleanup of debris to protect public safety.

But now municipalities are worried that the delay in clean-up efforts may mean clean-up costs will not be eligible for coverage under the program because they are expected to occur after the June 22 deadline.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini asked that council direct staff to draft a resolution requesting a deadline extension from the Province to ensure all eligible costs are covered. A similar resolution was passed by the City of Mississauga council on April 23, Pellegrini explained. In a letter to the GTA Mayors and Regional Chairs, Mayor Hazel McCallion explained City staff presented Council with a report providing an update on the ice storm recovery as it relates to Mississauga's efforts.

"Concern was expressed that the June 22, 2014 deadline for eligible costs is unreasonable based on extended assessment of remaining damage, poor site conditions and the resulting work plan," read the letter, adding council passed a resolution requesting that the deadline be extended to Nov. 30, 2014 as unavoidable delays are expected which will extend damage assessment beyond June 22, 2014.

"I wanted to share this information with you as I assume that all of the municipalities affected by the ice storm are experiencing similar challenges and if that is the case, I would encourage you to write to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing requesting a similar extension for if all the municipalities affected were to present a united front in this regard, the Ministry may be compelled to grant such a request."

A resolution similar to that of the City of Mississauga will be drafted and sent to the Province.