

King joins call for federal and provincial storm aid

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By Bill Rea

The provincial and federal governments are being called upon to pick up one-third each of the costs associated with last month's ice storm.

A group of GTA mayors and chairs who attended a meeting Friday in Mississauga unanimously passed a motion calling on the other two levels of government to shoulder their share of the costs.

The motion also called on the feds and province to treat all municipalities "equally and equitably" when it comes to distributing the funds.

As well, the motion cited the urgency of the matter, and called on the two higher levels of government to respond by March 1.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini thought that was a reasonable target date.

The discussion took place after a session with Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Linda Jeffrey. She was not present for the discussion or the passage of the motion.

Jeffrey told reporters it was a productive meeting, adding there will be recommendations going to Cabinet and Treasury Board.

She said her ministry had already received 27 resolutions from municipalities requesting financial aid in light of the storm.

"My ministry is already on the ground in most municipalities," she remarked, adding she told the mayors she has already written to the feds, asking them to be part of the effort.

Jeffrey said part of her goal in attending the meeting was to listen to the concerns, as well as helping the mayors understand the programs that are available. She pointed out they likely weren't very familiar with the details.

She was unable to offer a timeline for the assistance, or make any commitments on how much would be coming, without knowing what the actual numbers will be. She did say the mayors are anxious to move forward on this, and she hopes to have hard numbers in the next couple of weeks, with decisions in the next couple of months.

"I think we're all trying to figure out what those costs were collectively," she remarked.

Jeffrey stressed she was aware of the damage caused by the storm, and of the mayors' desire to get things started.

"I heard that loud and clear," she said. "My goal is to fast track it."

The motion also stated several municipalities have applied for assistance through the Ontario Disaster Relief Assistance Program (ODRAP), but concerns were expressed that ODRAP "doesn't adequately recognize the full costs of extreme weather events."

Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion was the spokesperson for her colleagues that followed Friday's meeting. She pointed out there was considerable flood damage in the area in July, but little in the way of help from the province. Concern was expressed by the mayors that could happen again.

"We all agree that property tax cannot bear that burden," she remarked.

She also agreed it was a very productive meeting with Jeffrey. "I'm really excited about it," she declared.

McCallion seemed confident that there will be help from the province.

"She (Jeffrey) will carry that message back to the Premier," she commented, adding she understood Premier Kathleen Wynne was anxiously waiting for the result of the meeting.

Pellegrini seemed pleased with the way the meeting went.

"I was quite delighted," he remarked. "The message was loud and clear. We want help."

He said the storm caused \$121,317 in damage to Township property and infrastructure. He added the municipality is getting into a good financial position, with reserves to help fund infrastructure, and he doesn't want to see it all used now.

"We can't keep going to a property tax payer to fund it," he remarked.