

King submits tab for last year's ice storm relief

By Mark Pavilons

While critics blast Queen's Park for delayed ice storm funding to municipalities, King's updated tab will meet the provincial deadline.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini said King's estimate for related costs to the ice storm was \$325,000. Their actual costs were nearer to \$310,000.

The submission will happen by end of this week, the mayor said, which is before the claim deadline of Dec. 15.

But provincial PCs are not happy with the way the Liberals have treated the matter.

Ernie Hardeman, Oxford MPP and PC Critic for Municipal Affairs, questioned the government's ice storm assistance program, which has failed to deliver a single dollar to a municipality.

"Minister, winter has started and areas from Buffalo to the East Coast have already been hit with massive storms, but here in Ontario municipalities still haven't seen a single dollar of assistance for the ice storm that hit them a year ago," said Hardeman during the question. "It turns out the delay is that your Ministry took nine months just to produce an application and didn't give them training on the forms until 11 months after the storm. Is that your idea of emergency assistance?"

Application forms were emailed to municipalities in September but the training required to fill out the forms didn't occur until webinars on Nov. 18 and 20.

"It's almost a year after the ice storm that created havoc and huge expenses for municipalities but due to this government's mismanagement they haven't been able to get any of the promised assistance out the door to municipalities," said Hardeman.

Hardeman also questioned the government's decision to pay \$2.7 million to a private company, Landlink Consulting Ltd., to assist with processing the claims. Landlink became well-known last year after they had numerous problems with the Alberta Flood Relief Program they were hired to administer, resulting in the Alberta government publicly ending the contract.

"You hired an Alberta company to help with the accounting and processing of the 58 municipal claims and yours to the federal government at a cost of almost \$2.8 million. So they are getting over \$46,000 for each claim they process," said Hardeman.

"Minister, a year later not a single dollar has gone to help municipalities but nearly \$3 million went to an Alberta company. Would you call that a great success of a disaster relief program?"

Ontario is helping municipalities affected by the December 2013 ice storm by working with the federal government to fund 100 per cent of their eligible recovery costs through a one-time Ice Storm Assistance Program.

Dr. Helena Jaczek, MPP for Oak Ridges-Markham, and Minister of Community and Social Services, said the province came up with the numbers based on the requests by municipalities and she's "hopeful they'll get what they asked for."

The money will provide a cushion.

A group of Greater Toronto Area (GTA) mayors and chairs gathered in Mississauga several months ago to send a plea to the province and federal government to share the costs of the ice storm.

They passed a motion calling on the feds and Province to treat all municipalities "equally and equitably" when it comes to distributing the funds.