

Money shortfall leaves some Aurora catch basins non-functional

By Brock Weir

In a season of heavy rain, you may have noticed water on some area roads is not as quick to drain.

According to a report before Council members last year, which raised alarm bells with several local lawmakers, a financial shortfall has rendered many of these catch basins and storm water receptacles non-functional as they have become compacted with debris. Council is set this week to get the ball rolling on sorting out this problem by outsourcing it to the tune of an estimated \$95,000. Historically, external contract services were retained to complete routine maintenance to the storm sewer infrastructure which involved the biannual cleaning and removal of debris from our catch basins and other storm water retention devices which are mostly located within the municipal road allowance, said Parks Manager Jim Tree, noting that attempts by staff to conduct storm sewer maintenance work in-house were unsuccessful.

It was determined in 2015 that the storm sewer cleaning program would be completed in-house as a maintenance function utilizing an existing sewer flusher/vacuum truck within the Town of Aurora fleet. This program was unable to be completed in-house due to shortfalls in both financial and labour resources. As a result, a very limited number of catch basins were cleaned to date.

In all, Mr. Tree estimates the Town currently has about 5,000 catch basins and nearly 40 other resources to store stormwater but the number of catch basins now non-operational are currently unknown, he said.

There are a number of storm sewer catch basins that have been filled with solid debris to the point where they have become non-functional, he said. While it is unknown at present exactly how many of these catch basins remain in this condition, staff remain vigilant in their efforts to identify and list those catch basins that are in the worst state.

Actions are, and will continue to be taken, using external resources to treat the most severely impacted infrastructure as high priority emergency cases. With limited background information on the maintenance history of this particular infrastructure, it remains unclear as to the overall cleanliness condition of the entire storm sewer inventory of catch basins and containment structures; however, it does appear that prior to 2014 all of the infrastructure would have been serviced on a two-year cycle. The entire inventory of storm sewer catch basin and containment structures require continuous inspection and/or maintenance to ensure that the entire system remains functional.

If the proposed way forward is not approved, there is a risk both financial and of system failure, he cautioned. Once approved, staff will survey the catch basins and make a priority list of the worst offenders.

A conservative estimate of \$95,000, funded by the Town's Storm Water Management Reserve Fund, will be set as a starting point in the clean out, while establishing a full evaluation of all storm water systems, determining the frequency of cleaning, and partnerships with other municipalities to reduce future costs.