

Fire Services to continue Cost Recovery Program

A pilot program to help the Central York Fire Services recover the costs for several types of calls ranging from vehicle collisions to false alarms will become permanent in the New Year.

The details of the pilot program's formal adoption were outlined at Council last week by Rocco Volpe, Deputy Chief with the Central York Fire Services (CYFS), which covers the Towns of Aurora and Newmarket.

The CYFS rolled out the original pilot in 2019 with a specific focus on cost recovery related to vehicle collisions. The pilot began with a 24-month program and in its second year was expanded to include burning complaints, false alarms, natural gas leaks, hydro incidents (such as downed wires), and matters relating to grow-ops and clandestine labs.

Once adopted as a permanent program effective at the beginning of 2022, these cost recovery programs will be further expanded to include elevator rescue and issues related to smoke and carbon monoxide alarms along with the expansion of a part-time employee role to run the program.

"I am proud to announce to all of you that after paying our expenditures, the total net recovery for the pilot for 2020 and 2021 was \$120,000," Volpe told Council. "If my forecast is correct at year-end we should be just south of about \$140,000. We surpassed the budget figure and met our target and I am delighted to let you all know that the [Joint Council Committee, which oversees CYFS from both Aurora and Newmarket] approved the report to move forward and to make this a permanent program."

Upgrading the cost recovery program to a permanent part of the CYFS was supported by Aurora Council, including Councillor John Gallo who previously served on the Joint Council Committee (JCC).

"When I looked at this project (while on the JCC) I didn't want just another burden, tax or fee to the taxpayer solely to generate income," he said. "I think, to your credit, that is exactly what has not happened. While we're generating income, most of the income is generated from areas that we expended resources and we never recouped them. Some are recovered by insurance companies, some of the others are given multiple chances to correct any issues before there are any charges and I just want the public to know."

Councillor Wendy Gaertner noted that when the program was first brought into place, she expected "some anger and some push-back" from residents who might be impacted by it, "but from what you said it seems like, at the end of the day, there was a reasonableness in responses, or at least acceptance."

Volpe replied that it was important for the CYFS to "demonstrate there was a lack of due diligence or a negligence" on the part of those being charged before any enforcement was considered.

"That has been the case," he said. "Usually we offer programs where there is a three-strike rule, three chances to correct your behaviour, before we would proceed with any enforcement. Some of the programs like our cost recovery for motor vehicle collisions, there is no three-strike rule because of a motor vehicle collision happens and what happens is we look at the fault driver and that is where we seek our financials through their insurance companies, which we haven't had any resistance from."

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter