

IN GOOD COMPANY: Home Stretch

Opportunities and Challenges down the Home Stretch

By Mayor Geoffrey Dawe

It scarcely seems like four weeks since my last In Good Company article appeared in The Auroran.

It has been an exceptionally busy time at Town Hall as our Council has been meticulously scrutinizing the proposed 2014 Operational Budget and staff continues to manage the fallout of the ice storm and subsequent inclement weather.

I found myself in the same situation as many Aurorans, and indeed hundreds of thousands across southern Ontario, when power outages left me in the dark, and freezing temperatures played havoc with snow removal and waste collection.

I had the opportunity to speak with many residents without power, some of whom made their way to our drop-in warming station at the Aurora Seniors' Centre.

It was very encouraging to know that most people's concerns seemed to be on the welfare of their neighbours, particularly elderly residents and those who may require assistance. In this regard, I am pleased to note that members of Central York Fire Services checked on many of these residents personally, including all retirement facilities across Town. Our staff stayed in constant contact until power returned to normal.

We encountered a number of difficulties during the unusual and persistent cold snap, including fallen tree branches, build-up of ice and erratic waste collection. We persevered and service has been running on-schedule since mid-January. One service that I would like to address, however, is waste collection.

As you may know, the northern six (N6) municipalities of Aurora, East Gwillimbury, Georgina, King, Newmarket and Whitchurch-Stouffville collectively contract with Green for Life (GFL) for waste collection services. Our communities were not alone in struggling to maintain collection schedules during the severe weather; however, issues with GFL reach much further back than the ice storm.

I received several complaints from residents that their garbage and recycling was missed. I was one of many who saw their garbage bags, Blue Boxes and green bins left at the end of their driveways.

People are understandably upset as well, when recyclables are collected sloppily, leaving bottles and cans carelessly discarded.

Waste collection is one of the Town's core responsibilities, and poor service is something that I, as mayor, will simply not tolerate.

To get service back on track and consistent with the standards our residents deserve, I called a Special Council meeting on January 11 to conduct an immediate review of GFL's contract, to take corrective action and work with our N6 partners to hold GFL accountable.

Further to this, I and the other N6 Mayors and Chief Administrative Officers met with GFL Chief Executive Officer Patrick Dovigi last week to express concerns and displeasure with recent collection efforts.

We have commitments from GFL that service will improve. If it does not, we will exercise our contractual rights to impose financial penalties and sever our contract if things don't change.

Performance lapses during extreme weather, while admittedly frustrating, are understandable. I have outlined some of the difficulties we experienced over the holiday break. Ongoing performance problems are another issue. GFL has the opportunity to demonstrate it can deliver the services they promised, and we will be monitoring very carefully to ensure our contracted standards are met.

I have also received emails from residents concerning our new Joint Operations Centre. I supported a deferral of this item at Council to provide an opportunity to host an Open House at our existing facility to better demonstrate the need for a modern structure that can better manage our growing operations.

The Joint Operations Centre is not a new consideration. The concept was discussed in 2004 and approved by our previous Council. Among the myriad benefits it affords is the consolidation of our fleet services, which will allow for more efficient response to inclement weather, such as the ice storm.

The simple matter of housing our vehicles indoors means that even in poor weather, staff are ready to 'hit the road?', unencumbered by delays removing snow and ice from vehicles.

The Open House will be held on Saturday, February 8 from 11.30 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Town operations depot located at 9 Scanlon Court.

There will be a free barbecue lunch, information brochure, facility tour and staff available to answer questions. There has been a great deal of information and, unfortunately, misinformation concerning this facility. I encourage you to bring your family out for our barbecue and learn for yourself what a new facility will do for our Town.