

Aurora eyes first-time leak forgiveness program

An unexpected, undetected leak can sometimes lead to a surprise on your water bill, but if you take the time to have it fixed, you could be eligible for some financial forgiveness.

Aurora is beginning the process of developing a forgiveness program for first-time leaks after Council gave the formal green light to a motion put forward by Mayor Tom Mrakas last week.

Council unanimously approved the motion tasking staff to "develop a program and policy for providing one-time high water consumption credits to coincide with the rollout of automated meter-read technology" and to report back to Council on the potential program before it gets final approval.

"Residents of Aurora may experience unexpected and significant increases in their water bill due to undetected leaks," said Mayor Mrakas in his motion. "Other York Region municipalities have successfully implemented water bill adjustment programs that provide financial assistance to homeowners facing high water bills resulting from leaks.

"These programs offer a one-time credit of 50 per cent of the bill amount above the average, up to a maximum of \$2,500, provided the leak is repaired and the usage returns to normal."

The upcoming meter-read technology, he added, will help municipal staff and residents alike identify potential leaks sooner.

"I'm just asking for staff to look at other municipalities and how they've done this," Mayor Mrakas told his Council colleagues last week, "to help those that end up with an astronomical bill due to no fault of their own. If that can be proven, some people do it in different ways, so I want staff to investigate that, bring us back a report with the possibility of implementing such a program, with the rollouts as well."

The idea received the broad support of Council, with Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland noting she was considering bringing something similar forward herself after being on the receiving end of a large water bill due to an undetected leak at a property outside of Ontario.

She said in other jurisdictions where such a program has been put in place, impacted residents need to show they've been proactive in solving the leak and suggested this should be the model for Aurora as well.

The report, she added, should also address lost revenue on the municipality's side of the ledger.

"I'd want to make sure staff come back with" where those funds would come from," she said. "I'm assuming we would probably have some reserves within that bucket that could help cover it."

Support was also offered by Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, who said he's heard from homeowners in his ward that have faced an unexpected financial hit due to unknown leaks.

"It's painful to see and it just seems unfair," he said.

But, at the same time, he added, "somebody has to pay."

Rachel Wainwright-van Kessel, Aurora's Director of Finance, said Aurora sees just "a couple" of significant leaks per year that might result in an impact of more than \$1,000 on the water bill.

"One of the things is we are getting close to the automated read technology coming out and we really want to communicate that out

to people because it will help homeowners manage their water as well, and it will help us also, as well as homeowners, identify leaks when they start,? she said.

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