

Opt-in municipal alert system considered by Council

An opt-in municipal alert system that can send up-to-date information on public safety, emergency preparedness, and significant weather events, is something that should be considered for Aurora, says Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland.

Council last week gave the tentative green light to the motion which calls on municipal staff to look into the feasibility of an opt-in municipal alert system, including costs, and examples of models used elsewhere.

‘The municipality has a responsibility to support public safety, emergency preparedness, and timely communication with residents during significant weather events,’ said Councillor Gilliland in her motion. ‘Timely and direct communication to residents can improve public safety outcomes by providing advance notice of road closures, service disruptions, warming or cooling centre availability, parking restrictions, and other emergency measures.

‘Utility providers, including hydro companies, successfully operate opt-in text, app-based alert systems to notify customers of outages and restoration updates, demonstrating the effectiveness and public acceptance of such platforms. A municipal alert system could reduce pressure on staff resources by decreasing inbound inquiries during significant events and improve coordination between municipal departments, emergency services, and the public.’

Speaking to her motion at last week's Committee meeting, she described the opt-in system as an ‘added tool that will be beneficial to the community.’

‘For an example, we've had some major infrastructure burst and it's caused road closures on our main arteries, and that's something that we could inform the public really quickly to divert,’ she said. ‘In other cases, I've had some residents this year complain because they didn't know about a significant weather event and about parking on the streets and receiving tickets during what would be considered normal parking hours.’

Among those noting their support for a report back was Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese who said he wanted to see the details of implementation.

‘I think when the report does come back I'd like to see what the incidents of these are,’ he said of the motion's notation that the Town often receives inquiries of this nature. ‘It would be helpful to know how many people are really asking about these kinds of alerts and having the needs for this because there are a lot of alerts around for weather, etc., but I'd like to see what the extent of the problem is in the report.’

Similarly, Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner said she wanted to know the time commitment of municipal staff, should the alert model move forward.

‘The only problem I've ever had that residents have had is finding out about power outages,’ she said. ‘I believe I told you about a senior couple that was huddled up in the Library because they had no power. They had no idea of what was going on. It's a ridiculous situation for us to put our residents in, so I would like to know if Alectra could be included in this with any real information.

‘I think this would be worth the cost, unless it's astronomical, to just make it easier for residents to follow what we do and find information. I look forward to this coming back.’

By Brock Weir
Editor
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter