

Tree removal and emergency shelter top costs for ice storm funding

By Brock Weir

Removal of trees felled by last year's pre-Christmas ice storm, and keeping warm those individuals affected by power outages are the key costs have been submitted by Aurora for damages to the Province of Ontario.

Aurora is claiming \$293,809.91 resulting from the storm.

One of the highest impacts to the Town, however, will not be covered, and that is the replacement of trees that were lost in the process.

With limitations to what we can claim, I suspect it is going to be in the \$100,000 range or less, Mr. Elliott told Councillors on what the final claim might be. At one point, we had included the cost of replacement trees and that was pushing us closer to \$280,000, but the replacement trees are very expensive and they are not covered, very clearly. It is just the cost of removing and addressing public safety issues, removing fallen trees and debris from them, as well as warming centres and some other response costs.

For the Town of Aurora, it is focused primarily on the removal of tree debris, fallen trees, cutting and stumping them, and getting them out and the overtime that was involved.

Mr. Elliott's report hit Council agenda amid criticisms province-wide of municipalities not stepping up where they should in filing their claims. He said the claims have been ongoing since Council first gave his department direction to proceed with applications in January.

Criteria were handed down from the Province the following month, and a number of deadlines had to be met through the spring and summer. But, he added, there were challenges ahead.

Guidelines on applications were delayed from the Province, but other deadlines were met.

Finance staff are coordinating with the Town's claim submission and have been in contact with both the Parks and IES Operations staff occasionally throughout the year as new updates occurred, noted Mr. Elliott in his memo. After November 20 staff met with both groups to begin the arduous process of pulling the required documentation [together for the claim]. Only incremental costs to the municipality of our response to the ice storm and providing shelters will be eligible.

There has been no indication how long the review, audit, approval and payment process will take, but it has been suggested it could take quite some time for all claims to be completely processed and paid.

While Aurora did not follow some municipalities in declaring a state of emergency following the 2013 Ice Storm, that does not preclude the Town for eligibility in the Ontario Disaster Relief Assistance Program, concluded Mr. Elliott.

We have received confirmation our expression of interest has been approved to the final claim process, he said.