

Town accelerates ice storm tree clean up

Mayor 'worried' Town will get short changed if it doesn't complain about relief deadline

In order to recoup storm-related cleanup costs, the Town must complete 36 weeks of work in eight to meet a June deadline for consideration by the province's one-time disaster relief help.

Town's staff's proposed "measured" phased-in approach to the massive cleanup - estimated to cost \$1.3-million - had to be scrapped after the province announced work had to be completed by June 22 to be eligible for reimbursement. In all, staff said there are 2,600 locations that require action, with over 2,700 broken limbs and 900 complete tree removals required to ensure public safety.

On Monday, Chris Mills, Director of Infrastructure Services told general committee members the cleanup schedule can be compressed to meet the provincial deadline, but he needs council's approval to loan, or transfer money from Capital Replacement Reserves to the Severe Storm Fund to cover the bills until they receive relief funds. He said there is \$605,000 in the Severe Weather Fund, and Treasurer Ed DeSousa said the Capital Replacement Reserve sits between \$2 and \$3-million.

Mayor Rick Bonnette, said the ice storm and subsequent weather delays left a "heck of a mess," in Halton Hills, and it would be "absolutely impossible" to do 36 weeks worth of work in eight. He noted the cost estimates do not include the clean up of Town parks, cemeteries, Town facilities, trails or hamlets, or the estimated \$750,000 to replace trees.

Ward Two Councillor Bryan Lewis said the June 22 date for clean up to be complete showed provincial officials had "not been in our community" to show the devastation. He also said he hopes rural residents won't miss-use the additional help from the Town and Region to clear their bush lots for free.

Several councillors said they continually get storm clean-up questions from ratepayers, some whom complained the Town's

approach has been "willy nilly" and asking when an area will be worked on.

Dick Spear, the Town's Superintendent of Public Works said they checked for limbs and branches that were "hanging dangerously" and noted there are still "quite a few out there." Spear marvelled at the size of the brush piles at the Acton and Georgetown works yards. The tree debris will be burned or chipped into mulch. The town hired four additional employees to help with the cleanup, and rehired four

seasonal employees.

Thanking staff for their efforts to date, Bonnette said he appreciates the proposed shortened work plan, but is worried that at the end of the day, the Town will get "short changed if we don't make any noise." He will write a letter of protest to the Premier, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Opposition leaders and parties, local MPP Ted Arnott and the other 21 municipalities who appealed as a group for provincial relief.



CLEAN-UP CONTINUES: The pile of storm-related limbs and branches continues to grow at the Acton works yard on Commerce Crescent where residents can drop off their brush, for free. Bulk brush can be placed out for pickup on regular yard waste/garbage days, and bulk brush will be collected in non-serviced areas of Acton from May 26 to June 6. - Frances Learment photo

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