

COMMUNICATION 133064

Received From: Pascal Meunier, Director of Protective Services
Addressed To: Committee of the Whole
Date: August 9, 2022
Topic: Emergency Management – May 21 Storm After-Action Review

SUMMARY

At the Committee of the Whole meeting on May 25, 2022, Council requested staff to bring forward a Storm Debrief report following the Derecho event that occurred in our area and surrounding areas on May 21, 2022.

BACKGROUND

A contained incident like a house fire can sometimes develop into an emergency that requires immediate response from the community's first responders – fire, paramedics or police. Emergencies are events that pose a greater risk to people, property and/or the environment. They require a greater degree of community resource co-ordination to respond. Disasters occur when an incident's impact exceeds the community's ability to respond, creating the need to call on both the Town and external resources. Disasters are occurring more frequently, with more severe impacts, both across Canada and around the world. Emergency Management is not only the responsibility of the municipality, but also a collaboration of all Town departments and divisions, external organizations, businesses, community groups and residents to be prepared which promotes resilience throughout the Town.

The Town is required under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (R.S.O. 1990) to include certain public safety components in the Emergency Management program. Legislative requirements include:

- An Emergency Plan
- An Emergency Management Program Committee
- Annual emergency training and exercises
- Annual public education
- An annual review of the Town's top hazards and risks
- Identifying Critical Infrastructure

All of the components are assessed by the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) each year. A letter is sent to the municipality indicating whether or not they have achieved annual compliance. The Town of Carleton Place has achieved compliance annually for many years.

The Municipal Emergency Control Group (MECG) is the group that is responsible for the direction and control of the overall emergency response within the community. The MECG ensures the provision of the essential services necessary to minimize the effects of an emergency on the community.

The MECG takes a collaborative approach to emergency management, building strategic partnerships locally and across the province in both the public and private sector. The Town's community approach to emergency management allows the MECG team to consider and meet the public safety needs of residents, businesses, and organizations throughout Carleton Place. The MECG works behind the scenes to ensure this resilience through the effective organization of people, resources and systems all working together to minimize any impacts experienced both during and after a disaster. The Group is responsible for the implementation of the emergency plan within the scope of authority, maximize the effective utilization of assigned human, material, physical, financial and information resources in order to best meet the goals and objectives and to best serve the community.

The MECG is made up of the following members:

Mayor (*or alternate*)

CAO (*or alternate*), Operations Officer

CEMC (Community Emergency Management Coordinator) (*or alternate*)

OPP Representative

Fire Chief (*or alternate*)

EMS/Ambulance (*or alternate*), if required

Director of Public Works (*or alternate*)

Medical Officer of Health (*or alternate*), if required

Director of Social Services (*or alternate*), if required

Public Information Officer (*or alternate*)

An operations cycle is how the MECG manages overall emergency operations. MECG members may meet in person or virtually to report in a round table format, their agencies' status to the Mayor, Operations Officer and the group as a whole. The round table discussion at an MECG meeting includes presenting problems, answering questions, discussing resources and requests as well as any other relevant information so that timely informed decisions can be made as a group. Once the meeting is completed, it is the responsibility of each MECG member to report back to their respective department and pass on any relevant information or directives that come out of the MECG meeting, including the schedule of MECG meetings. The frequency of the meetings is determined by the Operations Officer in conjunction with the Mayor but should reflect the pace of the emergency or situation and occur on a scheduled basis, which may be adjusted accordingly.

The Emergency Plan, up to and including a Declaration of Emergency, may be implemented in whole, or in part, based on conditions at the site or severity of the situation. The primary reason a Town would declare a State of Emergency is so that the Mayor can take immediate actions and make lawful orders in a timely fashion during an emergency. The biggest example of this would be the ability to bypass the Town's Purchasing By-law which requires staff to obtain multiple prices when purchasing goods and services on behalf of the Town.

Any member of the MECG may request, through the CEMC, that the Emergency Plan be implemented in whole or in part. During the May 21st, 2022 event, the group was activated shortly after the storm hit Carleton Place by the CAO.

DISCUSSION

An after-action review (AAR) is an opportunity to identify and strengthen successful processes and note lessons that need to be applied in future emergency management plans and practice. These lessons and observations will inform and improve response to incidents in Carleton Place. An AAR has been conducted after the May 21, 2022 storm by the personnel who were involved, and a detailed review of action items has been completed and is attached to this report. Some of those items have already been corrected and put in place for the next event. Some other items, like replacement and/or upgrading of backup generators to help us improve communication and having a more organised shelter system will be brought forward to Council during the 2023 budget process.

A successful AAR is intended to contribute to a more robust emergency management program by providing evidence for potential improvements, better resource allocation, and building/furthering connections with partner agencies.

During our AAR, staff reflected on the following questions:

1. What were our objectives?
2. What occurred?
3. Why was there a difference between what we intended to do and what occurred?
4. What practices will sustain existing strengths and correct identified weaknesses?

To be effective, a debriefing must be conducted in a manner that supports learning. Thus, the purpose is not to identify error and assign blame, but to understand why actions and decisions made sense to those involved in the moment. Such a focus increases the probability that positive performance can be reinforced, and new ideas can be generated for changing performance that was incorrect or otherwise below the desired standard. A common mistake during a debrief is not going back in the moment with the information we had or the information coming in as the event is developing. For example, it is easy to get sidetracked if we base the result of our response on information we have now but did not have at the time of the decision making.

During the process of completing the AAR, staff have reached out to some external organisations to ask for feedback and learn more about resources they can offer in the future. The information received from them has guided some of our recommendations. For example, based on comments received, in future events we will communicate to the community that the MECG are monitoring and meeting on a regular basis. We were able to do this not long after, on June 15th and 16th when we issued information to residents about a tornado warning issued for Carleton Place.

The organisations from which we received comments are:

- Lake 88.1
- Lanark County Social Services
- Lanark County Transportation
- OEM Emergency Management Advisor
- Bell Canada
- Rogers
- JL Richards and Stantec (Investigation and Report to establish a conceptual design and determine budget pricing for backup generators).

An in-depth AAR has been completed and is attached to this report. Included in the AAR is information and comments we received from MECG members, outside agencies, Council members and from community members who felt it will improve future emergency response. Some of the opportunities for improvement identified through this process have already been addressed and tested successfully during the recent tornado watch. Some, however, have much bigger financial implications which will require the support and approval of Council during the 2023 budget process in order to help us better serve the community.

The overall outcomes of our community response during this event have been professional, methodical and well-executed given the quickly changing circumstances during the hours and days following the storm. The MECG was engaged within minutes of the outage beginning, which started the process of decision-making on an hourly basis, as we were receiving information. It is important to remember that once the storm had passed and with the information we received at that time from Hydro One, all of the residents were expected to have their power back within the next 24 hours. As time passed and as the damage was assessed, more information was received from Hydro One, which resulted in the MECG expanding the number of people around the table.

We have identified some opportunities to improve the response to the next event which we were able to implement a few weeks later when a tornado watch was issued and included communicating to the community that the MECG was monitoring the storm updates, was ready to be activated and that we were ready to implement any part of the plan that was required. Through the review, we identified that more back-up generators are required for Town Hall, the Neelin Street Community Centre, Carambeck Community Centre, and the Carleton Place Childcare Centre to ensure continuity of service, as well as provide more assistance to residents. Along with this, we noted that the Neelin Street Community Centre, though able to provide charging stations, did not have sufficient back up power to run elevators and sufficient shower facilities to accommodate the public, which are needed during a long-term event such as this one. The lack of elevators is particularly important for accessibility.

Feedback provided during and after the event indicated that some seniors felt they did not have support and felt alone. A public education campaign to promote having a buddy system will be developed to ensure that these vulnerable residents do not feel

this way during an event. A full list of action items can be found at the end of the attached AAR.

Our Ontario Emergency Management Field Officer reached out and was complimentary about the Town's response after the derecho and all of the programs we had set up for the event within the first 72 hours such as the charging station, Lanark County Social Services and Lanark County Transportation to provide transportation to individuals who needed to attend other communities with power to purchase groceries, supplies, etc. He felt that we communicated well with the residents and that we should be proud of our success. We also received positive comments from many of our residents and most were satisfied with the Town's response.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications at this time associated with this information report.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council accepts the Director of Protective Services' Report on the May 21 Storm After-Action Review dated August 9th, 2022 as information.