

North Kawartha Township still waiting for provincial emergency funding



By **Brendan Burke** Local Journalism Initiative Reporter
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This article will be available in Peterborough Examiner tomorrow Monday July 25 .. Article is the black type while I have added my red comments - Ambrose

North Kawartha Township is still waiting for word from the province to see if it will qualify for emergency funding to cover costs of damage from the May 21 windstorm.

North Kawartha (NK) only focus is recovery cost for municipal damage and not relief for affected property owners. Neither North Kawartha (NK) nor Havelock Belmont Methuen (HBM) townships have submitted a request to the Province to be designated for the relief assistance.

“I kind of get the sense that things may not start happening until the legislature is recalled on Aug. 8,” North Kawartha Mayor Carolyn Amyotte told council Thursday.

This has nothing to do with the legislature. Activating the financial relief programs is within the authority of Minister of Municipal Affairs. Uxbridge was activated about June 17 when parliament was not in session.

“Rest assured I’m constantly (reaching out to) our provincial representative (MPP Dave Smith) for help and updates.”

The township estimates costs will be around \$300,000 and it has already spent about \$10,000 on special debris bins and overtime wages.

According to CAO Solomon’s report to Council last Thursday, the Township has submitted the Preliminary Assessment Questions About Municipal Response and Recovery Cost to Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) but did not include the information in her report to Council.

The major cost faced by the municipality is the repair of roads which were resurfaced last year — Cheboutequion Drive and Napier Crescent — and were damaged by heavy Hydro equipment used to repair damage to lines in the area. It is estimated the price will be \$245,000.

NK CAO actual claims she has a quote of \$245,000 for this work. On learning about this shocking figure, I immediately drove to inspect the roads and did not observe any damages. Is this a major

misunderstanding by the CAO or a scheme to obtain Provincial funding based on an untruth? I have requested from the CAO a copy of the preliminary submission to MMAH and the quotation for \$245k.

The only other explanation would be that there at 2 Cheboutequion Drives and 2 Napier Crescents in North Kawartha or that what I inspected was already repaired! Both I doubt.

There was also damage to the light standards at Mt. Julian Wharf, estimated at about \$4,500.

This figure was not reported to Council and mysterious as to why Council would first learn of this information through the media.

North Kawartha and Havelock-Belmont-Methuen townships have faced criticism from some Jack Lake cottagers who said the townships had failed to adequately assist them with the removal of tree limbs and brush on their properties following the storm.

North Kawartha has only focussed on damages to their own infrastructure and building and have not been sensitive to their affected ratepayers requests which were to simply identify convenient locations for devastated cottagers to dispose of brush. Other affected municipalities addressed the needs of residents as a priority.

But both municipalities' mayors have said they continue to work to all residents receive the relief they need, despite strained and limited resources.

Jack Lake affected resident are aware and rightly concerned that neither North Kawartha nor Havelock Belmont Methuen townships have assisted waterfront property owners. Townships has carried on based on "business and normal" claiming limited resources while as an example City of Peterborough employed outside contractors to assist in the storm clean up. North Kawartha waterfront property owners pay 84.6% of the property tax revenue and I understand North Kawartha ..who refuse to confirm this have between 8 and 10 million dollars in reserves but no money was available to simply assist cottages in disposing of storm debris at convenient brush depots for cottagers.

North Kawartha is hoping to receive provincial support in the form of two programs: the Municipal Disaster Recovery Assistance program, meant to help cities and towns recover from substantial damages following a natural disaster, including repair to public infrastructure, and the Disaster Recovery Assistance for Ontarians program (DRAO), which applies to private property and allows individuals to recoup losses not covered by insurance.

At some point someone needs to let Mayor Amyotte know that this program does not assist cottagers just permanent residents. Although claiming to be hopeful neither North Kawartha nor Havelock Belmont Methuen Councils have passed a Council resolution asking the Minister of Municipal Affairs to activate the relief programs for our area. Also, my request to NK Council to have a resolution passed by NK Council to have the Minister activate the Relief assistance program in NK was intercepted by Mayor Amyotte and not allowed to be put on the agenda last week... so Councillors are not today aware of my request.

“What would you say the community and the municipal control group has learned that we can do better next time one of these storms comes around?” Coun. Colin McClellan asked at the council meeting.

Alana Solman, the township’s chief administrative officer, said better public education would be helpful, including knowledge about 72-hour preparedness and on having an area cleared of trees around homes.

Amyotte said she realized communication with other agencies is key. There was limited contact with both Bell Canada and Hydro One in the first days after the storm, she said.

She also confessed at the Council meeting last week .. that her contact with Bell Canada was based on dialing “310 Bell” and only obtained a contact with Hydro One when they contacted her. Municipalities are required by statute to have in place Emergency Plans and surely it is fundamental that an effective plan would have up to date contact

information for senior staff at major utilities. I got a quick response for friends when I was able to directly contact the President of Bell Canada!

“When something like this happens, we’ve got to have a better communication plan in place to connect with those communities and municipalities that are experiencing the devastation or disaster.”

Climate change has arrive and we will very likely experience more severe and frequent storms. And next time, Cottagers will expect a more substantive and sensitive response from local governments. Hopefully a state of emergency is not declare again effectively putting the Mayor in total charge without any involvement of the other members of Council. The Mayor of Ottawa who previously was a Minister of Municipal Affairs was being pressured to declare a State of Emergency but said doing so was only ceremonial. North Kawartha Council was advised by the CAO that there is no relationship between declaring a state of emergency and qualifying for relief funding. It was not an emergency proven by fact that the declaration was made my NK Mayor Sunday May 22 and Mayor Amyotte first met with her Emergency Control Group Tuesday May 24. Monday was a statutory Holiday! Further the Mayor held off for 8 days to tour the damaged areas of the Municipality.

Mayor Amyotte declaring the state of emergency in North Kawartha was strictly political posturing for a municipality which according to available information sustained about \$15,000 in cost mostly being staff overtime and a couple of lamp posts. Probably the North Kawartha May 21 storm will go down in the Guinness Book of Records as the least costly state of emergency ever declared on the planet.

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