



Subject: Ontario Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (OnWARN) Mutual Aid and Assistance Agreement

To: Council

From: Public Works Department

Report Number: 2021-203

Meeting Date: July 26, 2021

Recommendation:

That Public Works Department Report 2021-203 be received;

That the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to execute the Agreement attached as Appendix B to Public Works Department Report 2021-203 with the Ontario Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (OnWARN) for the purpose of coordinating response activities and sharing resources during emergencies; and

That a by-law to enter into an agreement with OnWARN be brought forward.

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to inform Council of OnWARN and gain Council approval to participate in the mutual aid and assistance program for sharing emergency resources among water and wastewater agencies across the Province.

Background:

The Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (WARN) is a program that allows utilities to cross jurisdictional boundaries to provide aid and assistance (personnel, equipment, and other resources) in preparing for, responding to, or recovering from an emergency.

WARNs were first developed in the United States in response to major emergency events such as 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. It was recognized that Water and Wastewater utilities require specialized resources and specially trained staff, and that other critical infrastructure, such as fire services, rely on a functioning water system.

The purpose of a WARN system is to enable municipalities to provide mutual aid and assistance during or after a natural or man-made disaster or emergency. Such events that may require assistance include flooding events, watermain breaks or water contamination.

The WARN program has been established in 49 of 50 states in America and has expanded into Canada with a network in both Alberta and Ontario. WARN is supported by the Environmental Protection Agency and other major environmental and water agencies such as the American Water Works Association, Canadian Water and Wastewater Association, and Ontario Public Works Association. The Ontario version, “OnWARN” was developed in 2011. Participation is voluntary and there is no obligation to respond to events. There are 61 current members, including Niagara Region and Thorold. The name and location of the current members are included in Appendix A.

Discussion:

Some of the benefits of joining OnWARN include utilizing a streamlined approach to emergency response, creating a network of support in the event of an emergency, and the primary benefit is that it establishes a framework of agreements and protocols in advance of an event.

OnWARN members can put in assistance requests for additional staffing resources or specialized equipment even without formally declaring an emergency. Assistance can then be provided during minor and major events in a timely manner. OnWARN not only facilitates access to equipment, but also resources, such as templates and guides, and knowledgeable personnel.

In the event of an emergency where the required response exceeds the City’s resources, participation in OnWARN would allow the water and wastewater systems to recover as quickly as possible by using external resources as needed. Members also have access to assistance from all participating members across the entire province, which can be helpful when responding to events which impact large geographic areas (e.g. severe weather events) and when response from adjacent municipalities is not possible.

The OnWARN Agreement describes the procedures and standards for the administration of the OnWARN Program and is provided in Appendix B.

Financial Implications:

There is no cost to join or maintain participation in OnWARN. As a member of OnWARN there is no obligation to provide assistance at any time, however, should assistance be provided, all costs associated with the response are borne by the municipality requesting

the assistance. The members who provide aid must be reimbursed for the services provided.

As per the Agreement, each Member shall maintain an insurance program that covers activities that it may undertake by virtue of membership in the Mutual Aid and Assistance Program.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

The initiative contained within this report supports the following pillar(s) of the strategic plan:

- Service and Simplicity - Quality and Innovative Delivery of Customer Services
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Conclusion:

As evidenced by its successful implementation and use in other parts of North America, as well as Ontario, participation in the OnWARN program is seen as a significant benefit to the City in the event of an emergency situation, building on the City's robust emergency preparedness. Emergency Management is a required part of the City's Drinking Water Quality Management System (DWQMS) and being an OnWARN member will help the city be better prepared for drinking water system emergencies.

Becoming an OnWARN member will allow the City to have access to a large network of contacts and would expedite deployment of assistance and resources in the event of an emergency. With the extra tools that are provided by this network, any water related disaster can be mitigated more effectively without having to declare a state of emergency. The mutual aid and assistance agreement is an important tool that the City can use to improve preparedness and response capabilities to emergency events.

Appendices:

- a. Current OnWARN Members
- b. OnWARN Agreement

Respectfully submitted,

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Report Approval:

All reports reviewed and approved by the Department Director and also the City Treasurer when relevant. Final review and approval by the Chief Administrative Officer.