



**Subject: Water Rescue During Wind Storm on November 15, 2020 – 2021-59**

**To: Council**

**From: Fire and Emergency Services**

Report Number: 2021-59

Meeting Date: February 22, 2021

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### **Recommendation:**

That Fire and Emergency Services Report 2021-59 be received; and

That the Fire Chief be directed to continue billing for providing fire fighting or other emergency services to non-residents in accordance with By-law 6741/105/19.

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### **Purpose:**

This report was prepared at the direction of Council in response to Jaskaran Singh's request for financial relief for an invoice issued by Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services under By-law 6741/105/19 for providing fire fighting or other emergency services on November 15, 2020.

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### **Background:**

On November 15, 2020, Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services were dispatched to a reported car being pulled into Lake Erie due to high water levels and currents. The details of events are as follows:

- A wind storm hit Port Colborne at approximately 4:00 p.m. producing winds above 132 km per hour.
- Due to the winds, Port Colborne experienced hydro lines down, trees down, and a lake storm surge that caused flooding in low areas. This includes H.H. Knoll Park and Steele Street from the hospital entrance up to and including Fielden Avenue.
- City Public Works staff installed barricades before the arrival of the storm to protect the public.

- The storm surge pushed the lake to the front doors of Northland Pointe Nursing Home and the west parking lot of the Hospital.
  - Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services was dispatched at 6:30:28 p.m. for a water rescue. Also responding:
    - Niagara Regional Police
    - Niagara Emergency Medical Services
    - Coast Guard located in Trenton, Ontario
  - On scene, Engine No. 1 and Rescue No. 1 found a car located just east of the nursing home on Steele Street in approximately three feet of water. Two occupants were in the car; Pardeep Sekhon Singh and Jaskaran Singh. Both occupants reside in Niagara Falls, Ontario.
  - Fire fighters donned water rescue suits and removed the occupants from the vehicle and brought them to a safe area. Niagara Emergency Medical Services assessed the occupants; the occupants were not transported for further medical attention.
  - The occupants did state they came from Niagara Falls. They did not inform Fire Department staff that they had been working at Northland Pointe Nursing Home.
  - Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services and City By-law staff had to make arrangements the next day to remove the abandoned car from the middle of Steele Street.
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## Discussion:

For Council's clarification, both occupants were invoiced by Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services for providing fire fighting or other emergency services in accordance with By-law 6741/105/19. Under the by-law, a vehicle does not have to be involved in the emergency response.

At the time of dispatch, the storm surge had pushed Lake Erie to the front doors of Northland Pointe Nursing Home. Staff have attached a picture of the area to show the placement of the car along with water levels at the time of the call (Appendix A). Water levels were at the front doors to Northland Pointe Nursing Home. The doors are at a higher elevation than any part of the adjacent parking lots on the south side.

Mr. Singh did indicate at the January 25, 2021, Council meeting that he and his friend were parked in one of the South parking lots in front of Northland Pointe Nursing Home. They arrived at approximately 6:00 a.m. and worked a 12 hour shift.

It can be assumed that Mr. Singh and his friend would have had to walk through a considerable amount of water to get to their car at approximately 6:30 p.m. A decision to drive through the water was made by the occupants, Mr. Singh being one of them. Weather conditions at the time were not limited to high water; winds were over 130 km per hour.

Many municipalities have started billing individuals for rescue operations. Niagara Falls Fire Department, for one, has started billing for gorge rescues in addition to other charges placed by other authorities. Billing for rescues of this nature sends a message that people must be responsible for their actions and helps to recover the cost of using City services to respond to calls that are due to negligence or outside of the normal scope of the Fire Department's mandate.

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### **Internal Consultations:**

Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services did request Roads staff to provide the time that barricades on Fielden Avenue and Steele Street were erected. An exact time could not be confirmed but it is believed to be mid-morning of November 15, 2020.

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### **Financial Implications:**

Other than the \$1,160.28 value of each invoice (both parties were individually invoiced), there are no financial implications.

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### **Conclusion:**

Whether the car went around barricades or was parked in one of the south parking lots, the decision to drive into a river of water was made. Staff feel that this decision not only put City staff in harm's way, but also Niagara Regional Police, Niagara Emergency Medical Services, and the Coast Guard staff were also put into unnecessary danger.

Staff feel that individuals will continue to make poor choices and there is little to no deterrent for those poor choices. By billing for services in these instances, the City sends the message that there are consequences for poor choices. By-law 6741/105/19 was created and passed by Council to help the Fire Service deal with people making poor choices. Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services requests that both invoices stand to assist the Fire Department in protecting the community.

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### **Appendices:**

- a. Appendix A - Map of the affected area on November 15, 2020.

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 approval is by the Chief Administrative Officer.