



Subject: Christian Horizons Group – Invoice for False Alarms

To: Council

From: Fire and Emergency Services

Report Number: 2021-21

Meeting Date: January 25, 2021

Recommendation:

That Council receive Fire and Emergency Services Report 2021-21, Christian Horizons Group – Invoice for False Alarms; and

That the Fire Chief be directed to continue billing for nuisance alarms in accordance with By-law 6741/105/19.

Purpose:

This report was prepared at the direction of Council in response to Christian Horizons Group requesting financial relief for an invoice issued by Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services under By-law 6741/105/19 for nuisance alarms.

Background:

As of December 22, 2020, Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services has responded to five nuisance alarms at Christian Horizons Group home located at 408 Barrick Road. Dates of responses and description in 2020 are as follows:

June 23 - 17:55:21 - Alarm System Equipment – Accidental Activation

July 8 - 01:50:32 - Alarm System Equipment – Malfunction

July 11 - 03:16:47 - Alarm System Equipment – Malfunction

July 13 - 22:48:54 - Alarm System Equipment – Malfunction

Dec 11 - 01:21:48 - Alarm System Equipment – Malfunction

After the second nuisance alarm on July 8, Fire Prevention Officer Turpin, contacted the operator of the home to discuss the need to get the system serviced. Again, on July 14 the Fire Prevention Officer contacted the operator after two more nuisance alarms; one on July 11 and another on July 13. The Fire Department does contact owners of nuisance alarms in order to eliminate further nuisance alarms and reduce the amount of invoices being issued.

Prior nuisance alarms at the property include:

Feb 4, 2016 - 15:06:54 - Alarm System Equipment – Accidental Activation

Apr 14, 2017 - 15:08:45 - Alarm System Equipment – Accidental Activation

Feb 21, 2018 - 15:55:35 - Alarm System Equipment – Accidental Activation

Aug 25, 2019 - 15:55:20 - Alarm System Equipment – Accidental Activation

Since 2016, Christian Horizons Group who operate a group home for vulnerable persons, has an average of one false alarm a year. The operator has never been billed for any nuisance alarms prior to 2020.

Under By-law No. 6741/105/19 Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services does have the ability to bill for each responding apparatus; for this type of alarm four of the Department's apparatus are dispatched. As a show of good faith, the Fire Service only billed Christian Horizons Group for one apparatus.

At the December 14, 2020 meeting Council waived the \$100 administration charge within the July 13, 2020 invoice. The City Clerk has informed staff that any changes to the billing of this invoice would require a reconsideration of Council.

Discussion:

A nuisance alarm by definition is the repeated activation of a fire alarm system caused by mechanical failure, equipment malfunction or improper maintenance. Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services takes the position that the problem of repeated nuisance alarms is preventable. These alarms have become a significant concern for the fire service due to the impact upon public and fire fighter safety.

Public Safety:

A fire alarm system is in place to give early warning to the residents of a building that a fire event is occurring. Repeated false or nuisance alarms in a vulnerable occupancy building can lead to reaction complacency among residents and staff. This complacency may slow or deter the evacuation of the residents in a true emergency.

Fire Fighter Safety:

The National Fire Protection Association lists the second leading cause of fire fighter injury or death in North America as motor vehicle accidents. While lights and sirens are used by emergency vehicles to warn other drivers on the roadways, distracted drivers do not always give the right of way. By reducing nuisance alarms, Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services limits exposure to accidents while leaving resources available for actual emergencies.

Solutions Available:

To combat nuisance alarms, the Fire Service has several tools at its disposal. The Ontario Fire Code can be used as an enforcement tool by laying charges and going through the court system. Provincial Offences usually requires staff to represent the City (at the City's expense) and, in cases of conviction, fines start at \$5,000 per count.

Note: The Regional Municipality of Niagara collects 50% of the fine and the remaining fines are split proportionately across the twelve municipalities of the Region.

Additionally, the City of Port Colborne pays for legal representation provided by the Region.

Under By-law No. 6741/105/19 "By-law to establish fees and charges for various services", Council will note that the Fire Service does not charge for the first nuisance alarm; subsequent nuisance alarms are charged at the Ministry of Transportation rate for each responding apparatus. For a fire alarm activation, such as the ones at Christian Horizons Group Home, four apparatus are dispatched. All monies collected through the invoicing process are paid directly to the City of Port Colborne.

The ultimate goal of Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services is public safety through code and standard compliance. Billing for services is a common practice for nuisance alarms and is one of the tools utilized to obtain compliance.

Financial Implications:

Council did waive the administrative fee of \$100.00 at the December 14th, 2020 Council meeting.

Total value of the invoice remaining is \$1109.10

Other than the value of the invoice, there are no financial implications.

Conclusion:

Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services did not bill Christian Horizons Group for the second nuisance alarm on July 8, 2020. Staff reached out to the property owner to attempt to resolve the issues the owner was having with the fire protection system before taking enforcement actions. Further nuisance alarms continued to occur.

By-law 6741/105/19 was created and passed by Council to help the Fire Service deal with properties that have compliance issues. Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services requests that the invoice stand to assist the department in protecting life through compliance.

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.