

Flood Preparedness & COVID-19

Call to discuss initial concerns and strategies for municipalities

Date: April 8, 2020

Hosted by FCM

City of Ottawa strategies:

- The City has a Councillor assigned to emergency operations centre to help manage messaging and planning going forward for the spring flooding season.
- Sandbags:
 - o One of the first things tackled was the supply of sandbags. There were leftover sandbags stored from last year that weren't used that are now being prepared for this year. In preparing the sandbags they are able to provide enough space to ensure staff are physically distancing while working.
 - o Deployment of sandbags and supplies to low-lying at-risk areas has changed to provide sandbagging stations in multiple areas instead of a single station to allow residents to maintain physical distancing. The stations will be set up within the city right-of-ways.
 - o Signage is being developed with Public Health to guide and remind people of requirements at bagging stations
 - o City staff that are on rotational shifts (one week on, one week off) are being asked to fill shifts for sandbagging during their "off" weeks
 - o Based on past events and use of modelling tools, the city now has a good idea of where flooding will likely occur and how many sandbags will be needed
- Communications:
 - o Communications plan is already developed; going to be rolled out as waters rise
 - o The City began communications on flooding a few weeks ago with the goal of informing and preparing residents but avoiding stirring panic/urgency at this stage
 - o Will be relying on regular media and social media to inform residents
 - o Stakeholders: Ottawa brought in the utilities and major stakeholders to the emergency taskforce before there was/is a major event. In some cases there isn't much you can do to mitigate (ex. Tornado) but we know that in some cases like flooding, power and natural gas have to be turned off. Start conversations early with the stakeholders so that you start talking about mitigation before the situations happen.
- Flood modelling:
 - o Using a flood preparation and response tool that was developed a few years ago.
 - o A number of staff were involved in past floods and have that previous knowledge on the impacted areas and infrastructure. Since 2017 property owners have improved their properties to avoid flooding. Staff have been monitoring so that they know about what is needed.
 - o Using this tool to provide a 3-day warning system – then warn residents in any areas that are at risk.
- Emergency Shelters:
 - o If evacuation is necessary, looking for alternative options that can be used. Hotels are being used for COVID-19 response teams, university and college dorms are also an option but also being used for first responders. Considering how community rec centres could be divided to provide space for people while maintaining social distancing. Could also look in to trailers, etc.
 - o A suggestion to look at using cabins in local camps as a potential alternative
- Alternative solutions:

- The City has looked into every type of solution that could be used, especially for protecting water plants. Any of the solutions that are being proposed as a quick solution aren't that simple. Currently looking at a water bag (Water Bladder), but it has to be properly secured. Can be a great tool for protection, but all of the different tools require different things that are often hard to procure during the flooding season. Properties can also be damaged for example if you bring in a front-end loader.
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Other issues raised:

Capacity in small communities:

- In NB, there are many communities that face flooding annually. However, in smaller communities they currently do not have the capacity to think strategically about how to manage floods during the pandemic. Looking for strategies that can be brought back to PTAs and other municipalities.

Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs:

- Volunteer firefighters are often involved in the response to flooding. Currently, firefighters that are paid on call can't receive the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). This is putting volunteer firefighters in a difficult spot as they have to decide if they should respond to calls or receive the needed benefit. Federal government has acknowledged the issue and FCM is actively engaged.

Update on FCM's advocacy:

- FCM has connected with Public Safety Canada (PSC), who is working closely with Provinces/Territories to ensure they have what they need with regards to flood preparedness. In the initial exchange of information with municipalities, FCM provided PSC a list of initial concerns that were shared with us by members. PSC is well aware of the issues and are working closely with the provinces to provide support and solutions.
- FCM will continue to work with PSC to identify any additional needs from the federal government to support municipalities.
- New FCM funding offers right now are within the Green Municipal Fund (GMF), which focus mainly on energy efficiency. No updates at the moment on other new program offers.
- MCIP program is currently promoting resources and tools produced by different partners who are funded through our program. A number of case studies and tools related to flooding should be released shortly.
- FCM has a general resources page on COVID-19 and municipalities
<https://fcm.ca/en/resources/covid-19-resources-municipalities>

Other Resources:

- QC government announced investment of 500 million dollars to help mitigate flooding (2/3 of the money will be managed by municipalities)

- UMQ will be hosting a session in collaboration with Ouranos on the topic of flooding and COVID. <https://umq.qc.ca/publication/communications-durgence-comment-conjuguer-covid-19-potentielles-inondations-et-autres-sinistres/?bulletin=1>

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