



MUNICIPALITY OF **West Elgin**

Staff Report

Report To: Council Meeting

From: Lee Gosnell, Manager of Operations & Community Services

Date: 2023-01-12

Subject: Monthly Operations Update – December 2022

Recommendation:

That West Elgin Council hereby receives the report from Lee Gosnell, Manager of Operations & Community Services for information purposes.

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on municipal operations during the month of December.

Background:

Utilities

- Staff kept up on all regular duties including meter changes, reads and locate requests.
- Installation of a new water service on Silver Clay Line.
- Completed diagnostic work and repair on the bulk fill water station and tested for proper operation.
- Prepared tractor for sidewalk plowing/salting operations in Rodney and completed multiple rounds during the month.
- Utilities operator started winter shift position with the public works department. This operator assists with winter maintenance activities as well as water dept. work when weather allows.
- Department Supervisor took part in Emergency Management exercise.

Recreation

- Staff kept up on regular duties including arena operations and regular cleaning of the Rodney Recreation Centre.
- Covered additional ice bookings during the holiday season and delivered multiple sponsored public skate times.
- Quiet time in the arena was used to clean and paint the canteen kitchen prior to use by the Wallacetown Optimists at the WLMH Jamboree.
- Recreation staff received training on the Trackless sidewalk plow which is used to clear snow in Rodney and West Lorne.
- Assisted with snow removal, warming center setup/operation, and shuttling stranded motorists back to their vehicles after the storm.

Public Works

- Completed excavation work for the new water service on Silver Clay Line
- Completed drain repair at 24320 Pioneer Line
- Repaired washout on Fleming Line
- Finished grading operations during early December to prep gravel roads for winter
- Assisted with final grading of Blacks Road over the new bridge at McDougall Line, which was opened mid-month. The new box culvert on Blacks Road at Kintyre Line should be finished early in the new year...weather pending.
- Pothole patching along all hardtop roads and edge repair on Dunborough Road.
- All public works staff (fulltime and seasonal) completed a 3-day snowplow course which consisted of both classroom and practical training.

Storm Response

- December 23 saw the arrival of our first major winter storm of the season. Preparation began days before, with staff inspecting winter equipment, verifying fuel levels in bulk tanks and generators, topping off winter material stockpiles such as salt, and confirming availability of additional resources if required. The storm began as rain on December 22, with an expected transition to snow at approx. 5:00 am on December 23. Patrolling began at 3:00 am and operators were on duty at 4:00 am to salt roads during the transition period. Temperatures dropped quickly around daybreak and winds steadily increased through the morning hours.
- By noon, moderate snowfall, and winds of 60 km/hour (gusting to 90 km/hour) were causing whiteout conditions. Highway 401 was closed in both directions between London and Tilbury due to multiple accidents, and many displaced motorists began using local roads. Unfortunately, due to GPS navigation systems which sent people down gravel roads and treacherous driving conditions, many of these motorists became stranded in West Elgin and neighboring municipalities. Due to further deterioration in road and weather conditions, a significant weather event was declared at 3:30 pm on December 23 and plowing operations were suspended for safety reasons. Most operators were sent home for rest, while the afternoon shift dealt with downed power lines, fallen trees and stranded motorists.
- The Rodney Recreation Centre was opened as a warming shelter during the afternoon hours, initially housing a dozen stranded motorists. This number would continually increase through the evening and overnight hours, as OPP and municipal staff delivered people found stranded along the roadways. With the help of West Elgin staff, members of the West Elgin fire department, and local residents, every individual (including pets) brought into the Recreation Centre were provided with hot drinks, food, and a warm place to sleep for the night. West Elgin's Fire Chief even made the slow drive to St. Thomas for more cots and blankets as numbers grew to approximately 50 by midnight.
- Operations staff used a grader, front end loader and pickup to reach stranded motorists, as well as freeing an ambulance which became stuck while on route to a call. This continued throughout the night until the day shift returned the next morning. Plowing operations began on all roads before 5:00am on Saturday December 24. This was a slow process, as blowing snow was still causing visibility issues, and operators were having to carefully work around many abandoned vehicles. Winter operations carried on throughout the day, with most roads cleared by early evening. A few sections of gravel road remained closed due to heavy drifting until they could be cleared by loaders and graders.

- Frigid temperatures and strong winds persisted on Saturday, but as plows were able to clear the roads, people who had stayed at the Rodney Recreation Centre were eager to continue their travels. Many struggled to reach a towing service, and some had no idea where their vehicle had been left. With help from West Elgin staff members and volunteer firefighters, people were transported back to their vehicles, and in many cases, workers helped shovel snow and free frozen brakes to get people on their way without the need for a tow truck. These recovery operations continued for several hours, with the final residents of 'Hotel Rodney' checking out at 5:30 pm on Christmas Eve. The last public works staff went home on December 24 at 9:00pm, but operators were back in at 5:00am Christmas morning to clear the remaining gravel sections and touch up some light drifting on hard top roads.

It has been many years since our area has seen a storm of this nature, and hopefully we will not experience a repeat anytime soon (although climatologists suggest these will be more frequent in the future). Although snowfall accumulation was not significant, bitterly cold temperatures, high winds, heavy drifting, poor visibility, and closure of a busy highway created a significant winter emergency. Situations like these require a coordinated effort and support from the entire team to be successful. There should be no doubt the community of West Elgin delivered during this winter event.

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Monthly Operations Update - December 2022 - 2023-02-Operations Community Services.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Jan 6, 2023

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Jana Nethercott