




Hamilton

INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency and Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	May 16, 2019
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Requirements for a First Nation Host Community (HSC19024) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SIGNATURE:	

COUNCIL DIRECTION

At its meeting of April 24, 2019, Council referred Correspondence Item 5.2 from the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services respecting providing emergency response assistance to First Nations Communities located in the Province through an agreement with the Government of Canada to the Healthy and Safe Communities Department for appropriate action.

INFORMATION

Emergencies of varying scale and consequence occur in Ontario on an annual basis. Some of these emergencies threaten the life and safety of citizens to the extent that they must be evacuated from their homes and sometimes even their community to ensure their well-being. First Nation communities located on the James Bay river system experience annual flooding resulting in evacuations to Host Communities. There are two legal agreements that are required for the evacuation and hosting to be initiated. One is the signed legal agreement between the Province of Ontario and the Department of Indigenous Services Canada. The second agreement is a signed Memorandum of Understanding between the Province of Ontario and the local municipality. The City of Hamilton does not have a signed Memorandum of Understanding with the Province of Ontario to be a Host Community.

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The process of evacuating a First Nations Community and becoming a Host Community is outlined below:

When an emergency within a First Nations community requires an evacuation, the Ontario Provincial Emergency Operations Centre (PEOC) in partnership with other provincial ministries will coordinate the evacuation. The PEOC will request municipalities and other First Nation communities in the province to act as Host Communities.

The principle that municipal communities are the first level of response during an emergency forms the basis of Ontario's strategy in partnering with municipalities to extend emergency assistance to First Nation communities. Under this approach, Provincial authorities are responsible for coordinating the overall program, and local municipalities and agencies provide specific services to ensure the needs of the evacuees are met.

In fulfilling this coordination role, the PEOC deploys Field Officers and other staff as required to affected First Nations and Host Communities during the emergency to act as liaisons and to assist in the delivery of services. Representatives from the Department of Indigenous Services Canada will also work with the host communities to coordinate the response efforts.

Coordination of services is also achieved through consultations with other partners including host community contacts, the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, Department of Indigenous Services as well as the Chief of the First Nations community being evacuated. The goal is to ensure that all health and safety requirements of First Nations people are met during their evacuation.

Aside from a signed legal agreement to be a Host Community, the following factors are considered before confirmation of a Host Community:

- Ability to meet health care needs and requirements (i.e. local hospital, pharmacy and opiate rehab);
- Capacity to provide appropriate accommodation for the number and type of evacuees being received;
- Proximity of evacuee community to Host Community;
- Amount of time for which the Host Community is able to continue hosting;
- Amount of time needed for the Host Community to reach a state of readiness to accept evacuees;
- Type and amount of external support required;
- Ability to provide emergency social services; and,
- Ability to provide recreational activities for evacuees.

In addition, the following should be considered for evacuations that are anticipated to continue long-term (greater than 14 days):

- Ability to sustain evacuees for duration of a long-term evacuation;

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- Capacity to provide additional services including:
 - continued schooling options for students;
 - day care; and,
 - pet care
- Ability to provide accommodations that will be comfortable over the long-term;
- Ability to provide social and health care services on a long-term basis;
- Ability to offer a space in which a small, temporary band office could be set up as well as telecommunications equipment; and,
- Capacity to provide entertainment and recreational services.

While municipalities play a key role in this process certain municipalities such as Cochrane, Kapuskasing, Thunder Bay and Timmins have established agreements with senior tier governments to be a Host Community. These Host Communities have long standing agreements and established logistical processes to ensure evacuees are welcomed. The signed agreements detail all services and the process for cost recovery. Some municipalities such as Timmins have a company that coordinates all services for evacuees. They have considered all aspects of being a generous and welcoming host. They service to the specific needs of Indigenous people. During this time, select hotels are used for evacuees only. Some hotels have hired an Indigenous Chief; while other hotels have cleared space for a tepee and cultural rituals.

This year the Office of the Fire Marshal Emergency Management sent letters (April 24, 2019, Council Agenda, Item 5.2) to municipalities asking if their municipality would consider the opportunity to be a Host Community for the 2019 James Bay flood season.

Hamilton could consider being a Host Community if there was a signed legal agreement with the provincial government outlining all issues pertaining to being a Host Community. Without an agreement outlining cost recovery and services to be provided, the City would be in a vulnerable position financially and in terms of liability. The legalities of an agreement would require a thoughtful process involving legal consultation between the Hamilton's Legal Services Division and the provincial government. The agreement would outline all services to ensure the health and safety of evacuees. This includes, but is not limited to shelter, registration and inquiry, culturally appropriate meals, sanitation, security, health care needs, clothing and laundry, transportation, family reunification, personal care, recreational activities, language translation services, and cultural needs. The agreement would also ensure that the City is reimbursed for any pre-planning activities in preparation for evacuees that are subsequently hosted in another community.

Accommodations would be one of the first considerations in hosting evacuees. A priority is to keep families together and this would mean the consideration of hotels and dormitories. The occupancy rate for hotels in Hamilton is lower than the Ontario average and would be difficult to accommodate a large number of evacuees. College and University dormitories are a consideration however dormitories are occupied with

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spring/summer accommodations for special events. Use of arenas and recreation centres would be limited as city services facilitate a vast array of recreational programs for Hamilton residents. The city would also need to withdraw assistance if facilities were required for a municipal emergency.

The ability for the City of Hamilton to be a Host Community would take many months of preparation. Coordination with city departments and non-government agencies (Red Cross, Salvation Army, etc.) would need to be considered and would be part of the planning strategy. The experience for the evacuee could have psychosocial impact and must be part of the planning strategy.

There is considerable thought and careful planning that must be accomplished to be a Host Community. The evacuees are a community with a culture rich in diversity. It is critical that the Host Community consider all needs of the evacuee. To be a Host Community takes strategic planning and a process involving city departments, government and community agencies and consultation with the Indigenous community. With proper planning and a signed agreement there is an opportunity for Hamilton to be a Host Community.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

None