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Chair and Members of
Public Works and Infrastructure Committee

Extreme Weather Impacts on Toronto Water Service

Prolonged, extreme cold weather in both the 2014 and 2015 winters have led to an unprecedented number of "no water" calls due to frozen pipes on both City and private property.

The demand has overwhelmed the staff and resources available in Toronto Water, and has resulted in unacceptable delays to residents waiting for help. Some have been without water for up to two weeks and have been forced to rely on the support of neighbours, friends and family.

With prolonged extreme cold events becoming more common, the City will continue to need greater emergency response capacity. This may include greater thawing capacity, increased efficiency in highline techniques, better education and preventative measures before prolonged cold events, and better coordination between and within City departments to respond effectively.

The initial lack of coordination between Toronto Water and 311 resulted in poor communication with residents: many waited days for initial contact, called 311 daily for updates, and missed crucial visits from Toronto Water staff. Most residents simply cannot afford to cancel work on a prolonged basis, and vulnerable residents have been left with few options other than to vacate their homes.

In order to learn from the experience of the past two years, and be better prepared for the future, I would like to make the following recommendation:

RECOMMENDATION:

The General Manager of Toronto Water in conjunction with the Chief Operating Officer undertake a comprehensive review of the impacts of the 2014 and 2015 severe weather response including: capital and operating costs; summary of service calls and work orders/repairs performed by Ward; administrative and communication functions and responsibilities of 311 and Toronto Water; evaluation of current work order, scheduling, database and communication technologies; administrative policies, priorities and protocols for such things as private vs. public services, 'high lining; etc; and any other pertinent information, and report to the June 17 2015 meeting of the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee, including any recommendations and resource requirements.

Sincerely,

Councillor Janet Davis
Ward 31, Beaches-East York