

TOWNSHIP OF O'CONNOR – NOTES –
EMERGENCY TABLETOP EXERCISE DECEMBER 13, 2023

Notes of the Tabletop Exercise held on Wednesday, December 13, 2023 at 7 p.m. in the O'Connor Community Centre.

Present: Mayor Jim Vezina
Councillors: Alex Crane, John Sobolta, Carly Torkkeli
Clerk-Treasurer Lorna Buob
CEMC & Administrative Assistant Erin Laforest
Fire Chief & Alternate CEMC Henry Mattas,
Acting Deputy Fire Chief Greg Biloski
Alternate CEMC Morris Douglas
Roads Department – Kelly Johnson, Eugene Payette, John Caren
Volunteer Fire Department and First Response – Leanne Coderre,
Willy Coderre, Brendan Rea, Mike Davey,
Volunteer Fire Department Auxiliary Jessica MacDonald
Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) – Sargent Gary Wojciechowski,
Constable Faith Ling
Emergency Management Ontario – David Rasi, Field Officer, Amethyst Sector
Lakehead Region Conservation Authority (LRCA) – Tammy Cook, CAO
Superior North EMS – Jordan Gelu

Ms. Laforest, Community Emergency Management Coordinator (CEMC) welcomed everyone to the Township of O'Connor's Emergency Tabletop Exercise at 7:00 p.m. Introductions were held.

Copies of the Township of O'Connor's Municipal Emergency Plan were available for everyone at the door. Copies of the Lakehead Region Conservation Authority's Flood Warning System and Flood Messaging Terminology were distributed.

Ms. Laforest informed everyone that as per the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, every municipality shall have and implement an Emergency Management Program. This program shall consist of an Emergency Plan, training programs and exercises for our Municipal employees, as well as those providing other necessary services as per the Township of O'Connor Emergency Plan. This program also requires public education on risks to public safety, as well as public preparedness for emergencies.

A general overview of the Township's requirements were presented by PowerPoint presentation. The roles of Council, employees and volunteers were discussed. The positions of those in the Emergency Management Program Committee (EMPC) and their roles were discussed. In O'Connor, the EMPC consists of the Mayor, Councillors, Clerk-Treasurer, Fire Chief, Community Emergency Management Coordinator, and alternate CEMC's. The Committee will also address any deficiencies that may arise after this exercise.

Additionally, Ontario Regulation 380/04 states that every municipality shall have a Municipal Emergency Control Group (MECG). The MECG for the Township of O'Connor consists of the Mayor, the Clerk-Treasurer, the Fire Chief, and the Deputy Fire Chief. All emergency operations shall be directed and controlled by the MECG who, in the event of an emergency, will assemble at the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC). They are required, by law, to be trained and able to demonstrate knowledge of the components of the Township's Emergency Plan.

A Community Control Group (CCG) supports the MECG. Depending on the type of Emergency that the Township is experiencing, members from outside agencies may be invited to the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC). Not all CCG members need to be present for the CCG to function. Additional personnel may be required for expertise in other areas, such as Environment Canada, Search & Rescue, or Ontario Power Generation.

Besides the requirement to provide training, the Emergency Tabletop Exercise is an opportunity to improve the Township's readiness and response for dealing with

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emergencies and disasters. It helps clarify the roles and responsibilities for those in the MECG and the CCG. It gives the EMPC the opportunity to evaluate the Township's Emergency Plan in action, identify deficiencies and make amendments to improve the functionality of the plan. For the MECG, these exercises provide peace of mind and confidence that the key personnel of the CCG are adequately trained and prepared for critical events, which can drastically improve response times, potentially saving lives and protecting the Township from significant losses.

Ms. Laforest went on to explain that following the exercise, an informal debriefing of the exercise, called a Hot-Wash, will be held to allow for immediate feedback.

The scenario for this exercise is a 2024 Flood. On Friday, May 17, 2024, the Lakehead Region Conservation Authority (LRCA) issued a Flood Watch for the Lakehead Region including the City of Thunder Bay, Municipalities of Neebing, Oliver Paipoonge, Shuniah and the Townships of O'Connor, Conmee and Gillies. The LRCA has advised that 80-100 mm of precipitation is forecasted over the next 24 hours. There is also the potential for thunderstorms producing an additional 5-10 mm of precipitation plus any snow melt and runoff. Localized thunderstorms may also occur which could result in higher amounts in some areas.

Ms. Laforest requested that everyone discuss with their group what measures the Township of O'Connor currently have in place to prepare for major weather events. The participants responded with the Township's Text Messaging System and the Township Website. The website is also a useful tool to promote Emergency Preparedness and the Plan. In this case, they could see the Public Information Guide for Floods. Other measures are Social Media with the Township of O'Connor Volunteer Fire Department on Facebook, radio news casts generally announce the LRCA issued statements, and the Weather Network (or other weather apps). Although the information is not coming directly from the Township, people could be checking the weather conditions regularly. The Township of O'Connor Emergency Plan is available to its residents, without the personal information of names and phone numbers. For preparedness methods, the Township has the Cornerstone monthly newsletter, used to promote emergency preparedness, and inform our residents what measures can be taken to prepare for a flood or what they should do in the event of a flood and public events can be hosted to give our residents the knowledge they require to survive major weather and disastrous events. Public awareness is key for emergency preparedness. The Township of O'Connor also has Emergency Awareness Forms which we encourage our residents to provide and update their emergency contact information, age, medical conditions, heat, and water supply and whether they would need help in the event of a severe weather event. As a small municipality, we are able to offer this kind of service. It was recommended that members encourage people to fill these forms out, as well as sign up for the text messaging. The information collected is always kept confidential and it is of no cost to them. The Township of O'Connor also distributes Welcome Packages to every new resident. In this package is information on the Township's Directory of emergency phone numbers and staff names, the Township's Evacuation Plan, a map for the Township, the Emergency Awareness Form, instructions to sign up for the Text Messaging service, as well as fire permit information and a Fire Department application to hopefully encourage new volunteers.

The scenario continued by asking those present what steps our Emergency Plan takes to monitor severe weather conditions and the participants were encouraged to look at the Plan. The Township has an Emergency Communications Plan included in our Emergency Plan. It was agreed that timely and accurate information is of utmost importance during an emergency. Sharing of information is critical for a coordinated response.

The scenario continued with group discussions, including twists and turns to the emergency. The participants were encouraged to get up and communicate with each group as the emergency unfolds. Ms. Cook provided information on how and when the LRCA would be communicating their Flood Warning System to the Township and what each term refers to.

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Ms. Laforest did a pop quiz following the exercise with questions from the Emergency Plan that may or may not have been discussed during the exercise.

She then continued with the exercise Hot-Wash. Participants responded on the strengths and weaknesses of the plan and the exercise. The strengths included experience, as the Township has had to deal with floods in the past. Communication between the Township Departments and knowing each other helps to coordinate staff and departments and having contact information for additional resources included in the Plan.

Some of the weaknesses would include the small number of staff and lack of volunteers, lack of government funding, the Township currently does not have the emergency backup generator connected, however we have applied for funding for the purchase of new generators, with automatic start, for both the Fire Hall and the Garage, and a transfer switch from the current Office generator to connect to the Community Centre. The Township currently does not have a Continuity of Operations Plan for emergencies other than for a pandemic.

Some of the unanticipated issues that arose during the exercise were discussed, including the Road Superintendent being on holidays and the power outage happening during the emergency. This highlighted the fact that someone else still has to be knowledgeable in each department in an emergency.

It was noted that outside agencies can step in from the province including the Red Cross, Salvation Army and Team Rubicon Canada. It was recommended that when calling for assistance that the question be asked, is there going to be a cost attached to their assistance.

High priority issues were discussed. The back up generators are very important, and we are awaiting a reply to our current funding application to purchase new ones. Staff and volunteers training, and recruitment of more volunteers. It was noted that if we are using any volunteers in an emergency, while you do not need to declare an emergency for funding, if it is declared the volunteers are covered under WSIB. It also allows for the purchase of emergency materials and contractors without having to consider the Procurement By-law for quote or tender.

A couple of improvements that were suggested would be to have the Road Employees check in with each other and with the EOC regularly during an emergency, possibly every 15 – 30 minutes, as they could be working in dangerous conditions and alone, we would want to ensure they are safe. It was also suggested that a large map of the Township be hung up in the EOC so that it is easy to visualize the areas of concern. The LRCA can provide a copy of the Township Zoning Map. This map would also show the regulated areas and potential areas for flooding. This will be included in our emergency supplies box. It was noted that pictures should be taken regularly by the Township departments and residents throughout the emergency as proof of the event and the extremes. It was noted that if a flood were to occur during the day when schools are running, students from our Township could be stuck at the school or on school buses if access to their home is cut off. This would also have to be considered.

Ms. Laforest thanked everyone for attending and participating, and the exercise adjourned at 9:08 p.m.

Mayor

Clerk-Treasurer