



Report to Finance and Corporate Services Committee

PREPARED BY AND KEY CONTACT: C. SMITH, SENIOR MANAGER, ACCOUNTING AND REVENUE (X5128)

SUBMITTED BY: C. MILLAR, DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND TREASURER
J. THOMPSON, DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

GENERAL MANAGER APPROVAL: D. MCALPINE, GENERAL MANAGER OF COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE SERVICES

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER APPROVAL: M. PROWSE, CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

DATE: JUNE 5, 2018

SUBJECT: 162 CHELTENHAM ROAD WATER BILL

RECOMMENDED MOTION

1. That the 162 Cheltenham Road Water Bill report be received.

PURPOSE & BACKGROUND

2. During the time period beginning January 8, 2018 and ending February 13, 2018, residents at 162 Cheltenham Road incurred high water usage as a result of a burst pipe in their home, which was unoccupied during this time.
3. On April 29, 2018 the City received confirmation from the resident, Mr. Steve Balmer, asking to bring forward a deputation regarding the matter of a large water bill which he received that reflected this high level of usage – see Appendix “A”.
4. City staff followed normal practices and procedures as identified in the Chronological Timeline of Events in Appendix “B”. As a result of this unfortunate event, under the City’s Water and Wastewater Billing By-law 2016-115, the home owner is responsible for the costs and was billed accordingly.
5. In various discussions with the home owner, City staff have offered the option to enter into a payment plan as outlined in Appendix “C”, as is the historical practice in such situations.

ANALYSIS

6. 162 Cheltenham Road is a residential property and as such, is billed approximately every 60 days for water and wastewater charges.
7. The billing period in question includes January 4, 2018 to March 1, 2018 inclusive. It was during preparation for this billing cycle that the high usage issue was identified, as the water and wastewater billing system indicated 1,890 m³ had been utilized in a period of 56 days, at a cost of \$7,494.19.
8. During the time period where high water usage was reflected, the residents of the home were vacationing and were not in the home. A neighbour indicated that they were away for the winter.
9. Subsequent discussion with the residents indicated that their property sustained a flood from a burst pipe, as a result of the water being left on and pipes freezing.

-
10. The residents also noted that they had someone checking on the home for them while they were away, but this person may not have been going inside or walking around to the backyard to notice the problem.
 11. The water had not been shut off inside at the shut off valve, nor had the internal plumbing been drained.
 12. The City of Barrie By-law 2016-115, Water and Wastewater Billing By-law (Effective January 1, 2017) provides the following relevant guidance with respect to water usage and billing:
 - a) Paragraph 8.7 - All water passing through the water meter shall be charged for whether used or wasted;
 - b) Paragraph 14.6 – When any property is left vacant or without heat, it is the owner’s responsibility to shut off the water supply from within the property and to drain the piping therein;
 - c) Paragraph 14.8 – When any property that is left vacant, unattended, or without heat, where the water supply has not been shut off, suffers damage to it and its contents from a leaking or burst water pipe or water meter, neither the owner nor occupant shall have a claim against the City.
 13. The City provides the ability to all City of Barrie water customers to view their daily water usage online using their Account Number and Meter ID which is contained on all water bills. Customers can see their daily usage by week, month, year, or by a custom date range as far back as one year. Instructions for viewing account information are located in the Water/Billing section on the City of Barrie website, and on the customers’ water bills.
 14. Customers are continually encouraged to utilize the Customer Dashboard regularly to proactively monitor their own consumption, in an effort to avoid high bills caused by otherwise unnoticed leaks/water loss.
 15. Large water bills are incurred from time to time for many reasons. It is the City’s practice to address these types of bills in accordance with the By-law provisions. Exceptions to this practice would set dangerous precedents that would ultimately result in placing an additional burden on all other ratepayers.
 16. Recognizing the size of this bill, the City has offered an opportunity to pay the debt in monthly instalments over a reasonable period of time, as well as waive interest costs that would otherwise be incurred as a result of an ongoing principal balance.

ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS

17. There are no environmental matters related to the recommendation.

ALTERNATIVES

18. The following alternatives are available for consideration by the Finance and Corporate Services Committee:

Alternative #1 The Committee could choose to waive some or all of the water bill in question. As the Water and Wastewater Billing By-law is clear on the responsibilities of the City and the customer in this situation, this option would create a dangerous precedent which ultimately places a heavier burden on all other ratepayers and as such, this alternative is not recommended.

Alternative #2 The Committee could choose to enforce the Water and Wastewater Billing By-law 2016-115 which would require that the water bill in the amount of \$7,494.19 be paid in full, with penalties and interest as calculated from the due date of the bill. The City understands that this is a significant balance owing, as such this alternative is not recommended.

Alternative #3 The Committee could choose to require that the water bill be paid in full, but waive some or all of the penalties and interest that have accumulated since the due date of the bill. Staff have previously presented to the property owner the option of a reasonable monthly payment plan.

FINANCIAL

19. The potential financial impact of the alternatives will depend upon the option that is chosen.

LINKAGE TO 2014-2018 STRATEGIC PLAN

20. The recommendation included in this Report supports the following goal identified in the 2014-2018 Strategic Plan:

Responsible Spending

Limiting the exceptions to the City's Water and Wastewater Billing By-law will limit the City's financial risk.

APPENDIX "A"

Resident Communication

From: Steve Balmer [REDACTED]
Sent: April 29, 2018 1:59 PM
To: Wendy Cooke <Wendy.Cooke@barrie.ca>
Cc: Craig Millar <Craig.Millar@barrie.ca>
Subject: FW: Cheltenham Rd

Dear Ms. Cooke,

Below, I believe there is sufficient information for you to get an understanding of the essence of the background surrounding an unfortunate situation, whereby a pipe on the north wall of my home failed, causing substantial damage to my home. I was originally in touch with Mr. Craig Millar on this matter, in order to discuss a water bill I received mid March for \$7,494.14.

The matter was first noticed by way of City recording, whereby beginning January 13th., the City's systemics began to track an unusual amount of water usage of some 2984 (I assume litres/day), being consumed in my home. This was not brought to my attention until the neighbour, who was minding my home while I spent the winter in FL., noticed my basement flooding. My neighbour notified me on or about February 15th. Furthermore, I was not informed of this by the City Water Department office until I received a "mailed" letter, which didn't get to my FL., address until sometime early April, informing me of this situation. Later, there was a notice placed on my front door by the Water Operations on March 14th., noting that they had checked my water meter.

[REDACTED]

Ms. Cooke, Mr. Millar suggested to me that this matter was outside of his control, and that I would have to reach out to you in order to make my case for this issue of a bill that I do not believe I should be responsible for. I understand that in order to have this reviewed, I should be in touch with you in order to present my case to the Deputation during the next available Finance & Corporate Service Committee meeting (if I understood him correctly).

Please consider my situation and kindly advise how best we need to proceed.

Thank you.

Steve

Steve Balmer

[REDACTED]

APPENDIX “B”

Chronological Timeline of Events

Date	Observation / Action
January 9 th , 2018	For the billing period November to December 2017, revenue staff noticed an unusual consumption of 0 for this residence. As is City practice, a Water Operations crew was dispatched to investigate any issues. No one was home at the house and a neighbour confirmed the home had been vacant as the owner was away for the winter. Coincidentally, after this visit, during a cold weather period, there was a leak inside the house.
March 2, 2018	During preparation of water bills for the billing period January to February 2018. SunGard billing reports indicated high usage of 1,890m ³ in a 56 day period, charges amounted to \$7,494.19. Further review of consumption data for verification indicated high usage beginning January 8, 2018, continuing to February 13, 2018, dropping to 0 on February 14, 2018.
March 10, 2018	Water bill mailed to customer.
March 15, 2018	Usage data, and letter advising of high consumption mailed.
March 22, 2018	Resident called, advising receipt of letter and confirmed cause of issue as a burst pipe. Water had not been shut off during their absence during winter months at the inside water meter. Resident indicated someone was checking on the house in their absence but may not have been going inside or walking around to the backyard to notice the flooded basement. They were contacted by a concerned neighbour and indicated they would return home on April 16 th . As this unfortunate event is the responsibility of the home owner, the Water Billing Supervisor advised inability to reduce charges as per our Water and Wastewater Billing By-law (2016-115), but offered to discuss suitable payment arrangements such as monthly payments over 1 to 2 years, and to suspend any further penalty/interest charges.
March 28, 2018	Resident contacted Water Billing Supervisor and indicated he did not intend to pay the outstanding amount. Supervisor again advised of her lack of authorization as per our Water By-law to reduce any charges and indicated next steps would be to elevate the issue to the Director of Finance.
March 29, 2018	Resident sent email to Director of Finance with concerns over the large amount of the bill and that the abnormal levels of water usage should have been attended to once noticed by the City's monitoring systems.
April 3, 2018	Director of Finance replied to resident that matter would be investigated and that he would respond to the resident.
April 6, 2018	Water Operations confirmed that staff would need access to the water meter in the home to visually confirm the reading and ensure its proper operation. Meter was operating as expected and reading device programming parameters were correct
April 10, 2018	Director of Finance replied to resident with request to obtain access to home. Resident replied indicating return date from Florida, location of meter and confirmed access would be provided.
April 29, 2018	Resident advised Clerk's office of intent to file Deputation – see Appendix “A”.

APPENDIX "C"

City of Barrie Letter

CITY HALL
70 COLLIER STREET
TEL (705) 726-4242
FAX (705) 739-4237



P.O. BOX 400
BARRIE, ONTARIO
L4M 4T5

THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF BARRIE
Finance Department
"Committed to Service Excellence"

STEVE BALMER
162 CHELTENHAM RD
BARRIE ON L4M 6S5

URGENT
Notification of High Consumption

Service Address: 162 CHELTENHAM RD

Dear Home Owner:

During a recent billing review we noticed that there was an exceptionally high amount of water registered through the water meter at 162 Cheltenham Road for the most recent service period. We would like to bring to your attention that there was, and still may be, the existence of a possible water leak and we want to advise you of the financial impact this water leak will have on the water bill that will be issued.

During the service period of **January 4, 2018 to March 1, 2018** a total of **1,890m³** of water consumption was registered through the water meter at the property. The total charges that are to be billed for this consumption is **\$7,494.19**.

We do not know what caused this amount of water to be consumed but we can recommend areas to investigate such as all toilets at the property, water softeners, inside and outside taps, and any device that draws water from your internal plumbing. If you have not done so already, it is important that you inspect your plumbing and devices that utilize water to ensure that the exceptionally high water usage does not continue.

For your information, we have enclosed the water usage information for the property for the service period during which this high consumption occurred. The usage data appears to show that the increase in consumption began around January 12, 2018 and continued until approximately February 13, 2018.

Should you have questions regarding the water meter or consumption or need additional assistance reviewing your water consumption, please contact the Water Operations Branch at (705) 792-7920.

The Revenue Branch is unable to reduce the water and wastewater charges related to this high water usage. We can, however, discuss a suitable payment plan that would allow for the balance to be paid over a longer period time. For assistance with these water and wastewater charges and potential payment arrangements you may contact Mary-Lyn Gervais at 705-739-4220 ext. 5112 or by email at mary-lyn.gervais@barrie.ca.

We would like to work with you to avoid any unnecessary fees or transfers and will do our best to accommodate suitable payment terms.

Sincerely,

Mary-Lyn Gervais
Acting Supervisor of Water and Wastewater Billing
Revenue Branch