

DATE: October 21, 2024

REPORT NO: HR-01-2024

SUBJECT: **After Hours Emergency Phone Procedure**

CONTACT: Janine Buffo, Human Resources Advisor
Justin Paylove, Acting Director of Legislative Services/Clerk

OVERVIEW:

- At the September 16, 2024 Administration/Finance/Fire Committee meeting administration was directed to report back for clarification on the operation of the phone system during an office closure, specifically the Christmas break, and how calls from residents are retrieved or routed for snow events or other emergency operations during the winter season.
- Accordingly, administration has outlined the procedures that are used for contacting staff after hours and/or when the Township office is closed.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Information Report HR-01-2024 titled “After Hours Emergency Phone System Procedure”, dated October 21, 2024, be received.

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN:

Theme #4 – Foundational: Advance Organizational Capacity and Effectiveness

BACKGROUND:

At the September 16th 2024 Administration/Finance/Fire Committee Meeting, Council received Recommendation Report C-05-2024 titled “Township Hours of Operation for Winter Break – 2024”. This report is being brought to Council in response to the request for clarification on the operation of the phone system during an office closure, specifically the Christmas break, and how calls from residents are retrieved or routed for snow events or other emergency operations during the winter season.

Council approved the following resolutions on September 16, 2024:

*“That, Recommendation Report C-05-2024, titled “Township Hours of Operation for Winter Break - 2024”, dated September 16, 2024, be received; and
That, the following Winter Break operating schedule be approved:
That, the Township Administration Building be closed on December 27, 30 and 31, 2024 (office closed for the period between December 24, 2024 to and including January 1, 2025); and,
That, the Public Works Yard remain open on December 27, 30 and 31, 2024; and
That, the West Lincoln Community Centre remain open, subject to program scheduling, from December 24, 2024 to January 1, 2025 inclusive, with the exception of December 25, 2024.”*

Council also passed the following amending resolution:

“That, administration return with a report to the next Administration/Finance/Fire Committee meeting that provides further clarity on the emergency phone system.”

CURRENT SITUATION:

If a call is placed to the Township when the office is closed, the caller will be given the option to either leave a message for a specific employee at their extension, or they can choose to hear the after-hours emergency contact information. The after-hours emergency contact is routed to the Niagara Region dispatch number, where they can report their concern or emergency. The Niagara Region dispatch phone line is monitored 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Once a call is received it is dispatched immediately to the appropriate West Lincoln employee who is on call during that time, within the appropriate department; Roads, Water, Wastewater, Parks and Recreation, and Other.

The following recording is played when the Township office is closed.

“Thank you for calling the Township of West Lincoln, unfortunately our offices are now closed.

If you know the extension of the person you are calling and would like to leave a message, please dial it now.

Our office hours are 9 – 4:30 Monday to Friday.

- 3 – After-hours emergency (Niagara Region Dispatch contact information)
- 0 – leave a message in General Mailbox
- 2 – Staff Directory
- 4 – Public Works – 5139 (PW Secretary)
- 5 – Arena – 4688 – (Front Desk)”

During the Christmas closure, the message will be modified to indicate the number of days that the Township office is closed, so the public has a sense as to when they can expect a return call.

Administration has also reviewed the contractual obligations of the Township to both Union and Non-union employees, to confirm that this closure is in compliance with the Collective Agreement, as well as Employment Standards Act, 2000.

In 2023, the Township changed phone systems at all facilities. This new phone system is cloud based, which offers a “softphone” feature. This means that Township extensions can be answered through any device that has internet, for example a cell phone or a laptop. This application allows for every employee with a phone line to answer their phone via the internet, which includes the ability to receive and monitor calls during an emergency.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

There are no financial implications to the municipality with respect to the emergency phone procedure. Report C-05-2024 outlined that during the Winter Break closure, impacted employees will use either a vacation day, lieu day, or take the time off without pay. This is communicated well in advance of the holiday closure, to ensure every employee has the opportunity to plan their vacations accordingly.

INTER-DEPARTMENTAL COMMENTS:

This report was reviewed by the CAO and the Clerk.

CONCLUSION:

Administration is satisfied that the after-hours phone message provides the required information to connect residents with Niagara Region dispatch which is monitored 24/7 and has the up to date information as to how to route calls within West Lincoln.

Prepared & Submitted by:

**Janine Buffo
Human Resources Advisor**

Approved by:

**Truper McBride
CAO**