

**North Millbourne Community Meeting
Regarding July 12 – 23, 2012 Flooding
Held September 24, 2012 at North Millbourne Community League Hall**

Consultation Summary

Attendance: 150 (approx.)

City of Edmonton Presenters:

- James Tan, Director of Drainage Planning, Drainage Services
- Derek Melmoth, Director of Drainage Operations, Drainage Services

Presentation

Note: The following is a brief synopsis of the meeting's Powerpoint presentation. The full presentation is available on-line at www.edmonton.ca/floodprevention (click on Public Consultations).

Following introductions, Mr. Tan provided a summary of the July 2012 storm events. He noted that overall the storms in July were very intense over a short duration. 1,752 residents reported basement flooding – 502 in Mill Woods. He reviewed what Drainage Services has done since the July flooding to determine the nature and causes of the basement flooding. The preliminary assessment by Drainage Services suggests that the existing trunk sewers surcharged and backed up local sewer systems in the Mill Woods neighbourhoods. Emergency repair works have been done to repair catch basins and manholes and fix sewer main ruptures and blockages.

Out of Mill Woods' reported basement flooding, results suggest 30% were due to sanitary back-up; 10% due to private property issues (such as seepage, sump pumps, lot grading) and 60% have undetermined causes. Drainage Services is trying to determine the remainder of the causes. Mr. Tan emphasized residents can help by letting Drainage Services know how they were flooded.

Since 2006, a total of \$50 million has been committed to flood prevention projects in Mill Woods. The Mill Woods Double Barrel Tunnel Upgrade Project is 40% completed. Drainage Services expects to complete connection of the North Millbourne storm trunk sewer to the new storm tunnel next May and the entire project is scheduled to be completed by December of 2014.

Next steps are to conduct further evaluation and assessments and return to the community next spring with recommended improvement options. After that, an Expanded Flood Prevention Program will be recommended to City Council for approval.

Mr. Melmoth informed attendees that Drainage Services has a Home Check-up Program that is free to all residents. The program has been expanded to multi-family units. He mentioned the backflow valve subsidy program and provided an update on the City's application to the province for disaster relief. Mr. Melmoth noted that if the application is successful, it will cover qualified uninsurable losses.

Comments and Questions

A number of people at the meeting were upset at the apparent failure of a North Millbourne dry pond to prevent flooding in their neighbourhood. Many residents disputed the pond ever filled up at all, due to a lack of debris left behind and eyewitness accounts of an empty pond during and after the storms.

Mr. Tan said there was very likely a delay in the time it took for the dry pond to fill and the City is trying to determine why there was a delay. One resident pointed out that even if the dry pond did fill up later on, it was not in time to save homes from flooding. One resident asked whether some type of sensory system could be installed to track water levels in the pond. Mr. Tan stated this is something Drainage Services is considering.

Questions on the dry pond were raised several times. One resident asked about the elevation of the pond in relation to houses, while others questioned why culverts could not be put straight through to the pond that appears to be neither deep enough nor low enough. Mr. Tan indicated the dry pond in question is 2.8 metres lower than the lowest spot on 89 Street.

Many people were angry their backwater valves and sump pumps had failed to prevent flooding, even though they had been inspected and passed. One resident noted her house had a backwater valve installed and she still got flooded. Another mentioned the installation of sump pumps in a condominium complex was not enough to prevent seepage. Other residents reported their sump pumps had not prevented seepage, which is not insured.

Mr. Melmoth said backwater valves and sump pumps are mechanical devices and sometimes things go wrong. To many residents, the failures raise questions about the benefit of following the advice of the City's Flood Proofing Program if it does not prevent flooding. Mr. Melmoth invited residents to provide specific information about problem locations so they can be investigated. He noted that for 60% of reported basement flooding in Mill Woods the causes are still undetermined.

One resident stated she feels she is moving backwards as a taxpayer, not forwards, now that assessments have to be done all over again. Where insurance does cover replacement, it is not enough to obtain the same quality of equipment that was installed the first time. Another resident stated she is afraid to put in a sump pump because she will end up with seepage that is not insured. Mr. Melmoth said insurance companies will still ask what has been done to prevent flooding and he reinforced the importance of residents reporting individual flooding so that each situation can be investigated.

Some residents asked about the “class” of storm events that took place in July. Some people at the meeting reported seeing or hearing contradictory statements from Drainage Services about whether the storm was typical, or a 1 in 100 year event, or a 1 in 200 year event. A few long-time Mill Woods residents stated these types of storms seem to be occurring more frequently in the last eight years and that drainage systems should be designed for that frequency. For many at the meeting, it was the second, third and fourth time they had been flooded.

Several residents expressed frustration with fixes to the system that don’t seem to work. Many felt the existing system is not sufficient and needs major changes. Mr. Tan commented, if possible, more surface storage in the low lying areas would be needed.

A number of residents spoke of the personal, financial and emotional impact of the 2012 storms – people were forced out of their homes, they are now dealing with uninsurable damage and have permanently damaged belongings that cannot be easily replaced. Many residents echoed the sentiment expressed by one resident that there are serious problems in Mill Woods and people cannot afford to wait another two years for a solution; they have already waited eight years. Mr. Tan stated the Mill Woods area is a very high priority for the City.

Other residents urged the City to stop exploring and get something done. Mr. Tan said a proper investigation cannot be rushed. Options will be discussed with the community and any additional work must be approved by Council. It’s a process that takes time.

Other suggestions/comments

- There should be better communication about the need to report flooding.
- In emergency flooding situations, people should be able to call somewhere else than 311 operators, who seem to focus on sanitary sewer back-up issues.
- Where is the water coming from? Water was coming through storm sewers hours after the rain had stopped. Mill Woods appears to be a catchment area for other areas of the city.
- Stop telling residents the system works. It has not prevented flooding.

Updates

Updates to residents on the improvement plans will be provided by direct mail or email for who attended the meeting and others who are on the stakeholder list. It will also be communicated via the North Millbourne Community League Newsletter and through the website at www.edmonton.ca/floodprevention Additional comments or questions may be forwarded to Derek Melmoth at 780-496-5662 derek.melmoth@edmonton.ca or Fayi Zhou at 780-496-3006 fayi.zhou@edmonton.ca