



Fire and Emergency Services

Prepared for: Council-in-Committee

Report: FES-02-2024

Meeting Date: May 13, 2024

1. Title

Total Solar Eclipse - Summary Report

2. Recommendations

That: Report FES-02-2024 Total Solar Eclipse Summary Report, be received for information purposes.

3. Relation to Council's Corporate Strategic Plan

Priority: Quality of life and community well-being
Economic Prosperity and Diversification

Initiative: 2.2 Foster opportunities to support and promote culture, the arts, and history through education and communication.

4.3 Support Tourism and Cultural events through continued promotion.

4. List of Stakeholders

Mayor and Council of the Town of Fort Erie

Town of Fort Erie Residents

5. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to update Council on the Town's response to the 2024 Total Solar Eclipse planning and provide a summary of the debriefing process and plans for emergency management moving forward.

6. Analysis

Background

Niagara Region was one of the few places in Canada that experienced a total solar eclipse on April 8th, 2024. This is a rare natural phenomenon for any particular geographic location in which the moon passes in front of the sun and temporarily blocks its light, turning day into twilight. People in the path of totality were able to see features of the sun's corona that are not

normally visible. Areas that were outside of the path of totality (e.g. most of the Greater Toronto Area) only experienced a partial eclipse making the Niagara Region the premier viewing destination, resulting in a moderate influx of visitors to Niagara. As a result of cloud cover forecasted, the high number of visitors potentially expected in Niagara was reduced, but a moderate number of visitors arrived for special events that were planned. Traffic congestion, and demand on critical infrastructure were moderate, with some traffic congestion at the end of the event as visitors attempted to exit the area.

Overall, Fort Erie saw a modest influx of visitors to the Town for the Eclipse. The largest numbers were seen in the Crystal Beach and Waverly Beach areas. Short-term rentals and hotels/motels reported being sold out during this event.

Staff created an event-specific plan to facilitate and guide Fort Erie's emergency management activities during the 2024 Total Solar Eclipse. It addressed the coordination of activities, services, human, and physical resources in anticipation of, during, and immediately following the eclipse.

The complexity of a total solar eclipse response required a coordinated response from multiple emergency management partners. Coordination and information sharing among partners, including various levels of government and with different organizations across Niagara, was essential to ensure appropriate resources, situational awareness and coordination throughout the day of this event. This plan, coordinated through the Emergency Operations Centre, established the points of contact for the different levels of government including regional departments, local area municipalities, provincial ministries, federal departments, and other key emergency management partners.

This event-specific plan was developed specifically for Fort Erie to deal with unique circumstances in our community. It was intended to guide the Town's activities in managing the internal response to the 2024 Total Solar Eclipse by supplementing the overarching Town of Fort Erie's Emergency Response Plan (ERP).

Staff identified potential impacts on the local population with a large influx of visitors predicted to the area. Areas of concern included significant traffic delays, degradation or loss of communications and demand on health care. The Niagara Region Emergency Management developed a comprehensive Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (HIRA) which the Town adopted as it was a comprehensive and relevant document for Fort Erie.

Each municipality remained responsible for emergency management in their jurisdiction as required under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (EMCPA), and the Niagara Region had declared a state of emergency.

Staff started meeting with Regional partners in 2022 to plan for this event. The following is a timeline of preparation efforts.

Fall 2022 – March 2024 – Staff attended monthly and eventually weekly meetings with Federal, Provincial, Regional and Local Partners to plan for this event. Along with internal staff meetings to prepare all divisions for duties and activities necessary for the day.

April 5th, 2024 – Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) was set up and tested.

April 5th – April 7th, 2024 – Enhanced monitoring of the activities around Town took place

including virtual EOC meetings (as required) over the weekend.

April 8th, 2024 – Full Level One Activation of the EOC took place as of 6:00 am.

April 8th, 2024 – Deactivation of the EOC took place by 6:30 pm. Some monitoring of post eclipse activities took place into the evening with no incidents to report.

Communications

The communications strategy for the eclipse was executed using a two-pronged approach. One focus was the promotion and education of the eclipse event itself, and the second was based on emergency planning.

On February 2, 2024, the Communications team developed 10 dedicated pages on the Town website and created a vanity URL forterie.ca/eclipse for easy access and sharing of relevant information.

To ensure the largest possible reach, the Town used a mix of paid and organic media, including our website, local radio, national television news media, local newspaper, social media, email marketing, and a creative, fundraising I will(food drive) in exchange for solar eclipse glasses.

A community engagement initiative was coordinated through Town Hall and the three Fort Erie libraries. Nearly 30,000 solar eclipse safety glasses were distributed to the public in exchange for 16,609 donations, which were distributed to 8 local charity organizations. Students from MYAC and GFESS actively participated by counting and sorting all of the items received in exchange for community service hours.

A [media release](#) promoting “safety as a top priority” sent on March 15 received 5,478 views.

Through media relations, arrangements were made with Bell Media CP24 (CTV) to broadcast from Bay Beach during the eclipse event. They were provided private WI-FI network access and “staff only” parking next to the Bay Beach pavilion, along with maps and photos of the area to accommodate their needs. Fort Erie received invaluable free organic media coverage for the entire day as they interviewed and broadcasted you live during the eclipse.

Summary & Analytics

- Two full-page advertisements were run in the Fort Erie Observer in March 2024.
- 10 eclipse pages were created on our website, receiving 42,687 views and 22,739 visitors. A spike in website traffic on April 8th (day of the event) reached 5,945 views.
- Two radio spots ran in March 2024 on 101.1 FM to promote the eclipse and emergency planning.
- Two email newsletters were sent to list members (approx. 4,000 x 2).
- Three email newsletters were sent to local businesses (approx. 700 x 3).
- CP24 Live television news media coverage for the entire day on April 8 from Bay Beach
- Social media: approximately 33 posts, 214,975 impressions (times shown on page), 203,642 reach (number of people who viewed content), and 37,146 engagement (which includes reactions, comments, shares, and clicks).
- As part of a community engagement effort, 30,000 solar eclipse safe viewing glasses were distributed, and 16,609 donations were received.

- Two media releases were sent pre and post-eclipse, totalling 5,899 views.
 - March 14 - Solar Eclipse Safety a Top Priority in Fort Erie
 - April 12 - Fort Erie Solar Eclipse Glasses Raise 16,609 Donations

Equipment

Staff purchased and rented several different pieces of equipment to support this event. Some included:

- Portable toilets (both regular and accessible units) and hand washing stations – placed at viewing sites to support a large number of visitors.
- Security – to patrol viewing sites overnight on the weekend.
- Extra handheld radios (so that we could communicate with our outside partners easily in case communication networks were compromised).
- Golf carts – were rented to support staff moving around the viewing site locations easily and to store equipment such as radios, medical kits and bottled water.
- Off-Road Vehicles – to support emergency services to move around heavy traffic in order to respond to emergencies.
- Road Barricades – to add to what the Town already owns, to support road closures as needed.
- Various Safety Equipment – extra medical kits, extra sharps containers, safety vests, rain ponchos, etc. to support keeping staff safe during the event.
- Eclipse Glasses – 30,000 glasses purchased to support the community and staff to stay during the event.

Safety/Staffing

Overall, the event and redeployment of staff across the community was both safe and effective, with no safety incidents reported.

Town staff were redeployed to a different work shift for the day to accommodate an “all hands-on deck” scenario to ensure that there were enough staff to support viewing sites and road closure areas across the community. Some staff were deployed to alternate duties for the day as well. Although some staff worked overtime prior to prepare for the event, most staff were able to work their regular hours on the day of the event, as the volume of visitors was manageable.

Recognition

The Town of Fort Erie would like to recognize the following organizations and agencies for the tremendous assistance to the Town and our community in response to the event:

- Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA)
- St. John's Ambulance
- Peace Bridge Authority
- Niagara Regional Police / OPP / RCMP
- Niagara EMS
- Niagara Parks Commission / Niagara Parks Police
- Niagara Region - several departments / Niagara Region Emergency Management Team

- Emergency Management Ontario
- Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)
- Canadian Disaster Relief Organization (CDRO)
- Canadian Red Cross
- Canadian Coast Guard
- POCOMAR
- Niagara Area Municipalities
- Crystal Beach BIA - their partners & volunteers
- Ministry of Transportation
- CP24 - for exceptional live TV coverage
- Canadian Niagara Power
- Fort Erie Libraries - for support to distribute eclipse glasses and collect donations

Without the support of these outside groups, the Town’s effective response to the event would not have been possible.

This report provides a high-level summary of the experience of the Total Solar Eclipse event. Going forward, Town staff will be reviewing the Town’s Emergency Management Plan to ensure that learnings and successful approaches are incorporated into the plan. This will ensure that the Town’s ability to plan and respond to emergencies and continue to work with partner agencies on coordination and information sharing, will continue to be effective.

7. Financial, Staffing and Accessibility (AODA) Implications

All costs associated with this event are being tracked under a special expense code in order to help staff predict budget allocations for future events.

Below in table 1 includes expenditures from the 2024 Total Solar Eclipse.

2024 Total Solar Eclipse – Budget \$92,500	
Wages & Benefits	\$5,763.00
Supplies and rental equipment	\$63,452.34
Communications	\$1,345.00
BIA Grant	\$10,000.00
Total Expenses	\$80,560.34

*Expenses Net of Non-Rebated HST

There are surplus funds from the approved budget, at this time that amount to \$11,939.66. However, the surplus is likely to be reduced further, as the Volunteer Fire Fighters honorariums were not available at the time of this report. As part of the event debrief, it was identified that Incident Management refresher/training would be helpful for all staff who are involved as primary and alternate Emergency Operations Centre staff. It is recommended that any surplus funds be used to address emergency management needs that were identified.

8. Policies Affecting Proposal

By-law 136-2023 adopted Council’s 2023-2026 Corporate Strategic Plan for the Town of Fort

Erie. This event and the recommendations provided conform to the priorities, goals and initiatives as described herein.

By-Law 40-2017 adopted the Town's Emergency Management Program and Emergency Plan Governing the Provision of Necessary Services During an Emergency.

9. Comments from Departments, Community and Corporate Partners

Comments from staff and partners were included in this report as part of the after actions review process when the Emergency Operations Centre is activated.

10. Alternatives

As this is an information report, there are no alternatives.

11. Communicating Results

N/A

12. Conclusion

The Town of Fort Erie is very grateful for the coordinated response from all our partners, support from Council and especially the staff who worked so hard over the last two (2) years to ensure the safety and security of the community during this once in a lifetime celestial experience. Although the Town experienced cloudy conditions during parts of the event, it was a well-planned, coordinated and phenomenal event.

As with any event, there are always learnings and improvements to prepare for similar future events. Town staff will be reviewing the Town's Emergency Management Plan to ensure that it will continue to meet the needs of the Town and its ability to respond to emergencies and will bring forth any changes that are required to Council in the future. After Winter Storm Elliott the Town purchased new handheld radios which were instrumental in helping to support this event. After this event staff have identified that some new equipment may be needed to be purchased as a result of this event to support future events and emergency response.

13. Report Approval

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14. Attachments

N/A