



Staff Report

Finance and IT Services

Report To: Committee of the Whole
Meeting Date: August 26, 2019
Report Number: FAF.19.162
Subject: Email Downtime Update
Prepared by: Cathy Bailey, Manager Information Technology

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report FAF.19.162, entitled "Email Downtime Update";

AND THAT Council approve the creation of a 2019 budget for \$50,000 for the purposes of hiring a consulting company to assist with the move to online mail services.

B. Overview

The purpose of this report is to explain two significant Town email outages during the month of July 2019 and to outline recommendations from Town IT staff.

C. Background

1. On Monday, July 15th at 12:30 p.m. the Town's email database became corrupted and email stopped flowing; service was restored at 7:37 a.m. on Tuesday, July 16th.
2. On Monday, July 22nd at 2:30 p.m. the Town's email database became corrupted again and email stopped flowing; service was restored to Town staff at 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, July 25th.

D. Analysis

It was quickly determined by IT staff during both outages that the problem was not caused by any outside interference. There were no Ransomware demands and only the email system was affected. Ransomware is a type of malicious software designed to block access to a computer system until a sum of money is paid. The problem appeared to be simply a software bug in the "on premise" email server software.

During the first outage, the mail server was restored from the previous night's backups and service was restored.

During the second outage, the mail server was restored from the previous night's backups. In order to avoid a recurrence of the database corruption, email service was blocked this time,

while IT staff took the time to move all the Town's mailboxes to a new mail database. This entire process took several days of IT staff working 24 hours per day, due to the large amount of email data. Due to the requirements of the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA), Town staff email boxes are large compared to those in most private sector corporations; Town staff are not allowed to delete messages in case they need to be searched during a Freedom of Information (FOI) search.

Recommendations from IT Staff include:

- The plan to move to online mail services during 2019/2020 should be expedited by hiring a consulting firm to do the setup required and test a sample of users in 2019. Other local municipalities, including Grey County, have already successfully taken this approach;
- That a 2019 operating budget for \$50,000 be formed to hire a consulting firm in 2019 to assist with this migration work;
- That \$600 be added to the 2020 operating budget for 2 additional phone lines to the Town Hall phone system. While the email system was down, there were complaints that at times the phone system was not being answered; the presumption is that all of the current seven lines were busier because members of the public were using the phone to contact Town staff instead of corresponding by email; and
- That the Town initiate annual emergency exercises, where Town staff can test departmental emergency procedures for IT emergencies, such as power outages, internal service outages or Ransomware occurrences.

E. The Blue Mountains Strategic Plan

Goal #4: Promote a Culture of Organizational and Operational Excellence

Objective #4: To Be a Financially Responsible Organization

F. Environmental Impacts

N/A

G. Financial Impact

- \$50,000 from IT Reserves to hire a consulting firm in 2019 to assist with the migration to online mail services
- \$600 from the corporate phone operating budget annually for two additional phone lines at Town Hall starting with the 2020 budget
- \$1,359 for overtime hours for IT staff to repair the mail server. IT staff also spent 115 regular hours working on the problem during the two outages

H. In consultation with

Ruth Prince, Director Finance & IT Services

I. Public Engagement

The topic of this Staff Report has not been subject to a Public Meeting and/or a Public Information Centre as neither a Public Meeting nor a Public Information Centre are required. Comments regarding this report should be submitted to Cathy Bailey, Manager of Information Technology at support@thebluemountains.ca.

J. Attached

None.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cathy Bailey
Manager of Information Technology

Ruth Prince
Director of Finance and IT Services

For more information, please contact:
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