

# Egan: The pipes froze, burst, flooded the basement – Wendy's woes continue

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Pipes in Wendy Richards' home froze last week and she was without water service for 8 days until it was restored on Tuesday. PHOTO BY ERROL MCGIHON /Postmedia

The excavation next door stopped 15 months ago but Wendy Richards is still digging out of the hole left behind.

The Manotick woman has been fighting to have her property — and peace of mind — restored after unauthorized construction removed mature trees and a pile of earth within inches of her 1886 foundation.

And, just when it looked like things couldn't get any worse, my, how they did.

"I don't even know what to do anymore."

Richards woke up Jan. 11 to discover there was no water in the taps — frozen pipes, which she is convinced are a side-effect of her foundation now broadly exposed to the winter elements.

The next day, another bad turn — the pipe burst and began filling the basement with water.

“I was in shock watching the water furiously gushing and (envisioning) my house sliding over the 12-foot cliff that (the neighbour) created,” she wrote frantically to a number of officials at Ottawa City Hall.

The water reached a depth of about 45 centimetres before the fire department arrived to begin pumping things out. By then the hot-water tank was ruined.

When the sump pump was turned on to drain the last bit of water, said Richards, it wouldn't work: A plumber would determine that the discharge line was frozen.

It didn't end there. The plumber also discovered the city's water meter “snapped and froze” — a part he couldn't replace. More calls, more trouble-shooting.

It took about eight days — during which she relied on big water jugs and the kindness of neighbours — before water service was restored on Tuesday, with a new hot-water tank on the way later in the week.

She said she had two electric heaters in the area where the pipe is located, but it's so drafty she can see the exterior tarp thrown up to shore her weakened foundation.

“I worry every day the pipe is going to burst again.” (This is the fourth time the pipes have frozen in 15 months, she said, and the repair bill this time is likely to exceed \$2,000.)

Richards is beyond frustrated and she sent an urgent email to Mayor Jim Watson and Coun. Scott Moffatt on the weekend, very nearly begging for help. Her house, after all, had become close to uninhabitable.

The city responded by bringing in an engineer to verify the stability of her house and to recommend temporary exterior insulation to address the immediate problem of the pipes. It has repeatedly demanded a work completion schedule from the excavator, Saade Group Development.

Trouble began in the fall of 2020, when the Saade company, which owns the adjacent property on the village's main street, began cutting trees, then excavating a hill that buffered its site from two neighbours.

Richards says a contractor first cut 17 of her trees, many of them mature, due to confusion or sloppiness about the property line. Then came the dig to prep an L-shaped retaining wall, reportedly to stop water run-off into the Saade building, the 1876 McFadden House.



Wendy Richards leans out toward the neighbouring excavated property next to her home in Manotick on Tuesday. PHOTO BY ERROL MCGIHON /Postmedia

Saade's company was almost immediately slapped with a stop-work order and loads of gravel were quickly dumped to shore her foundation, now on the edge of a cliff.

Both Richards and neighbouring property owner Lee McCallum wanted the city to step in, complete the work and restore their properties to something approaching the original condition.

The city argued it would have better leverage if Saade were granted a building permit, which comes with oversight from building code officials. This led to a partial standoff between the parties, but the permit was finally issued in December.

But no work was ever done and it now appears the company will do nothing until April at the earliest.

Company operator George Saade was not sympathetic to Richards's plight. He still maintains the removed trees and earth were on his property and says it's not uncommon for pipes to freeze in older houses.

He denied his excavation work contributed to the pipe problem. "Not true."

Coun. Moffatt, meanwhile, said this was a matter between two property owners and, while the city has a role to play, it cannot control a developer's exact work schedule.

"You can't sit there and say this has to happen by this timeline."

He said it's been a frustrating situation for all parties — none more than Richards — but says he's never had more contact with building officials on one constituent issue in 11 years in office.

Richards, meanwhile, is beyond frustrated — with the city, with the developer — and points to the toll the saga is taking on her.

“I’m exhausted dealing with this and getting nowhere, nowhere.”