

Corbitt expresses hot line concerns

Pleased with administration's connection with City Council

By Chris Sykes
Staff Writer

While he expressed support for the city's response to Hurricane Irene, one councilman said he saw room for improvement.

"I've never seen the Public Works employees work so hard and so fast before in my life. I saw some of the guys out there sweating," Corbitt said. "The only complaint I had with our response was that the voicemail for the emergency service hot line was inadequate. Once it filled up, there was no place for anyone who called looking for help, or trying to report a situation or the need for service, to go. Corbitt said he would like one change in the emergency hot line before it is again needed.

"I just wish they had somebody live manning that hot line to respond to peoples' calls," said Corbitt. "I just think they should have had a live person there to respond or just take down messages and information."

Corbitt did credit the office of Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. for providing status updates with City Council members.

"They don't always keep the council apprised of things that happen in the city, but this time they did an excellent job in keeping us updated about the things that were happening and the ongoing response to the storm," Corbitt said.

Hawkins also serves as the city's emergency management coordinator. In a statement, Hawkins said the Public Works Department cleaned city's storm drains prior to the storm to ensure the system was working to its capability.

"This was done successfully and minimized the flooding of neighborhoods," Hawkins said. While Corbitt expressed his concerns, Hawkins said calls to the hot

'What sense does it make to have a hot line but the voicemail is full?'

***— Elroy Corbitt,
councilman***

line were referred to city personnel to be resolved.

Hawkins said the city's emergency management team worked Saturday night to assess the storm while addressing resident concerns.

"City officials also provided updates and alerts to residents via email, reverse 911 calls, social network sites and Channel 35," Hawkins said. Channel 35 is the city's public-access channel. "Coordination between federal, state and local agencies was continuous."

Hawkins declared a state of emergency Saturday evening. That night, late-operating businesses were advised to close by 10 p.m.

After the storm, Hawkins said residents experienced power outages and flooding.

"Sporadic power outages occurred throughout the city, some due to fallen trees on power lines," Hawkins said. "PSE&G crews, as well as tree contractors, continue to work in an effort to restore power. Some lost power has been restored.

Hawkins said that water levels in the east branch of the Rahway River and other areas rose, some basements were flooded in the Valley area by early Sunday morning. He added storm-drainage issues caused flooding in the East Ward.

In addition, residents were urged to limit water use after a potential water main break caused United Water to limit usage and to urge customers to boil water. That warning was lifted on Monday.