



**COUNCIL
AGENDA
REPORT**

TO: Mayor Harding and Members of Council
MEETING DATE: August 12, 2020
SUBJECT: Municipal Operations Covid-19 Phase 2, Stage 3 Reopening Plan

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council endorses the Municipal Operations Covid-19 Phase 2, Stage 3 Reopening Plan as outlined in the staff report entitled Municipal Operations Covid-19 Phase 2, Stage 3 Reopening Plan and dated August 12, 2020;

AND THAT staff are directed to proceed as outlined in the Summary section of said staff report

APPROVALS:

Date

Signature

**Submitted: Derrick Hammond, CAO,
on behalf of the Strategic
Leadership Team**

31/07/2020

Original signed by D. Hammond

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report provides a summary of staff's review of a variety of factors to develop a plan to enable moving to Phase 2, Stage 3 of the Township's Operations Covid-19 Reopening [Framework](#) which was endorsed by Council on July 15, 2020.

ORIGIN:

The recent announcement by the Province that the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit jurisdiction was permitted to enter Phase 2, Stage 3 of the [Framework for Reopening Our Province](#), has triggered a review of the factors that must be considered to develop a plan to enable moving to Phase 2, Stage 3 of the Township's Operations Covid-19 Reopening [Framework](#).

BACKGROUND:

On July 15, 2020, Council endorsed a framework to reopening Township operations, which is aligned with the provincial [Framework for Reopening Our Province](#) and provides a predictable approach to guide changes to service delivery as the Province's response to the Covid-19 pandemic evolves. Key to the [Framework](#) are a set of Guiding Principles which are intended to assist in decision making related to moving through the phases/stages. These include:

1. Health and Safety
2. Legal and Regulatory Requirements
3. User Focused Service Delivery
4. Adapt, Evolve, Innovate
5. Communicate and Collaborate

Consideration of the most effective ways to move into Phase 2, Stage 3 follows.

DISCUSSION

General

As municipalities across Muskoka and Ontario for that matter, consider reopening plans, approaches will likely differ as there is differences in technology limitations, physical configurations as well as service delivery processes. In finding our own way to further reopen Township operations, our primary objective or consideration is to maintain the health and safety of staff, Council and the community. This of course involves considering our unique circumstances and abiding by the public health recommendations, emergency orders and directives from the Province of Ontario and the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit.

Using the approved [Framework](#) as a starting point, staff have reviewed how we can evolve operations for Council and Committee meetings, as well as at the municipal office and facilities. The results of this analysis follows.

Committee/Council Meetings

While Phase 2, Stage 3 of the provincial reopening plan permits indoor public gatherings of 50 people, physical distancing of 2 metres between people is required. Although holding an in person Council meeting while meeting this requirement may be possible in some other jurisdictions, due to space limitations, a meeting of all members of Council, along with the requisite staff, let alone any members of the public, is not possible in the Muskoka Lakes Township Council Chambers. Interestingly, in a letter to the Simcoe Muskoka municipalities (Appendix I), Dr. Gardiner, Medical Officer of Health, suggested that continuing alternative means of Council meetings and seeking public input, despite moving to Phase 2, Stage 3. He also describes recommended Health and Safety requirements and guidelines, which staff is working towards implementing.

In view of the foregoing, it would appear that the following meeting options are available to Council at this time:

- With the recent amendment to the Council Procedure By-law 2019-079, which complies with Bill 197, the *Covid-19 Economic Recovery Act, 2020*, **electronic or virtual Council meetings** can continue. Given staff and Council's familiarity with this approach, coupled with the fact that physical distancing is assured, we could continue with the current practice. In addition, public input into the agenda is invited through email, delegations may

be heard and the public can view the proceeding live or view the Youtube Video. Staff have also put protocols in place to accommodate electronic participation for legislated planning public meetings.

Due to Council member internet connectivity issues during some of these meetings, some members of Council have attended the municipal office or other municipal facility during other virtual meetings. Further assessment has confirmed that if four Councillors in addition to the Chair/Mayor attended meetings in person in the Council Chambers, physical distancing can still be maintained. Therefore, to address the internet connectivity issue of some members of Council, a hybrid approach, whereby an alternating roster of four Councilors and the Committee Chair/Mayor would attend the Council Chambers for virtual meetings, should be considered. A minimum number of staff would also be present in the Council Chambers for the meetings. To accomplish this, adjustment of furniture placement and IT connectivity would be required.

- Use the **Port Carling Memorial Community Centre auditorium**, as a temporary Council Chambers. This portion of the facility has an estimated 42 person capacity. However, webcasting would currently not be possible due to the weakness of the internet signal in this building. Should Council wish to have in person meetings with all members present, and accommodate a limited number of staff and members of the public, this option should be considered. While this option would see this portion of the community centre remain closed to functions other than meetings, in the longer term, larger scale public meetings (i.e. post Covid-19) could be accommodated at (and webcasted from) this location. If the current electronic meeting solution is no longer utilized, the webcasting equipment currently in the Council Chambers could be relocated.

Township By-law 2004-161 relating to procurement requires that a competitive processes be used that are open, transparent and fair except in specific allowable circumstances. Under Policy C-5-06/02/06 – Procurement, the requirement for a formal competitive bid solicitation can be waived when “there is an absence of competition for technical or other reasons and the goods, services or construction can only be supplied by a particular supplier and no alternatives exists” with a report to Council seeking approval prior to awarding any contract (General Procurement Procedures; paragraph 2). Based on their knowledge of the Township’s electronic hardware and software systems as well as internet architecture, Near North Business Machines, should be authorized to complete the electronic, software and internet upgrades.

- Another alternative would be to hold a Committee/Council meeting in a location that has the space to enable Council and the requisite staff to physical distance, as well as webcasting facilities. Staff have made preliminary enquires with the District of Muskoka staff for the use of their Council Chambers in the District Administrative building. Our understanding is that although Council and the administrative team (Clerk, CAO and two administrative staff) could be accommodated in that Council Chambers, as the District Administrative building is not open to the public at this time and due to space constraints, public attendance at such meetings would not be possible. However, with this option, the public can view the proceedings live or view the Youtube Video. In addition, input into the agenda is invited through email and delegations and public meetings maybe heard live electronically.

Appendix II contains an analysis of the pros and cons of these alternatives. The associated costs of each of these alternatives is outlined in the Financial Section of this report.

Municipal Office

The Township office has remained closed to the public since March 17, following the Provincial orders issued to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. To address the requirement for physical distancing in the office, we have:

- adjusted our Information Technology system to enable 75% of the Municipal Office staff to work from home, or at another Township facility (i.e. Fire Hall);
- used modified schedules to limit attendance at the office and when at the office, practice physical distancing by working from different work stations;
- increased the use of paperless processes;
- changed our method of receiving documents that are not able to be emailed, such as engineering specifications for inspections, payments, etc. through secure drop boxes; and,
- provided permits via “curbside” style interactions with members of the public (window).

In accordance with health and safety best practices, the frequency of the cleaning of the Township Office was increased, including washrooms and high touch points. We have also employed a screening protocol for all nonemployees (contractors) entering the building.

The leveraging of technology and the above measures has enabled staff to continue to deliver services with minimal disruption. As the Province progressed our Region through the various stages of reopening in the [Framework for Reopening Our Province](#), updates were made to our practices. For example, building and development approvals continue through the use of the drop box, telephone and electronic communication and onsite inspections, and public meetings for Planning applications are now being held virtually.

Although the Province has recently updated the maximum number of people (50) permitted indoors, the issue of space and layout of the Township Office remains. Our pre Covid-19 layout had 5 public counters located throughout the two main floors (Building, Public Works, Fire & Emergency Services, Clerks/Treasury and Planning). In addition to the counters which were accessible throughout business hours, public Council and Committee meetings were held, the meeting rooms could be booked by a staff member with members of the public, washrooms were available to the public, and the assessment records could be viewed by the public at leisure. Essentially the full building was accessible to staff and members of the public all day. With the varying needs and usages, this makes managing the flow of traffic difficult.

In order to ensure safe physical distancing measures are in place, and based on our hallway and stairwell sizes, only one person can walk down a hallway/stairwell at a time. Internally, if all the public counters were opened as they were pre Covid-19, most staff would be required to be in the office. With the current workstation/office layout, many desks are too close to ensure the recommended safe physical distance of 2 metres. This includes the consideration of not only when the person is sitting, but also standing, and moving from their desk to various office locations (photocopier, etc.). Financial considerations of workstation and counter barrier protective measures are outlined in the Financial Section of this report. If Council is of the view that service levels remain adequate, and the safety guidelines remain in place, there would appear to be no need to reopen the building to the public as it was pre-Covid-19 at this time.

Staff are reviewing all processes and especially those which could be enhanced by meeting with the public face to face. Where there is a need (i.e. commissioning documents), an appointment based option is being explored. This would see a member of the public scheduling an appointment, and being screened before entering a specific or limited area of the building or possibly the community centre next door and escorted by the staff member. This is similar to the current approach being used for contractors.

Outdoor Amenities, Library, Arenas and Community Centres

While outdoor amenities have been open for some time, the Library, the Township's two arenas and 13 community centres have remained closed to the public since the initial provincial orders in March.

Outdoor Amenities

On May 23 following the announcement of Province's entry into Stage 1, the Township reopened permitted recreational amenities, and the remaining parks and playgrounds were reopened on July 17th, 2020. Currently outdoor parks are not open for rental, as this decision would be made in line with the community centres reopening.

Library

The Library closed to the public March 16, 2020 and reopened on May 20, 2020 for outside (curbside) pick-up. In addition to outdoor pick up, to keep the public engaged and informed, the Library is offering 24/7 WIFI, e-resources, online membership applications, a used book sale, social media postings, and communication boards outside the Library and Port Carling Memorial Community Centre. The Board and staff are developing procedures and policies that address safety protocols for staff and the public with the goal being reopening to the public in line with other municipal decision making (i.e. other facilities opening).

Arenas

As it relates to the arenas, staff's review of "Team sports and live sporting events" portion of the Province's [Stage 3 Reopening Plan](#) appears to prohibit contact sports and Leagues of over 50 players. Accordingly, although staff will continue to monitor provincial updates, given the limited potential use of both arenas and the inability to maintain cleaning and sanitation protocols, they should remain closed at least for the time being.

Community Centres

The Province's [Stage 3 Reopening Plan](#) appears to enable community centres to be reopened subject to adherence to gathering size limitations, physical distancing requirements, adoption of proper cleaning and sanitization protocols and any other conditions imposed by the municipality.

In considering a decision to reopen the community centres, regard must be had to the Guiding Principles of the Township's Reopening Framework, which places a priority on the health and safety of staff and the users. To this end, based on the recommendations of the Health Unit, enhanced cleaning and sanitizing protocols are proposed to be established and facilities must be cleaned after each use. It is also important to remember that Covid-19 is an exclusion on the municipal insurance policy. Staff consulted legal counsel on this matter and it was their view that

all users should be required to sign a waiver absolving the municipality of any responsibility as a result of their choice to participate in an activity at a Township community centre.

In view of these matters and being cognizant of the increased costs of the requisite cleaning measures, staff examined usage statistics of our facilities and have identified three scenarios for Council’s consideration. These options are included in Table 1 and in each case, the facilities would be open for two, two hour time slots (9:00 to 11:00 am and 1:00 to 3:00 pm) per day, five days per week. As additional options, including after hours and weekend time slots would attract overtime charges, they have been excluded from this analysis.

Table 1: Community Centre Opening Options

Option	Community Centres Open	Time Slots per Week	Estimated Cost (Based on 50% Utilization)
1	Bala, Port Carling, Ullswater	30	\$2,100/week
2	Bala, Milford Bay, Minett, Port Carling, Ullswater	50	\$3,500/week
3	All Community Centres	130	\$9,100/week

Based on our analysis of usage data, it would appear that option 2 most closely replicates the number of spaces needed to meet normal demand. In addition, it includes the centres that are traditionally the busiest and provides the best geographic distribution.

As noted earlier, the Port Carling Memorial Community Centre could be used as a temporary Council Chambers. Should this become the case, only the lower level would be available for rental to the community. The upper level would be reserved for Council’s exclusive use in order to better manage the cleaning and sanitation protocols.

Phase 3: Next Steps, Space Optimization Review

The previous sections of this report have highlighted some of the physical space limitations within the Township office. Issues include inadequate:

- Office/workstation space for the Clerks and Legislative Services, Financial Services and Public Works teams (physical distancing cannot be assured without re-configuration);
- meeting space, including a Council Chambers which can’t accommodate larger publicly attended Committee and Council meetings; and
- storage space for records retention.

In addition, the amalgamation of the Building and Planning Departments will necessitate the reconfiguration of office space in order to improve our customer service experience.

The need to examine and consider optimization of office space in the Township Municipal Office has been identified for some time now and certainly was a contributing factor to Council’s decision to purchase the easterly abutting lot in 2013, with a vision of another eventual building addition. It was also noted in the Organizational Review in 2016.

Certainly the Covid-19 pandemic and the requirement for physical distancing has had implications for consideration of additional space in order to protect staff. However, interestingly, having certain staff work remotely to provide continued services electronically has also enabled the accomplishment of physical distancing. On-going evaluation of the current temporary measures taken need to be considered as part of a permanent solution.

In view of the foregoing, staff should be authorized to investigate options for improving space efficiencies within the existing Township Office building envelop, in comparison to the potential costs of an expansion of the building.

Summary

In view of the foregoing, the following should be considered

Committee/Council Meetings

In the short term, continue with virtual/electronic meetings, with a hybrid approach beginning when adjustment of furniture placement and IT connectivity have been completed in September (Q3/2020).

In anticipation of physically distanced in person meetings in the longer term (Q4 2020/Q1/2021), authorize the upgrade of the Port Carling Memorial Community Centre internet and webcasting upgrades. Staff have investigated costs to upgrade the related infrastructure and the preliminary cost estimate is approximately \$30,000. This would include installation of infrastructure in the community centre along with the installation of infrastructure between the municipal office and the community centre. Based on their knowledge of the Township's electronic hardware and software systems as well as internet architecture, Near North Business Machines, should be authorized to complete the electronic, software and internet upgrades.

Municipal Office

In the short term, maintain the current approach and practices. As conditions permit, prepare to accommodate an appointment based approach for Q4 2020. In the longer term, Q1 or Q2 2021, prepare for workstation and counter retrofit with a view to potentially reopening after these upgrades have been completed.

Library

In the short term, maintain current approach and practices. Monitor conditions and prepare a plan that is similar to that proposed for the Community Centres to enable reopening later in Q3 2020.

Arenas

In the short term, maintain current approach and practices. Monitor conditions and prepare a plan that responds to anticipated usage based on public health restrictions.

Community Centres

Proceed with Option 2 – only open the Bala, Milford Bay, Minett, Port Carling, Ullswater

Community Centres for two, two hour time slots (9:00 to 11:00 am and 1:00 to 3:00 pm) per day, five days per week in Q3 2020. Implement increased cleaning protocols and the usage of a waiver form system.

Next Steps/ Space Optimization Review

Authorize staff to investigate options for improving space efficiencies within the existing Township Office building envelop, in comparison to the potential costs of an expansion of the building.

RATIONALE:

An update to the Township Municipal Operations Covid-19 Reopening Framework is in line with the guiding principles set out in the plan.

FINANCIAL:

Committee/Council Meetings

The cost of continued electronic/virtual meetings would be nominal (ZOOM software licensing fee).

Costs related to the necessary upgrades for the Port Carling Memorial Community Centre are estimated to be approximately \$30,000.

The cost of the use of the District Council Chambers would include increased mileage claims from staff and Council. Costs of any District charges are to be determined.

Municipal Office

If the need is determined to open by appointment, a more cost effective solution might be to create a new workstation at the Bailey Street entrance to meet with members of the public right at the entrance. This option has not been quoted, but would involve a new desk with a counter screen and some IT considerations, and could be approximately \$6,000.

The workstation retrofit would cost approximately \$22,000 plus applicable taxes, and the counter barriers have not been formally quoted, but are anticipated to be around \$10,000 for three departments (Clerks/Finance, Planning, and Building). In addition we have been informed that the lead time for plexi-glass is approximately 6-8 weeks as many organizations are looking to make similar retrofits.

Costs incurred in 2020 would be funded from the Working Capital Reserve. Depending on timing, the amounts incurred in 2021 could be brought forth as part of the 2021 Capital budget submission.

Library & Arenas

None at this time.

Community Centres

The cost of enhanced cleaning and sanitization is anticipated to be \$3,500/week.

Next Steps/ Space Optimization Review

A further report will be prepared and related costs will be identified therein.

TOWNSHIP STAFF CONSULTED:

Cheryl Mortimer, Clerk	705 765 3156 Ext 211
Kenneth D. Becking, P. Eng., Director of Public Works	705 765 3156 Ext 250
Sarah Lehman, Human Resources Manager	705 765 3156 Ext 283
Mark Donaldson, Director of Financial Services	705 765 3156 Ext 210
Ryan Murrell, Fire Chief	705 765 3156 Ext 261
David Pink, Director of Development Services & Environmental Stewardship	705 765 3156 Ext 230

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix "I" - Letter from the SMDHU Medical Officer of Health, follow up letter regarding municipal council meetings being held in person with members of the public attending.

Appendix "II" – Analysis of Pros and Cons – Committee and Council Meetings

CONTACT:

Derrick Hammond, CAO	705 765 3156 Ext 272
----------------------	----------------------

July 20, 2020

Dear municipalities in Simcoe County, the District of Muskoka, the Cities of Barrie and Orillia, and of the four First Nations located in Simcoe Muskoka:

I am writing in follow up to my letter dated June 30th, 2020 with respect to questions pertaining to municipal council meetings being held in person with members of the public attending.

On Monday, July 13, 2020, the Province of Ontario announced Phase 2, Stage 3 of the [Re-Opening Ontario Plan](#). With the initiation of Stage 3, the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) provides the following communications with regards to your respective public council and other public government meetings that you may have scheduled following the initiation of Stage 3 on Friday, July 17, 2020.

In accordance with [Ontario Regulation 364/20 \(Rules for Areas in Stage 3\)](#), indoor gatherings are permitted to a maximum of 50 persons. Further, persons attending an organized public event shall comply with public health guidance on physical distancing. Accordingly, for the purposes of municipal council and public meetings associated with municipal matters, the following applies:

- Municipal council and public meetings associated with municipal matters are permitted to a maximum of 50 persons.
- Physical distancing between individuals is required to take place in ensuring a distance of 2 meters or greater
- In the event that space for the gathering does not permit 50 persons with physical distancing in place, the maximum number of persons permitted should align with the spacing associated so that each person is distanced at least 2 metres from one another.
- Aisles and walkways should be designated as one way where possible
- As per the instructions provided on July 7, 2020 (revised [July 15, 2020](#)), face coverings must be worn inside businesses and/or organization at all times in publically accessible spaces. Exceptions are provided under the instructions. [FAQs](#) are continually revised, including a recent addition regarding public speaking

In keeping with the above, in person council meetings would be allowed within the requirements specified. However given these limitations, in keeping with the June 30, 2020 communication, SMDHU suggests continuing alternative means of meeting and of seeking public input, where possible, for the duration of the pandemic as an ongoing preventative measure. Such alternative means include [electronic council meetings](#) with public access which is in alignment with [Bill 187](#) which allows for quorum to be counted if municipal council members are participating virtually with all other council meeting requirements remaining. In discussions with the Association of Municipalities in Ontario (AMO), they have advised that they have worked with the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO) and the Municipal Information Systems Association (MISA) on virtual meeting guidelines to fulfill all the Municipal Act requirements during virtual meetings including committee meetings which can be found [here](#).

□ Barrie:

15 Sperling Drive
Barrie, ON
L4M 6K9
705-721-7520
FAX: 705-721-1495

□ Collingwood:

280 Pretty River Pkwy.
Collingwood, ON
L9Y 4J5
705-445-0804
FAX: 705-445-6498

□ Cookstown:

2-25 King Street S.
Cookstown, ON
L0L 1L0
705-458-1103
FAX: 705-458-0105

□ Gravenhurst:

2-5 Pineridge Gate
Gravenhurst, ON
P1P 1Z3
705-684-9090
FAX: 705-684-9887

□ Huntsville:

34 Chaffey St.
Huntsville, ON
P1H 1K1
705-789-8813
FAX: 705-789-7245

□ Midland:

A-925 Hugel Ave.
Midland, ON
L4R 1X8
705-526-9324
FAX: 705-526-1513

□ Orillia:

120-169 Front St. S.
Orillia, ON
L3V 4S8
705-325-9565
FAX: 705-325-2091

SMDHU remains committed to providing web updates on the provincial Emergency Orders and information for the public and our municipalities with regards to public gatherings. Further information pertaining to COVID-19 can be found at the following page: <http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/Topics/COVID-19>.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL Signed By:

Charles Gardner, MD, CCFP, MHSc, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health

CG:SR:LS:sh

Appendix "II" - Council Meeting Format Alternatives Analysis

Option	Pros	Cons
Continue electronic or virtual Council meetings (Hybrid)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical distancing assured • Public can view proceedings via YouTube • Input to the agenda via email • Delegations and Planning Public Meetings may be heard live electronically • Members of Council and the public are now used to it, running efficiently as in process • Hybrid model increases Councillor intercommunication abilities (i.e. some face to face, reduced internet interruptions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited Councillor intercommunication ability via online • No public, in person, attendance • Increased staff resources
Port Carling Memorial Community Centre, with IT infrastructure upgrade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased ability for Council intercommunication (in person) • Public attendance offered; gallery capacity with safe distancing is 42 (current gallery normal capacity is 38) • Move towards enhanced Council Chambers • Set up will create an additional large meeting space, available for other meetings with large attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unbudgeted capital cost and time to set up improved internet/webcasting will not meet short term needs • Loss of rental space to the public based on the set up requirements • Increased staff resources
Hold Committee/Council meetings at the District or another available space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased ability for Council intercommunication (in person) • Webcasting available immediately • Delegations and Public Meetings may be heard live electronically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No public, in person, attendance • Staff and committee/Council travel required • Staff transportation of materials required • Increased staff resources