



COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

TO: Mayor Harding and Members of Council
MEETING DATE: April 15, 2020
SUBJECT: COVID-19 Update on Township Operations

RECOMMENDATION:

None. For information purposes only.

APPROVALS:

Date

Signature

Submitted by: **Derrick Hammond, CAO**

April 9, 2020

Original signed by D. Hammond

SUMMARY:

This report provides an update to the business continuity of Township operations during the provincial emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

ORIGIN:

As Council is aware, on March 17th, 2020 the province declared an [emergency](#) to protect the public and contain the spread of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19. Since the declaration, 23 Provincial orders have been issued under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act.

BACKGROUND:

The declaration of emergency has enabled the preparation and issuance of legislative and regulatory changes, as well as related orders in order to facilitate a rapid response to combat COVID-19. Some of these changes were issued often only days apart and sometimes two and three related orders on a single day. Muskoka CAOs, and their various staff teams have been meeting regularly and working collaboratively to review and understand this large volume of changes. These discussions have informed Township Senior Leadership Team discussions respecting our review, decision making, and operational implementation of each relevant order.

DISCUSSION:

Actions Taken

Council's approval in January, 2020 of the update to [By-law 2020-014 \(CAO\)](#), along with other delegated authorities has enabled staff to nimbly adjust operational practices to respond to this quickly evolving situation. At the core of our decision making and implementation of the orders has been the health and safety of our staff, along with business continuity. As outlined to members of Council through prior emails, newsletters and media releases, the Township has taken the following steps to realign municipal operations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It should be noted that some of these measures preceded the declaration of emergency by the Province. For a detailed timeline and summary of actions required based on our operations for each related order, please see Appendix I.

Clerks and Legislative Services:

While the recruitment process for the Director of Financial Services position continues, the Clerks and Legislative Services team have taken on the responsibility for Information Technology. During the initial phases of the Staff Protection Plan, coordinating the transition of IT systems to enable staff to work remotely, along with adjusting technology for electronic meetings has been a full time task. In addition, considerable attention has been required to determine the breadth of amendments required to the Township's Procedural By-law, as well as the logistics respecting the holding of electronic meetings.

Given the volume, as well as the changing nature of information related to COVID-19 flowing from senior levels of government, coupled with confirmation of direction on the holding of meetings related to Planning matters, the Clerk outlines in her report that for the time being, only emergent matters should be addressed at special meetings of Council, or Committee of the Whole. Once the Province provides clarity around planning meetings, or Provincial declaration of emergency is lifted and orders rescinded, other meetings addressing the anticipated backlog of regular business could begin. This is also dependent upon the length of the declared emergency.

Communications and Economic Development:

The focus of our efforts has been on internal and external communications. In this regard, the Communications Specialist has been working with the Human Resources Manager and the CAO to produce timely and informative communications to staff.

As it relates to external communications, a special section of the Township's website, providing links or access to the latest public health, financial/community support and Township service adjustments has been created and amended. Respecting Township services, numerous press releases have been issued and information sheet that each Councilor can use to inform their contact groups has been created.

From an Economic Development perspective, staff remain in constant contact with regional partners, including the Muskoka Lakes Chamber of Commerce and area municipalities in an ongoing effort to understand local impacts to the business community and to work together moving forward. The Township continues to gather information on resources and programs available that are shared on the Township website. Additionally, staff participate in virtual meetings and networking opportunities to share updates on opportunities available, such as

Digital Main Street Muskoka, and to gather further information as the situation continues to change.

Development Services:

Based on the latest change to the [Essential Services](#) list issued by the Province, a press release was issued to identify temporary changes to the building permit application and inspection processes. In addition, although not required at this time, a building inspector, already appointed as a bylaw enforcement officer, has been assigned to work with the OPP, to help with the stay home and social gathering orders. Another report on this agenda addresses the appointment of a new Township By-law Enforcement Officer.

Financial Services:

As noted above, the recruitment process for the Director of Financial Services continues. Despite the overwhelming nature of the information and change requiring changes to operations, the Township Senior Leadership Team and District staff have continued to work on the 2020 Operating and Capital Budget and Forecast.

Once the budget, Treasurer's Report and related presentation are complete, a Council Agenda, with a link to these documents will be issued one week prior to the initial Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting where the draft budget will be introduced. The release of the Agenda will provide a week for the public to review the document as well. To ensure that the public has an opportunity to provide comments, an email address, specifically for that purpose has been set up. After the budget has been introduced, a second COW will be held in order to provide an opportunity to discuss any Council member or public comments. Should all of the comments be able to be addressed during this second meeting, the Budget should be referred to Council for adoption.

Fire and Emergency Management:

The Fire Department still possess the staffing levels to respond to emergencies and perform all services listed in the Establishing and Regulating By-law. They have adjusted their operational practices to ensure that staff are aware of the social distancing requirements, updated procedure related to Personal Protective Equipment and created operational directives related to services performed during this Pandemic.

In addition, the Province declared a provincial fire ban. Staff have communicated this through a press release and are responding to fire complaints and emergencies.

From an Emergency Management Perspective, some municipalities have declared states of emergencies to bring awareness to the need for social isolation and distancing to avoid the spread of COVID-19. Emergency management staff across the District have been monitoring this situation and consulting with the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit and have determined that at this point, there is no need to declare an emergency as many of the threshold identified by the Province have not yet been met. Declaring an emergency is beneficial when life saving tasks and business critical functions require fast decisions beyond the capability of the services in place. Today, all the municipal services of Muskoka Lakes are operating within their capabilities albeit differently. Further, we have not been approached to draw attention to this Pandemic by hospitals or the health unit to declare an emergency as most other communities have been. As this is a health emergency, The Township's role is to promote Public Health messaging, instill calm in our residents and be kind to one another.

Interestingly, the Fire Chief advises that some municipalities that have declared emergencies are now experiencing burn out of their team members due to prolonged hours 7 days a week. To respond appropriately to another issue or emergency, a well rested and focused team is required.

Human Resources:

Implementation of a phased Staff Protection Plan with the following components:

- Cancelled all recreational programming including closing community centre bookings and removing ice from the arenas;
- Closed municipal office and other facilities to the public;
- 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);
- Remaining office staff (8-10 people on any given day) are using modified schedules to limit attendance at the office and when at the office, practice physical distancing by working from different work stations;
- Increased Municipal Office cleaning to twice per day, including washrooms and high touch points;
- Increased use of paperless processes and when handling money, mail and paper gloves are used;
- Departments are receiving documents that are not able to be emailed, such as engineering specifications for inspections, payments, etc. through secure drop boxes set up at the Municipal Office; and
- Staff who use Municipal vehicles are driving alone and wiping/sanitizing after use.

Council may be aware of the recent Town Council labour discussions respecting staff layoffs. These discussions are occurring because a portion of their budgets are based on revenues related to the extensive recreational programming they offer. As the Town programs are not being held, no revenue is being realized and the related part time staff are being laid off. As the Township does not provide the same extent of programming, our situation is not analogous.

That said, to be prudent, the Senior Leadership Team has made the following staffing adjustments:

- Temporary receptionist contract ended;
- Arena seasonal contract ended early;
- Full time Parks/Arena staff moved back to Parks early;
- Trails Coordinator seasonal role to be filled by Parks Operators;
- Delayed start dates of seasonal positions until at least related orders have been lifted; Building Administration Assistant, Septic Inspectors, Recreation Attendant (Arena), Lead Swim Instructor;
- Delayed start of permanent full time By-law Enforcement Officer;
- Recruitment for the permanent full time Receptionist has been delayed; and
- Library part time staff have been placed on Declared Emergency Leaves.

Considerations for these adjustments were workload (including program availability), and the ability to safely and effectively train and onboard new hires. The Senior Leadership team continues to monitor the situation and in accordance with the [By-law 2020-014 \(CAO\)](#), will make further adjustments as necessary.

Planning:

At this time, Planning staff are able to work remotely to ensure social distancing. Staff continue to receive, process and review applications and enquiries. Should the volume of these matters slow down, the Director has identified a variety of projects for completion. Respecting the holding of planning meetings, given that [Regulation 73/20](#) suspends all timeframes related to all legislation and regulations, it would appear that many planning matters are in limbo. Further clarification has been sought from the Province on this matter, as well as the ability to hold public meetings. Until that clarification has been received, anecdotally, we understand that planning matters should not proceed.

Respecting the Minett matter, staff have sought legal clarification to determine if [Regulation 73/20](#) has the effect of extending the associated timeframe. Despite this staff continue to facilitate further meetings of the Working Group with a view to producing draft policy for the consideration of District and Township Councils respecting circulation.

With respect to the Official Plan Review project, the next phase, starting with a Policy Directions Workshop, originally scheduled for April 3, 2020, has been postponed. While hosting an electronic Workshop later this month/early May could likely be accommodated, the following phases consisting of public engagement and consultation, including amongst other methods pop up events and open houses, will pose challenges under the current environment. While we await further direction from the Province on the ability to hold public meetings, in the event they are not possible suspending the project may have to be considered.

Public Works:

At this time, Public Works staff are able to work remotely and ensure social distancing. Operations include:

- Roads staff have begun sweeping operations and the newly acquired sweeper that was authorized by Council has enabled a greater level of efficiency;
- Parks crew have begun spring cleanup and have placed closed signage on all parks and recreational playground areas. Hardy Lake Provincial Park and Torrance Barrens Conservation reserve are under the jurisdiction of the Province and are closed and both have signage to indicate such. Trails remain open at this time and are signed to ensure appropriate social distancing;
- Although arenas are closed, arena staff have taken out the ice and continue to perform maintenance that has not been able to be completed in some time;
- Facilities staff continue to perform maintenance that has not been able to be completed in some time.

Going Forward

Staff will continue to deal with operational matters and adjust plans to respond to this fluid situation. As we encounter policy and other matters with which staff do not have the authority to address, matters will be quickly compiled and reports written for inclusion in a meeting agenda for Council's consideration.

Financial

At this time, staff have been coding and tracking extra time and expenses (i.e. cleaning expenses) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, we have been and continue to track lost revenues. These actions are being undertaken to ensure we have the appropriate data to respond to potential future grants and subsidies from senior levels of government.

Consultations

Senior Leadership Team, Township of Muskoka Lakes

References

Appendix I

Timeline of Township of Muskoka Lakes applicable orders under the [Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.9.](#), and how we applied them.

- March 17 – [O. Reg 50/20](#) - Declaration of Emergency
- March 18 - [O. Reg 51/20](#) – Closure of Establishments – Required closure of indoor recreational programming (i.e. public skating) and libraries
- March 18 – [O. Reg 52/20](#) – Organized Public Events, Certain Gatherings – No gatherings over 5 people, limits ability to hold Council and other public meetings
- March 20 - [O. Reg. 73/20](#) – Extending time Periods in Ontario Regulation – Allow the flexibility of response to building permits and planning deadlines (retro to March 16) for the duration of the emergency
- March 24 – [O. Reg 82/20](#) – Closure of Non-Essential Businesses – 1. (5) 1) allows government operations and services to continue.
- March 30 – [O. Reg 107/20](#) – Meeting for Corporations – Allows electronic meetings during the emergency
- March 30 – [O. Reg 105/20](#) – Extension of Emergency – To April 14, 2020
- March 30 – [O. Reg 104/20](#) - Closure of Outdoor Amenities – Cordoned off parks and beaches (minimal impact to workload)
- March 31 – [O. Reg 114/20](#) – Enforcement of Orders – Gives powers to Police and Bylaw officers to enforce the orders of the Emergency Management Act. At this time the OPP were consulting municipalities and not requiring assistance.
- April 3 – [O. Reg 119/20](#) – Amends 82/20 to extend the schedule of closures – to April 13, 2020. Same government exemption applies. Further restrictions to construction impacted Development Services department.