



Subject: COVID Update – November 2021

To: Council

From: Chief Administrative Office

Report Number: 2021-295

Meeting Date: November 22, 2021

Recommendation:

That Chief Administrative Office Report 2021-295 be received.

Purpose:

This CAO generated report is provided as a follow up to the COVID-19 pandemic update that was provided to City Council on October 25, 2021.

Background:

The City's Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) was activated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on March 13, 2020 by bringing together the City's Emergency Control Group (ECG). The COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect the nation and the City continues to prepare, respond, and plan recovery from the impacts of the pandemic to the municipality. As described in a previous staff report, the City's response is based on four principles:

- Maintaining essential City services to the community throughout the emergency;
- Continuing to ensure the safety and security of the public and City staff;
- Ensuring the organization remains financially stable throughout COVID-19; and
- Continuing to remain consistent in the City's actions with the actions of other agencies.

In order to respond appropriately to the impacts of the pandemic and adhere to these principles, the City's response has been divided into three phases:

- First phase – initial response and precautions for users and staff
- Second phase – maintaining essential services
- Third phase – recovery and reopening

Currently, the City is in the third phase, recovery and reopening, as staff continue to execute plans that were developed for reopening the City's programs, services, and facilities.

Discussion:

In October, the Province released *A Plan to Safely Reopen Ontario and Manage COVID-19 for the Long-Term*. This plan detailed the Province's gradual approach to lifting the remaining public health and workplace safety measures by March 2022. The City is in full compliance with the Province's regulations as they pertain to the workplace and to gatherings and public facilities such as the Vale Health & Wellness Centre.

The most recent step of the Province's plan was the planned removal of capacity limits in some high-risk settings on November 15th. On November 10th, the Province announced that this step was being delayed at least 28 days due to public health trends such as the COVID reproduction number and the percent positivity.

Reconnecting with Residents

Since the outset of the COVID pandemic, some City facilities have been closed to walk-in visits. While many facilities have been open with precautions in place such as Sugarloaf Harbour Marina, parks and beaches, the Vale Health & Wellness Centre, and the Port Colborne Public Library, other administration buildings such as City Hall, the Port Colborne Operations Centre, and the Fire Station have been serving stakeholders on an appointment-only basis. While some staff worked remotely during the pandemic to help prevent the spread of COVID in the workplace, all of these facilities have been open and staffed.

At this time, the ECG is planning the safe and gradual return to in-person, walk-in visits to administration buildings and revisiting COVID precautions that are in place in the workplace. City management has designed a colour-coded chart that outlines COVID precautions and restrictions that will keep staff and visitors safe during the return to normal practices. Workplace-wide conditions are outlined in the attached appendix, City of Port Colborne Re-opening Stages; there are also additional workplace specific conditions that have been outlined for individual City facilities.

Staff would advise Council that this colour-coded tool is for corporate use only and is not intended to be used in the broader community and is not based on Provincial or Regional Public Health requirements. Rather, this tool is designed to help administer the workplace in a safe manner that will prevent the spread of COVID in the workplace.

The ECG will establish the colour code in effect for the workplace at the regularly scheduled EOC meetings and revisit the decision from week-to-week.

Council Meetings

While administration buildings will soon be opening to walk-in visits, City Council meetings will remain virtual at this time. Provincial regulations consider Council meetings to be in a separate category from other City facilities as they take place in a public meeting facility. Council meetings would require enforcement of a mask mandate, screening, and verification of vaccination. While the increased screening can be conducted with the help of extra staffing, the mask mandate would limit the effectiveness of the meeting for Councillors, staff, and delegations. Staff recognize that holding a lengthy meeting while wearing a mask may be uncomfortable and it hinders accessibility for those watching the meeting who rely on reading lips. Since virtual meetings are working effectively, and this change would not be an improvement due to safety precautions, staff will not be moving forward with in person public meetings at this time. Staff are committed to continuing to watch Provincial guidelines and examine best practices and hope to resume in-person public meetings in the first half of 2022.

Internal Consultations:

The City's Emergency Control Group continues to meet on a regular basis during the pandemic. From time to time, staff from other departments are present at these meetings to discuss reopening of City programs and amenities including recreation facilities and programming, cultural services, and access to City buildings.

Financial Implications:

While the pandemic has had financial impacts on the City in 2020 and 2021, there are no new financial impacts since the most recent report to Council. City staff project a balanced budget for 2021.

Public Engagement:

The City continues to provide high-quality communication to the community by giving frequent updates of City initiatives and sharing information from other agencies such as the Federal government, the Provincial government, and the Region of Niagara and Niagara Region Public Health.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

The initiative contained within this report supports the following pillar(s) of the strategic plan:

- Service and Simplicity - Quality and Innovative Delivery of Customer Services
 - Value: Financial Management to Achieve Financial Sustainability
 - People: Supporting and Investing in Human Capital
 - Governance: Communications, Engagement, and Decision-Making
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Conclusion:

The City's Emergency Control Group continues to meet during the pandemic to make operational decisions for the City's programs and services in order to maintain essential operations within the community. Staff will continue to report to Council for the duration of the pandemic.

Appendices:

- a. City of Port Colborne Re-opening Stages

Respectfully submitted,

Scott Luey
Chief Administrative Officer
905-835-2900 ext. 306
Scott.Luey@portcolborne.ca

Report Approval:

All reports reviewed and approved by the Department Director and also the City Treasurer when relevant. Final review and approval by the Chief Administrative Officer.