

Staff Report



To	Committee of the Whole
Service Area	Office of the Chief Administrative Officer
Date	Monday, December 7, 2020
Subject	Managing the impacts of COVID-19: Update 6

Recommendation

That report “Managing the Impacts of COVID-19: Update 6” dated December 7, 2020 be forwarded to the local MP and MPP, FCM, AMO, OBCM and the Federal Minister of Finance and the Ministers of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Minister of Finance for the Province of Ontario.

Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

This report outlines the City of Guelph’s work towards managing the impacts of COVID-19 since staff’s last (interim) update to Council on October 23, 2020.

Key Findings

The City continues to work actively with community partners and as part of the Emergency Operations Control Group (EOCG) to manage the impacts of COVID-19 and respond to a second, more severe wave of the virus. The City has implemented additional precautions for facilities and programming in response to the Province having moved Guelph into level Orange of its response framework. Staff are now preparing for adjustments that will be made if and when Guelph moves to level Red, which would generate broader, more far-reaching restrictions.

Financial Implications

Council should continue to take a long-term view of the City’s financial recovery from COVID-19. The City’s 2021 Budget includes a [four-part strategy](#) to address the impacts of COVID-19 on our service delivery.

Recovering financially from the pandemic calls for identifying new opportunities, and greater cooperation with local businesses and partner organizations to bring the local economy back to a thriving position. Council can refer to the [Third Quarter Operating Variance Report](#) for full details on the COVID-19-related variance.

Report

When staff prepared its interim report to Council on managing the impacts of COVID-19 (October 23, 2020) we reported that Ontario was experiencing a record number of new COVID-19 cases in what most experts agreed to be the start of Canada’s second wave of the virus. Today, Ontario’s new daily case count far exceeds those we’ve seen so far since the beginning of the pandemic.

At the time of preparing this report, Guelph is in level Orange (Restrict) of the [Provincial COVID-19 response framework](#). Orange is characterized as intermediate-level restrictions: enhanced measures, restrictions and enforcement, while avoiding closures.

However, Guelph's test positivity rate is up, as is the effective reproductive rate. The City of Guelph, together with our community partners, has already prepared for a move to level Red (Control) which would generate broader-scale measures and restrictions across multiple sectors to control transmission (effectively, a return to modified Stage 2). Restrictions in level Red are the most severe before widescale business and organizational closures.

As part of Guelph's ongoing response, the EOCG continues to meet two to three times each week to oversee and coordinate the community's response to COVID-19. The work of the EOCG is focused on anticipating change, listening and pivoting as needed, following Provincial and Federal announcements.

Supporting our community during the second wave

Advocacy, Consultations and Delegations

Since staff's last COVID-19 report to Council, City staff have continued to engage regularly with federal, provincial and municipal partners to advocate on behalf of Guelph's interests.

A fall 2020 Provincial Budget was tabled by Ontario's Minister of Finance on November 5, alongside Bill 229, the Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19 Act (Budget Measures), 2020. Most notably for the City, the budget proposed changes to the property tax system, including a 30% reduction in the Business Education Tax rate and the creation of a new optional property subclass for small businesses aimed at enabling local governments to provide targeted property tax relief for small business. Municipal governments can opt to implement this reduction starting in 2021, contingent on local feasibility, and it may be matched by the provincial government.

On November 27, Mayor Guthrie hosted his final meeting as Chair of the Ontario Big City Mayors (OBCM). At that meeting, OBCM passed a motion in support of a new policy paper titled "Infrastructure Independence: Empowering Municipalities to Deliver Local Infrastructure." This discussion paper calls on Ontario and the federal government to "build back better" by investing in critical municipal infrastructure to stimulate local economic recovery. The policy paper also recommends a long-term, stable framework for infrastructure funding, an allocation-based approach to funding distribution, and for the province and federal government to reduce red tape associated to grant reporting and application requirements.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) has also released a policy paper titled "Building back better together: Municipal recommendations for Canada's post-COVID recovery." This policy paper calls for a successor agreement to the Safe Restart Agreement (emergency municipal relief funding), the doubling of the federal Gas Tax Fund, targeted action to end and prevent homelessness, investments in community infrastructure, public transit funding and modernization, measures for climate change mitigation and adaptation, investments in natural infrastructure and for investments to ensure universal broadband access. The policy paper also calls on the federal government to commit to a dialogue with FCM on

municipal resilience, including a discussion on modernizing municipal finances and authorities.

Through the end of 2020 and into 2021, City staff will continue to engage with OBCM, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and FCM to advocate for continued pandemic financial relief and funding programs to support Guelph's strategic priorities. To that end, staff were pleased that the Ministry of Infrastructure recently opened the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) COVID-19 Resilience Infrastructure Stream. Guelph has been allocated \$945k under the new program, and at the time of writing, City staff is working cross-departmentally to identify eligible projects and coordinate the City's application (Further details will be provided to Council when they become available).

Vital Focus Series: Secondary Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The City of Guelph continues to contribute staff capacity towards the recent [Vital Focus Series: Secondary Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

Since the last COVID-19 update, the [Vital Focus Series partnership](#) has successfully released several publications highlighting the secondary impacts of the pandemic. The series is led by Toward Common Ground, with key contributions from the City, County of Wellington, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) and the Guelph Community Foundation.

The Vital Focus series provides national and local data, and recommendations for local community organizations, institutions and all orders of government on how to mitigate and address the secondary impacts of the pandemic over the longer term. The series reveals that the effects of the pandemic aren't limited to those who are infected with COVID-19 and their families. The series builds awareness of the secondary impacts of the pandemic using evidence-based analysis and provides recommendations to help mitigate those effects. To date, the partnership has released reports on Food Insecurity, Alcohol and Substance Misuse, Mental Health, and Employment. Forthcoming releases will highlight secondary impacts on Families with Children, the Digital Divide, and Accessibility.

City staff will continue working with the partnership to identify additional secondary impacts and use the findings to help inform a new community-based advocacy strategy.

Emergency Grant allocations

In November, the City of Guelph announced [24 recipients for the Emergency Fund](#), and awarded \$150,000 in phase 2 funding to organizations, unincorporated groups and individuals who will use the funds to help adapt their services or programs to meet community needs as a result of COVID-19. This funding is the result of Council's approval at a Special Council Meeting on June 17, 2020 to direct approximately one year of funding from six granting programs within the Community Investment Strategy to the Emergency and Resiliency funding streams. The decision in June allowed teams to design, launch and award a total of \$350,000 over two phases in emergency granting by the beginning of November 2020.

Supporting the enforcement of COVID-19-related restrictions

The City of Guelph is supporting the enforcement of COVID-19-related restrictions through its Corporate and Community Safety division.

As Guelph moves through various levels of public health measures as outlined in the Province's response framework, the City is scaling its enforcement activities to match.

The City has expanded its communications with the University of Guelph so that the University is aware of large gatherings involving students and can take appropriate action.

Over the weekend of November 26–29 during Black Friday retail sales, Bylaw Enforcement coordinated enhanced enforcement at retail stores with various other agencies such as WDGPH and Guelph Police Services, with a focus on ensuring the number of people within the stores met provincial thresholds, and that personal protective equipment was in place. The response from store employees was extremely positive, and they were generally grateful that Bylaw staff were onsite reinforcing safety messages. No infractions were observed and therefore no charges were laid in any retail locations.

Holiday programming impacts

Recognizing the importance of eliminating large social gatherings and public events to slow transmission, and understanding the imperative of leading by example, this year the City will not be able to host the Guelph Farmers' Market annual holiday market, the Hanukkah menorah lighting, or the Mayor's Tree Lighting event.

Market Square will still be lit for the holidays, and staff's intent is to have the outdoor rink opened in mid-December, subject to weather, public health advice and Provincial guidelines.

The City joins WDGPH and others in wanting to encourage community members to find enjoyable ways to celebrate the holidays safely, while staying home and with those who live in their household.

Supporting Guelph businesses during the second wave

The City's economic development division continues to work with the Smart Cities office, the Small Business Enterprise Centre, Innovation Guelph, the Guelph Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Guelph Business Association and many others to ensure that local agencies are aligned and providing the best support we can.

The following is an update on key economic support initiatives:

Grow Back Better

Since May, the Smart Cities Office and [Our Food Future](#) collaborators have been implementing programs and initiatives that have helped our community respond to and recover from COVID-19. Through [Grow Back Better](#), Our Food Future's 10-point plan in response to COVID-19, programs have been fast-tracked, infusing \$1.6 million into the community at a time when we needed it the most.

To-date, Our Food Future collaborators have helped residents and businesses receive support they need through a variety of programs including [The SEED's Emergency Food Home Delivery Program](#). This program, which receives financial support through community donations, continues to play an important role in providing access to affordable, nutritious food to community members. To date 1,100 Guelph-Wellington community members have received support and \$20,000 has been received through community donations, which has been matched dollar-

for-dollar by Our Food Future, bringing the total donation to \$40,000. As the number of COVID-19 cases rise in our community, the need for the Emergency Food Home Delivery Program continues, as does the need for community donations.

To help inform the support provided and to understand how food access and food insecurity is affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, WDGPH and Our Food Future collaborators are conducting a survey with Guelph and Wellington residents. The information gathered will inform service planning and programs in Guelph and Wellington to increase access to affordable, nutritious foods and mitigate secondary pandemic impacts.

Grow Back Better will continue to guide Our Food Future's programming through 2021 as we continue to support our community's response to COVID-19 while creating Canada's first circular food economy. Council will receive relevant updates through staff reports and established reporting channels for Our Food Future.

Guelph Shops

The City continues to support and iterate the Guelph Shops campaign. Staff are working with partners to run an enhanced Guelph Shops promotional campaign throughout December, tailored to the holiday season. The holiday campaign will be promoted through social media sponsorships, and online and print promotion via Guelph Today, Guelph Mercury Tribune, Intrigue Media and Guelph Transit advertising.

Tourism Adaptation and Recovery Fund (TARF)

FedDev has announced a new funding stream to support tourism in Guelph. While Guelph Tourism Services is leading the allocation of funds, the criteria and selection of successful businesses will be created with our partners in Regional Tourism Ontario 4 (RTO4), the Guelph Chamber of Commerce, and the Tourism Advisory Committee. At the time of writing this report, staff are still waiting to learn the total funding amount.

Guelph Farmers' Market

The City put additional precautions in place when Guelph entered level Orange (Restrict) of the Province's response framework. Indoor capacity was reduced to 100 customers at a time. Staff have prepared the Market for level Red (Control), at which point they will limit indoor capacity to 75 customers and continue to use the outdoor parking space to accommodate vendors as weather permits.

Guelph Aglow

Guelph Aglow is a hyper-local tourism initiative that will promote safe shopping and experiences around Guelph. This work is funded through the Regional Recovery and Relief Fund (RRRF), Shareable Moments Challenge (RTO4), and the department operating budget. Safe tourism activations include: 'Sparkle Square'; outdoor skating and additional seating in Market Square; Sparkles in the Park; the Riverside Park Skate Trail; and more.

Staycation campaign

The City's economic development division is working on development of an online contest for Guelph residents to encourage overnight stays in Guelph, and downtown shopping and dining. The contest is planned for Q1 2021.

Parkland dedication fee exemptions to address COVID-19 response

On October 13, 2020, Council approved waiving the parkland dedication fee that would typically apply to businesses looking to expand their square footage in cases where businesses have to expand to meet pandemic-related health and safety requirements, or to supply essential equipment.

The change allows for an exemption for industrial and commercial businesses from the parkland dedication fee if the reason for expansion is to comply with public health requirements for physical distancing, screening and/or testing for COVID-19. The fee exemption also applies in cases of expansion related to the production of urgently required safety equipment and supplies related to the pandemic.

A building permit has been issued and the noted pandemic exemption has been applied for 165 Dunlop Drive. The property owner demonstrated that the application was solely to provide screening for their employees that would help ensure the facility remains safe and operational while providing needed supply chain materials. Therefore, the exemption as outlined in 33 (h.1) of the Parkland Dedication By-law (2019) 20366 as amended by the By-laws (2019 20380 and (2020) 20531 was applied.

This application represents the only COVID-19 exemption to the Parkland Dedication bylaw in Q4 2020.

Supporting our organization during the second wave

Processes and plans developed over the spring and summer are serving the organization well as we adapt to the realities of a second, more severe wave of the virus. In addition, City administration continues to iterate and adjust in order to keep our employees safe.

Screening for employees and visitors

We've updated our approach to screening to keep employees, Council and visitors to City facilities safe. Active screening for City facilities took effect November 23. An online screening form is available to all employees; completion is mandatory before entering a City facility (Print forms are also available).

Active screening is also now mandatory for contractors and vendors entering City facilities.

Anyone coming to a City facility for a scheduled meeting, event, or program must confirm they are not sick, have not been in contact with anyone who is sick, have not travelled outside of Canada in the past 14 days, and provide contact information to help the City track possible cases of COVID-19.

Workplace Precautions During a Pandemic Policy

In November, the City rolled out its Workplace Precautions During a Pandemic Policy to ensure safe and healthy workplaces that comply with legislative directives.

Guelph-Wellington Paramedics offer Flu clinics for City employees

It's always important for frontline and/or deliverers of essential community services to be vaccinated so they can protect themselves and others from influenza. As we all know, this year, public health officials urge the flu vaccine is more important than ever.

The City offers annual influenza immunization for its employees, but logistical challenges caused by COVID-19 had the potential to disrupt this annual service for City employees. With good inter-departmental coordination, the City overcame those challenges and managed to continue its annual influenza immunization service for City employees. The result was 167 more people immunized than might otherwise have been.

This decision was driven by our corporate values and administration expects it will minimize the disruption of routine activities during seasonal influenza epidemics.

Financial Implications

The projected year-end variance that requires funding from Safe Restart Phase 1 Funding is estimated at \$5.5 million (\$2.7 million for tax supported budgets and \$2.8 million for non-tax supported budgets.) The projected year-end position includes an estimated \$19.5 million shortfall in revenue related to COVID-19-impacts; a cost increase for COVID-19 expenses of \$4.8 million; and a corresponding cost reduction through mitigation efforts of \$20.7 million. For more detail, please refer to the [Third Quarter Operating Variance Report](#).

Because of early and significant steps taken by staff and Council to mitigate expenses early in the pandemic, the City was not eligible for Phase 2 funding. However, based on projections, the City will have remaining Phase 1 Funding available of approximately \$6.5 million and will be able to transfer this to reserve to help offset COVID-19 impacts in the first quarter of 2021 (These estimates will likely change and be revised through the year-end variance reporting process, given that we are responding to the second wave of the virus along with changing Provincial requirements.).

The Safe Restart Phase 1 funding enables the contingency reserves to remain intact in 2020 and better positions the City to manage the long-term financial impacts of this pandemic without significant increases to the tax levy or user rates. It will provide the City with greater flexibility to respond to COVID-19 through 2021, and to other unexpected events in the upcoming years.

Financial Recovery

Council should continue to take a long-term view of the City's financial recovery from COVID-19. The City's 2021 Budget includes a [four-part strategy](#) to address the impacts of COVID on our service delivery.

The world has entered a 'new normal' and recovering financially from COVID-19 calls for identifying new opportunities, and greater cooperation with local businesses and partner organizations to bring the local economy back to a thriving position. Working with partners to ensure that commercial real estate is not severely impacted in the long-term will protect assessed commercial property values and limit a taxation shift to the residential sector. Council should continue to leverage the City's Strategic Plan to prioritize recovery efforts and take advantage of recovery funding and stimulus programming from other levels of government to position Guelph and be future-ready.

Consultations

This report was written in consultation with general managers, strategic business advisors, and the executive team.

Strategic Plan Alignment

The content of this staff report aligns with the Strategic Plan, Guelph. Future Ready. As a whole, the City's response to COVID-19 is aligned with each of the priority areas of the Strategic Plan. That work is in support of our community and our employees during the pandemic and through recovery, while not losing sight of long-term sustainability.

Departmental Approval

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