

Staff Report

To	Committee of the Whole
Service Area	Office of the Chief Administrative Officer
Date	Monday, June 7, 2021
Subject	Managing the Impacts of COVID-19: Update 8

Recommendation

That report “Managing the Impacts of COVID-19: Update 8” dated June 7, 2021 be forwarded to the local Member of Parliament and Member of Provincial Parliament, Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Association of Municipalities Ontario, Ontario Big City Mayors 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 managing the impacts of COVID-19 since staff’s last update to Council on March 1, 2021.

Key Findings

The City continues working with its partners on Guelph’s Emergency Operations Control Group (EOCG) to respond to and recover from a third wave of COVID-19.

The provincial government declared a third state of emergency, declared another province wide shutdown April 3, and issued a stay-at-home order from April 18 to June 2, 2021.

Since the last update to City Council, one of the rinks at the Guelph’s West End Recreation Centre has housed a vaccine clinic operated by Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health, and the City opened, closed and reopened outdoor recreation facilities in response to changing provincial regulations.

Now, the City is making plans to resume recreation programs, and reopen facilities based on [Ontario’s Roadmap to Reopen](#). The three-step roadmap is based on vaccination targets, COVID-19 cases, and other health-related metrics to determine when and how businesses, services and programs can reopen in the weeks and months ahead.

The City continues supporting and sharing information from Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health as they work toward vaccinating 75% of the population before this fall. At the time of writing, more than 60% of adults in the community have received at least one dose, and high-risk patients and health care workers are receiving their second doses.

Financial Implications

The most current financial implications available for COVID-19 are indicating that the City is managing within budget as of the end of the first quarter as expenditure savings are currently in excess of lost revenues due to the pandemic. However, this is not necessarily reflective of future quarters as fuel prices are on the rise, COVID-19 expenditures are increasing due to recent changes in Ministry of Labour protective equipment requirements, and inflationary cost concerns are being predicted by economists.

The City has available \$9.9 million of the Operating Stream funding and \$12.5 million in Transit Stream funding for 2021 and beyond. There is currently risk that \$5.2 million of the Phase 2 Transit Stream funding could be lost due to arbitrary eligibility timelines imposed by the province. The City and its municipal partners continue advocating for funding to keep our transit systems financially whole during recovery.

The City is responding to all known grant opportunities and joining others in the municipal sector advocating for additional community-focused recovery funding. To date in 2021, the City received the near doubling of the Federal Gas Tax, now renamed the Canada Community-Building Fund - an additional \$8 million from the federal government for capital projects.

At the time of writing, the City is awaiting the federal approval of three Investing in Canada Infrastructure Programs: COVID-19 Resilience Stream projects, with anticipated federal and provincial contributions valued at \$945,162.

Report

Taking care of our community

Supporting COVID-19 vaccinations

The City continues promoting accurate and reliable information about COVID-19 vaccines and encouraging people to get vaccinated as soon as they can, wherever they can – whether at a local pharmacy, doctor’s office, or mass vaccination clinic like the one located at the West End Community Centre.

The City removed the ice from one of the rinks a few weeks early to accommodate the clinic. Now, the City is planning to have ice available in both rinks in time for the fall /winter recreation season.

About 70 members of the Guelph-Wellington Paramedic Service are trained to administer COVID-19 vaccinations. Those paramedics are working in local clinics and delivering vaccinations to 100 home-bound patients in the community.

Also, while COVID-19 cases spiked throughout the province, hospitals in the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area were struggling to find beds, doctors and nurses to care for patients. Guelph-Wellington, Waterloo and other neighbouring Paramedics Services helped transport patients to hospitals with available beds so they could get the treatment and care they needed.

Awarding Emergency Grant Funds

The City is awarding COVID-19 Emergency Grants to not-for-profit organizations, unincorporated groups and individuals to adapt services or programs or strengthen capacity and resiliency in response to COVID-19. City Council approved \$350,000 for COVID-19 Emergency Grants in 2021 and redirected another \$300,000 to the same fund. The first round of funds will be awarded this month, and a second round will be awarded in the fall.

Guelph's \$350,000 Tourism Recovery Fund helped 50 businesses during the pandemic. Some used funds to adapt and continue operating while others used the fund to create outdoor dining areas.

On May 31, 2021, Council approved an additional \$350,000 for each of these emergency grant programs, increasing available support in 2021.

The Pandemic's effects on mental health

All levels of government recognize mental health as a secondary effect of the pandemic.

Now, in addition to covering expenses related to psychology services, all City of Guelph employees who had a \$200 maximum benefit from Manulife will be reimbursed up to \$500 a year for expenses related to mental health services including:

- clinical counsellor
- marriage and family therapist
- psychoanalyst
- psychologist
- psychotherapist
- social worker

Out of respect for the collective bargaining process, these temporary changes are in effect from January 1, 2021 until December 31, 2022.

In addition to offering its own employees more resources for more types of treatment, the City continues working with several partners to advocate on behalf of the community. Mental health is identified in the [Vital Focus Series](#), and through discussions on the secondary impacts of the pandemic, as a key challenge arising from COVID19.

Provincially, Ontario is spending \$175 million this year to improve access to mental health supports as part of the "[Roadmap to Wellness: A Plan to Build Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions System](#)" released in March 2020.

In the Federal 2021 Budget, Minister of Finance the Honourable Chrystia Freeland announced \$45 million over two years to co-develop National Standards for Mental Health with provinces, health organizations and key stakeholders. Budget 2021 also commits \$100 million over three years to support innovative mental health interventions targeting populations disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. \$50 million has also been allocated to support those at risk of experiencing pandemic-related post-traumatic stress disorder. Finally, the federal government has created a new [Wellness Together Canada Portal](#) which helps Canadians access mental health supports.

Support for seniors and vulnerable populations

The City is continuing its efforts to support isolated and marginalized seniors through the Evergreen Meals Program. Working with the Guelph Wellington Seniors Association, the City is delivering 350-400 meals a week. The program is being sustained by a generous donation from a local business owner and will continue through June 2021.

Also, the Evergreen Seniors Community Centre now offers low-cost frozen meals to-go and will continue this program post-pandemic.

In March, the City invited people between the ages of 13 and 30 to spread some joy and thoughtfulness to local seniors. 45 pictures and letters were sent to registered seniors and those in long-term care centres in Guelph.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, [Our Food Future](#) collaborators have been implementing programs and initiatives that address critical issues in the food system. Approved by Council one year ago, [Grow Back Better](#), Our Food Future's 10-point plan in response to COVID-19, has contributed over \$1 million dollars in Infrastructure Canada funding to support the community relief effort, generated \$1.2 million in community donations and in kind contributions and leveraged an additional \$6.5 million in public and private sector funding. The \$6.5 million in leveraged funding includes \$5 million in support for the Circular Ontario Innovation Launchpad (COIL). More details on COIL are included further in this report.

The SEED's Emergency Food Relief program has transitioned its business model to [Groceries from the SEED](#); a pay-what-you-choose online grocery store with a social purpose. Members choosing to pay the regular retail price subsidize the groceries sold community members in need.

Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health collected data for three research projects looking at food access and food insecurity during COVID-19 from service providers, the general public, and people who are food insecure. Data collection and analysis has informed applications for additional funding projects that will address the needs identified in the research.

The Nutritious Foods Workstream has convened a group of emergency service providers to support them to collaboratively address pressing local needs. Funding (~\$100k) has been made available for organizations to work together to identify problems they are facing and co-create solutions.

The County of Wellington administers Ontario works programming here in Guelph, and expects caseloads to return to normal levels as federal benefits are phased out later this year. Benefit costs are 100% provincially funded so this does not impact the municipal tax levy.

The County's childcare programs have remained open during 2021. Some revenue loss is expected, but not to the same extent as last year. Increased costs of cleaning, PPE, and staffing requirements has put pressure on the childcare system, and there has been no additional COVID funding from the provincial or federal governments.

Staying active during stay-at-home order

In response to provincial regulations announced May 21, the City consulted Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health before opening many outdoor recreation facilities in time for the Victoria Day weekend.

With fewer provincial restrictions for outdoor recreation facilities, Guelph Bylaw reduced proactive enforcement in parks.

Bylaw officers continued responding to large private gatherings and non-essential business. At the time of writing, Guelph Police, Bylaw and University of Guelph Campus police have issued the following charges and fines under the Reopening Ontario Act:

- 100 failure to comply \$750 (individuals)
- 8 failure to comply \$750 (businesses)
- 4 obstructing an officer from performing a duty \$1,000

COVID-related Bylaw charges are posted on the City's website each week. All other provincial restrictions under the stay-at-home order remained in effect until June 2, 2021.

The City received just over \$23,000 from the New Horizons for Seniors Program for the Bike Wise Project. The project provides a safe encouraging space for seniors to (re)learn the rules of road riding, rebuild confidence riding on roads and trails and learn how to repair and care for a bike. With many regulations and programming limitations in place through the summer, this COVID informed program will create wonderful opportunities for seniors in our community to get out and be active in a safe way.

The City restored temporary active transportation lane on the Speedvale Avenue bridge, to allow for physical distancing until July when the road will be closed for construction.

Public transit post-pandemic

Guelph Transit is preparing to restore all routes and service levels this September. With University students back on campus this fall, ridership and revenue is expected to slowly rebound toward pre-COVID levels.

Meanwhile, inter-regional transit has been permanently impacted by COVID-19. Greyhound Canada has stopped all bus service in the country. The Ontario Ministry of transportation, Metrolinx and several transportation providers are discussing ways to fill this gap, including plans for two-way all day GO transit service between Kitchener and Toronto.

Supporting Guelph businesses and economic recovery

Guelph continues promoting local shopping using [GuelphShops.ca](https://www.guelphshops.ca). The City is also sharing the stories of the people behind Guelph's favourite local businesses using [Guelph Shops Business Spotlight profiles](#).

Guelph's Mind Your Businesses newsletter and COVID-19 updates have been well received by subscribers. Each issue includes timely, relevant information about funding supports, events and training to support business recovery. Examples

include rapid testing kits, recovery funding, entry-level health care positions, and mental health supports.

This month, the City will kick-off the development of its next economic development strategy. The five-year strategy must account for the impacts of COVID-19 and build a strong foundation for what's to come post-pandemic.

Guelph Junction Railway is expecting revenues to return to pre-COVID levels within two to four months.

Our Food Future – supporting existing and new food businesses and a circular economy

In April, Our Food Future announced \$5 million from the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario to launch the Circular Opportunity Innovation Launchpad (COIL), a three-year initiative. COIL builds on the work of Our Food Future to accelerate circular businesses in the food and environment sectors while also launching a series of larger scale challenges and demonstration projects. COIL will:

- Develop a Circular Economy Accelerator to support the growth of 45 high-potential circular economy businesses with coaching and up to \$40,000 in funding per business.
- Expand the [Harvest Impact](#) social impact investment fund with a goal to raise \$3 million and create a community-based lending facility that provides access to capital for food and environment sector companies and enterprising not-for-profits.
- Lead five flagship demonstration projects that will explore, test and prove circular business models, with up to \$100,000 available per project.
- Launch three innovation challenges that incentivize cross-industry collaboration and surface transformative ideas to redesign supply chains or business models.
- Expand the Guelph-Wellington Circular Economy Urban Rural Test Bed to provide resources and connections to support innovators and researchers from across southern Ontario.
- Expand the [Circular Economy Data Hub](#) to gather and strengthen access to essential data required to inform research and problem-solving.
- Launch a ReSource Exchange virtual business-to-business marketplace to match unwanted but still valuable by-products with those that can turn that waste into a new value stream.

The CFE iHub created and launched a Digital Passport web service as a mechanism for businesses that are interested in the circular food economy to gain access to knowledge, services, and connections in the Our Food Future business ecosystem.

Recognizing the importance of collecting and sharing data, Our Food Future completed the first phase of work for the food and waste flow study. The purpose of the study is to assess the status of organic 'waste' flows in the Wellington region, and identify strategies to close these loops. The municipalities with support from a consultant developed a baseline understanding of regional circularity. The analysis revealed some specific food categories that warrant deeper investigation such as farm fruit losses before manufacturing or losses of cereals at the processing stage.

Our Food Future received \$200,000 from Next Generation Manufacturing Canada (NGEN) to contract a Food Hub Feasibility and Circular Food Manufacturing

Capability Model. When complete, this report will evaluate the gaps and opportunities within the regional food growing, processing and distribution system. It will inform future partnerships or interventions intended to support local food businesses and introduce advanced manufacturing required for modern food chain transparency and traceability. It will also provide a reproducible framework for evaluating other food regions.

Since November 2020, an Advisory Committee for the [Food System Resiliency Table \(The Table\)](#) has worked to articulate a draft Terms of Reference as well as a process for attracting and onboarding members. Virtual discussions on June 9 will invite community members to [learn about The Table and how to get involved](#).

Grow Back Better programs will continue to evolve through 2021 as we continue to support the City and County's response to COVID-19 alongside the development of our regional circular food economy.

Supporting the organization

Since March, the City conducted an employee engagement "pulse check" survey. According to the results, overall employee engagement increased by 17.9 per cent; a bit higher than the 13% average increase experienced at other organizations.

Research suggests more frequent communication, flexible work options and on-demand training and development resources helped people feel more engaged at work in 2020.

The City implemented a few more health and safety measures to keep employees and their families safe from COVID-19 and continues emphasizing the importance of mental health to all employees.

Part-time and casual employees experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or required to get a COVID-19 test are now eligible for up to three days of paid emergency leave in accordance with Ontario Ministry of Labour policies.

Eye protection is now required in City vehicles, and facilities – anywhere employees may not be able to stay at least two metres apart.

Employees and members of City Council are using a new app for more active screening before they come to work at City facilities. The City will use the updated system to screen people visiting City facilities for recreation programs when those facilities are permitted to reopen.

Future Facility Space Needs Pilot

COVID-19 has changed how the City views its work arrangements. With City staff being asked to work from home where possible since March 2020, it has opened the door for the City to review policies and practices around future alternative work environments – ones that meet employee and employer needs, helping to strike a balance between work and home responsibilities.

In the coming months, the City is conducting a Future Facility Space Needs Pilot project with three departments at various work locations. The goal is to establish a hybrid work environment to meet the growing needs of the organization and employees enabling us to attract and retain talent in the coming years.

Financial Implications

The most current financial implications available for COVID are in the City's [2021 First Quarterly Budget Monitoring report](#). Results to date indicate that the City is managing within budget as of the end of the first quarter as expenditure savings are currently in excess of lost revenues. However, this is not necessarily reflective of future quarters as fuel prices are on the rise, COVID expenditures are increasing due to recent changes in Ministry of Labour protective equipment requirements, and inflationary cost concerns are being predicted by economists.

Safe Restart Grants and other COVID-related funding

The 2020 \$4.8 million unallocated balance from Phase 1 of the Safe Restart Operating grant was transferred to the Tax Operating Contingency reserve to help offset deficits resulting from COVID-19. The City also received an additional \$5.1 million through Phase 2 and 3 and combined with remaining Phase 1 funds, the City has a total of \$9.9 million available in 2021 and beyond.

The 2020 \$1.3 million unallocated balance from Phase 1 Safe Restart Transit has been deferred to help offset COVID-19 financial pressures through this quarter. This amount, combined with the Phase 2 funding totals \$7.7 million. The actual costs incurred are less than the funding allocated, leaving \$5.2 million of funding which may be forfeited because of the March 31 deadline. The announced Phase 3 allocation of \$5 million for the period of April 1 and December 31, 2021 is expected to fall short of actual need, and could lead to deficit in transit at year end.

In response to this funding challenge where the City may need to return Phase 2 funding and then not have enough Phase 3 funding, Ontario's Big City Mayors (OBCM) and the Ontario Public Transit Association (OPTA) have advocated for the Province to allow municipalities to keep Phase 1 and Phase 2 funding beyond March 31. Further to advocacy by OBCM/OPTA, on [April 27 Mayor Guthrie wrote to the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing](#) to communicate these concerns. Minister Mulroney responded acknowledging Guelph's concerns on May 11. Contingent on further developments, it is anticipated that this issue will again be raised by the City during ministerial meetings at the 2021 AMO General Conference.

In addition to Safe Restart funds, the federal government announced a near doubling of the Federal Gas Tax, now renamed the Canada Community-Building Fund. This announcement signals that Guelph will receive an additional \$8 million this year from the federal government for capital projects.

The province is providing emergency child care funding for essential workers through the County of Wellington and considering one-time Paramedic Service COVID funding for the vaccine distribution costs and protective medical-related equipment otherwise borne by the local tax payers. Although the City applied for \$250,000 in funding from the Healthy Communities Initiative in partnership with local business and art sector groups to fund enhancements to this year's Dining District, this funding application was not successful. Phase 2 of the Healthy Communities Initiative is now accepting applications with the intake closing on June 25. City staff are working to identify a key project that aligns with the intake's eligibility criteria.

The County of Wellington Housing services continues using provincial/federal COVID funding to support non-profit housing providers and County-owned social and affordable housing. Funds have supported additional cleaning, PPE, and measures to assist with social distancing requirements. COVID funding that has been committed by senior levels of government in 2021 includes \$1.5 million in Reaching Home, and \$2.7 million in phase 3 Social Services Relief Funding.

Consultations

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

Strategic Plan Alignment

The content of this report aligns with the Strategic Plan, Guelph. Future Ready. 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.

Attachments

None.

Departmental Approval

Tara Sprigg, General Manager, Corporate Communications and Customer Service

Report Author

Stacey Hare, Corporate Communications and Customer Service

This report was approved and recommended by:

Scott Stewart
Chief Administrative Officer
Office of the Chief Administrative Officer
519 822 1260 extension 2221
scott.stewart@guelph.ca

Colleen Clack-Bush
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Public Services
519 822 1260 extension 2588
colleen.clack-bush@guelph.ca

Stephen O'Brien
Acting Deputy CAO
Infrastructure, Development and Enterprise Services
Stephen.OBrien@guelph.ca
519-822-1260 extension 5644

Trevor Lee
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Corporate Services
519 822 1260 extension 2281
trevor.lee@guelph.ca