

# Staff Report



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To	<b>Committee of the Whole</b>
Service Area	Office of the Chief Administrative Officer
Date	Monday, December 6, 2021
Subject	<b>Managing the Impacts of COVID-19: Update 10</b>

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## Recommendations

That the report “Managing the Impacts of COVID-19: Update 10” dated December 6, 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.

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## Executive Summary

### Purpose of Report

This report outlines the work the City of Guelph has done to manage the impacts of COVID-19 since staff’s last update to Council on September 7, 2021.

### Key Findings

Since the September update to City Council, the City has been responding to changing information and policies set by the provincial government.

On September 14, the Province announced [proof of vaccination or medical exemption requirements](#) for anyone 12 years or older to access high-risk, indoor City facilities, programs and services:

- Recreation programs and activities (excluding organized sports)
- Spectator and viewing areas
- Recreational fitness areas
- Basketball, hockey games or events at Sleeman Centre
- Shows and performances at River Run Centre
- Guelph Public Library at West End Community Centre

Additionally, Guelph Museums opted to require proof of vaccination or medical exemption for visitors starting October 27.

The October 15 deadline for employees to submit proof of vaccination or exemption to adhere to the City’s [COVID-19 Vaccination Policy](#) passed. At the time of writing, 94 per cent of City employees are fully vaccinated, while unvaccinated full-time employees are tested twice a week, 48 hours apart and part-time employees are tested 48 hours ahead of their first shift of the week. There are two City employees,

which represents approximately 0.1 per cent of the total work force, who failed to comply with the COVID Vaccination Policy and took unapproved absences.

On October 22, the Province released [A plan to safely reopen Ontario and manage COVID-19 for the long-term](#). The plan uses local and provincial public health indicators to gauge readiness to lift remaining COVID-19 measures like capacity limits, masks and proof of vaccination by March 2022. On October 25, the City lifted capacity limits and physical distancing requirements in recreation facilities and museums where proof of vaccination is required.

On November 19, Health Canada approved a vaccine for children 5-11 years old. Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health's Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Nicola Mercer, has shared a regional plan to deliver vaccinations for children and caregivers through three primary avenues:

- Primary care providers
- Pharmacies
- Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph vaccination clinics

## **Financial Implications**

The ongoing pandemic still poses a risk to the City's finances, despite continued support from other levels of government.

Overall, from an operating perspective, the City is projecting a year-end deficit of \$9.9 million before applying any Safe Restart grant funding. Budget pressures are primarily being experienced in departments relying on service revenues that have been restricted due to public health measures. Some service areas, such as Guelph Transit and Guelph-Wellington Paramedic Service (GWPS), are projecting increased COVID-related operating expenses due to enhanced cleaning and sanitization and increased use of medical and protective equipment supplies. It is expected that these extra COVID-related costs will total \$2.6 million for 2021. Based on the year-end projection, the City will have sufficient Safe Restart grant funds to address this projected deficit, and pending approval from the Province, will carry forward up to \$7 million in funding to assist through 2022.

Due to current conditions within supply chains, there is significant volatility in pricing for materials and services, causing growing concern with the City's approved capital plan. Further, the supply chain issues are causing project timeline delays as certain supplies are not available. To date, there have been instances where budget has been reallocated to enable the project to be awarded, or the project has been paused to reevaluate the scope and/or schedule. This concern is most pronounced where project budgets were approved in 2021 or prior, but due to capacity and other factors, has not been procured until now. Staff are monitoring this trend and may consider seeking delegated authority from Council at a future meeting to use reserve funds within a certain procurement limit to enable staff to move forward with previously approved projects. In other instances, staff may be required to bring construction awards to Council, for approval, depending on the magnitude of the pricing difference.

These inflationary and supply chain challenges are also starting to put upward pressure on the operating budgets; however, price escalation was considered as an input into the 2022/23 budget development. The City has operating contingency

reserves that have been proposed to mitigate these pressures over the next two years.

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## **Report**

### **Taking care of our community**

#### **Proof of vaccination requirements for high-risk, indoor facilities**

Proof of vaccination or exemption at some high-risk indoor facilities for anyone 12 years or older started September 22 under the Reopening Ontario Act.

Visitors are required to show their vaccination receipt or medical exemption alongside government-issued identification to participate in recreation programs and activities (excluding organized sports), watch sports from spectator and viewing areas, attend recreational fitness areas, watch basketball, hockey games, shows or events at Sleeman Centre and River Run Centre and visit the Guelph Public Library at West End Community Centre.

Anyone under 18 years old participating in an organized sports program is exempt from providing proof of vaccination or medical exemption. This includes sports leagues, organized pick-up sports, dance classes, martial arts and aquatics programs.

Since September 22, contract security staff have been stationed at six City facilities to check vaccination status of visitors and ensure compliance with Provincial regulations. The service costs the City \$4,800 per month, with a projected cost of \$15,500 for the last quarter.

Proof of vaccination is not required for:

- Purchasing bus passes or bulky item tickets at service counters
- Paying parking tickets, fines, licencing fees or property/business taxes
- Using the washroom (except at recreation facilities)

On October 22, the Province updated legislation to allow municipalities to decide whether proof of vaccination or exemption should be required for civil marriage ceremonies. The City Clerk's office is working to establish a vaccination policy for couples and guests for marriages taking place at City Hall in the coming months.

On October 27, Guelph Museums opted to start requiring proof of vaccination or medical exemption following increased indoor capacity limits. This change makes Guelph Museums consistent with other high-risk City facilities.

In addition to enforcing regulations at City facilities, Corporate and Community Safety staff are also tasked with responding to enforcement calls related to businesses not following Provincial requirements. Bylaw officers attended 68 calls for service with respect to non-compliance with the Reopening Ontario Act and issued 10 charges during the last quarter.

#### **Unsanctioned street parties and gatherings**

Despite cancellation of the University of Guelph's homecoming football game and celebrations, an unsanctioned street party with approximately 1,200 people took place on September 25 at Chancellor's Way. The party broke COVID-19 gathering

restrictions that, at the time, permitted only 100 people gathering outdoors and 25 indoors.

The following calls and charges were observed across the city, including Chancellor's Way:

- 20 calls to Guelph-Wellington Paramedic Service
- 300 calls to Guelph Police Service
- 65 calls to City bylaw for noise complaints
- 10 noise bylaw and nuisance party charges

On October 21, the Guelph Police Services Board passed a two-part motion to pursue cost recovery for on and off-campus initiatives related to student safety and unsanctioned parties and to reach a funding agreement with the university and report back to the board by September 2022.

### **Enhanced vaccine certificates and the Verify Ontario app**

[Enhanced vaccine certificates](#) were announced October 16 and fully available for download by October 18. The certificates are a QR code that can be downloaded by anyone who is fully vaccinated and scanned by businesses and services where proof of vaccination is required for entry. Community members can continue to present paper or digital copies of their vaccination receipts in lieu of access to the QR code.

City staff at recreation facilities have access to the Verify Ontario app, which acts as a scanner for QR codes and quickly establishes whether a person has the proper vaccination status required for entry. While the QR code and receipts are all accepted, the enhanced vaccination certificate can mean a shorter wait for community members to access facilities.

### **Supporting public health vaccination, testing and health monitoring**

The City continues to promote accurate and reliable information about COVID-19 vaccines. On October 20, the City joined Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health and in celebrating the community's most recent vaccination milestone: 90 per cent of Guelph's eligible population is now fully vaccinated.

GWPS continue to assist Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health in providing in-home vaccinations and testing for residents with limited mobility, vaccinating residents in long-term care settings including some third doses and performing tests for the local coroner on people who have passed away.

Through the City's Community Paramedic Program, GWPS continues to offer monitoring of COVID-19 patients in their homes, including post-hospital, to save hospital resources for those that require it. The program uses regular telephone check ins and some in-person visits to provide health and wellness support.

Use of GWPS services in transporting patients from Greater Toronto Area hospitals to hospitals with greater capacity has not been needed since the last COVID-19 report three months ago.

### **Our Food Future: Grow back better campaign**

During its 18-month implementation period, [Grow Back Better](#), Our Food Future's 10-point plan in response to COVID-19, designed and delivered programs and initiatives to support the recovery of both the economy and the community. Grow

Back Better articulated three priority areas to address food system issues that were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic including:

- Increasing access to affordable, nutritious food
- Supporting new and existing food businesses
- Taking action to strengthen regional food system resilience

Some overarching achievements of the program include:

- \$1.6 million dollars in Infrastructure Canada funding to support the community relief effort
- \$1.5 million in community donations and in-kind contributions
- \$6.5 million in public and private sector funding leveraged

### **Increasing access to affordable, nutritious food**

[Groceries from the SEED](#), has continued to grow its clientele and expand its inventory for a pay-what-you-choose online grocery store with a social purpose. Members choosing to pay the regular retail price subsidize the groceries sold to community members in need.

Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health and Toward Common Ground completed the Food Environment Assessment. This research distills a wealth of information about food access and food insecurity from service providers, residents and people who are experiencing food insecurity. This data will now be used in community engagement activities to spark creative ideas for food access solutions throughout the region.

The Co-Lab Action and Funding Process brought social service providers together to collaboratively address pressing local food access needs. 10C and Toward Common Ground helped facilitate a highly collaborative exercise to allocate \$100,000 through Our Food Future's Harve\$t Impact Fund. Seven innovative solutions emerged ranging from expanding community markets that sell fresh food on a sliding scale to making farmland and commercial kitchen space available to support local food initiatives. The process emphasized synergies, prioritized ideas with strong potential for collaborative action, and used a participatory budgeting process.

### **Supporting new and existing food businesses**

The Circular Opportunity Innovation Launchpad (COIL) is now entirely virtual, improving safety during the pandemic and participation. Here are some of the key successes COIL has enjoyed since pivoting to a virtual model:

- Launched the 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.
- Launched Circulate CoLab. Five intersectoral teams have been selected for the first round of the twelve-week CoLab program. Each team will receive project support, mentorship and \$20,000 in funding to develop a prototype or proof of concept for a new innovative service, program or idea that could have the potential to shift circularity across their industry. These teams will compete against one another in early 2022 in front of a panel of judges for

an additional \$100,000 to bring their idea to reality through a demonstration initiative.

- Initiated the COIL Advisory Council, with 10 industry leaders who have volunteered their time, expertise and networks to support the strategic direction of COIL's work and deepen the potential programmatic impact for business, innovation and entrepreneurship across the province.
- Developed, in coordination with 10 Carden and Innovation Guelph, the infrastructure, decision-making process and scoring matrices for COIL's programs.
- Expanded the Guelph-Wellington Circular Economy Urban Rural Test Bed to provide resources and connections to support innovators and researchers from across southern Ontario.
- Expanded the Circular Economy Data Hub to gather and strengthen access to essential data required to inform research and problem-solving.
- Launched 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 Circular Food Economy (CFE) iHub created and launched a Digital Passport web service to provide businesses that are interested in the circular economy the opportunity to gain access to knowledge, services and connections in the Our Food Future business ecosystem.

The Grow Back Better program is winding down in December 2021. Our Food Future and COIL will continue to evolve through 2022 to support the development of our regional circular food economy.

## **Supporting Guelph businesses and economic recovery**

### **Seasonal patio program**

The seasonal patio program came to an end on October 31 following a successful four-month season with 36 public patios downtown and 25 on private property. The program helped foster economic stability for restaurants while balancing public health and safety requirements during a pandemic.

### **Guelph Shops**

Guelph Shops has published 14 business spotlights, featuring local businesses to encourage local purchases where possible, with a focus on diversity and inclusion initiatives.

The City is working alongside the Guelph Chamber of Commerce to amplify the presence of Guelph Shops leading up to the holiday shopping season. This includes development of the Guelph Shops holiday wish book, local print and digital advertising for a shop local campaign and development of the Guelph Shops Instagram account which is featuring more than 60 local businesses.

### **Tourism Recovery Initiative**

The Tourism Recovery Initiative has used \$475,000 in Council-supported funding to help Guelph tourism operations recover from the economic impacts of COVID-19 through an emergency operating expense relief stream (rent, utilities and payroll)

and a physical and technological adaptation support stream (patio beautification, safety modifications and digital upgrades).

The remaining \$230,000 has been used for other programs designed to recover tourism in Guelph. The latest includes:

- Summer Neighbourhoods Exploration Campaign – The City partnered with SWAY to develop a campaign to encourage local residents and regional visitors to explore all the great things Guelph has to offer.
- Food trucks – Food trucks were present from 4-8 p.m. every Tuesday throughout September, offering safe ways for the community to dine outdoors while supporting local businesses. The City was able to subsidize the booking fees and allow trucks an opportunity to operate.
- Development of a digital information kiosk – As the world quickly relied increasingly on technology, the City's delivery of tourism information also needed to change. The digital kiosk will make its debut at the Guelph Civic Museum in early 2022.

### **Emergency Grant funding**

Since the last report, the City granted \$178,700 to 18 organizations, unincorporated groups and individuals in the second phase of this year's Emergency Grant Fund, initiated to support local economic recovery. A full list of [Emergency Grant recipients](#) is available online.

Applications for the third phase of this year's funding opened on October 8, with \$485,000 available for applicants who can improve and sustain quality of life for residents, support residents in adapting to the pandemic and allow residents access to programming. Applications closed November 8.

### **Supporting the organization**

#### **Implementation of the COVID-19 Vaccine Policy**

As of November 4, almost 1,800 employees (94 per cent) are fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Mandatory testing of unvaccinated employees started on October 18, with full-time employees being tested twice per week, 48 hours apart and part-time employees being tested 48 hours before the start of their shifts for the week. There are two City employees who are taking unapproved absences due to failure to comply with the policy.

The City operates its own COVID-19 testing centre located at 500 Wellington Street West, offering 15-minute antigen tests provided by the Province of Ontario at no cost to the City. Unvaccinated employees must attend testing on their own time and had to have completed mandatory training about COVID-19 vaccinations by October 29.

Test results are connected to the City's Go Evo PPA screening app, which employees are required to do ahead of entering a City facility for work. A positive test result will mean a failed screening sent to supervisors and further instruction on rules for self isolation.

## **Lifting the City's state of emergency**

Mayor Cam Guthrie plans to lift the City's state of emergency order by December 31, 2021 so long as COVID-19 cases continue to decline. Mayor Guthrie declared a state of emergency on March 26, 2020.

The declaration provides some authority to be delegated from Council to the City's Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and for some employees to be transferred to different roles, work sites and union groups to fill COVID-related needs. When the state of emergency ends, those aspects of the City's operations will revert to normal. At the time of writing, all staff who were transferred during the course of the pandemic have returned to their original roles.

## **Changes to COVID-19 quarterly reporting**

Management of the COVID-19 pandemic is moving toward an endemic stage requiring less regular reporting. The quarterly reporting schedule of COVID-19 updates will end with revoking the City's state of emergency. Instead, COVID-19 updates will be brought to Council on an as-needed basis.

Dr. Nicola Mercer, Medical Officer of Health for Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health supports revoking the City's state of emergency

"Guelph has made significant strides against the COVID-19 pandemic, boasting a vaccination rate above 90 percent and growing – something that would have been impossible without the commitment of the City and residents alike. Now it is time to start planning for a return to something more normal for all of us. Like many, I am keen to begin the careful reduction of restrictions guided by the best science and data available. As we work toward that return to normal, each of us must continue to follow public health guidance so that as we approach the time to ease restrictions, we are as safe and as ready as we can be."

## **Financial Implications**

The ongoing pandemic still poses a risk to the City's finances, despite continued support from other levels of government.

Overall, from an operating perspective, the City is projecting a year-end deficit of \$9.9 million before applying any Safe Restart grant funding. Budget pressures are primarily being experienced in Parking, Culture and Recreation, Information Technology, Legal, Realty and Court Services and Guelph Transit. Some service areas such as Guelph Transit and Guelph-Wellington Paramedic Service are projecting increased COVID-related operating expenses due to enhanced cleaning and sanitization, increased staffing costs and increased use of medical and protective equipment supplies. It is expected that these extra COVID-related costs will total \$2.6 million for 2021. Based on the year-end projection, the City will have sufficient Safe Restart grant funds to address this projected deficit, and pending approval from the province, will carry forward up to \$7.0 million to assist through 2022.

Due to current conditions within supply chains, there is significant volatility in materials and services pricing being experienced, causing growing concern with the City's approved capital plans. To date, there have been individual project instances where budget has been reallocated to enable the project to move forward, or the project has been paused to reevaluate the scope and/or schedule. Further, supply



chain issues are causing project timeline delays as certain supplies are not available. This concern is most pronounced where project budgets were approved in 2021 or prior, but due to capacity and other factors, has not been procured until now. Staff are monitoring this trend and may consider seeking delegated authority from Council at a future meeting to use reserve funds within a certain procurement limit to enable staff to move forward with previously approved projects. In other instances, staff may be required to bring construction awards to Council for approval depending on the magnitude of the pricing difference.

The 2022 and 2023 capital budget was developed based on the best pricing information known at the time, and like any other year, there are environmental influences that can change these project estimates. For this reason, capital projects typically include contingency that can be allocated to address things that happen during construction, or market conditions that may cause procurement-related price shifts. At this point in time staff are still assessing impact and believe it would be premature to seek a blanket corporate project contingency budget increase direction. Staff will continue to respond to market conditions through other procurement strategies like timing of procurement processes and extended project delivery milestones given supply chain challenges. It's difficult for staff to assess if pricing and/or inflation is permanent or temporary and need more time to analyze our experiences to support an informed Council budget request, if necessary.

These inflationary and supply chain challenges are also starting to put upward pressure on the operating budgets; however, price escalation was considered as an input into the 2022/23 budget development. The City has operating contingency reserves that have been proposed to mitigate these pressures over the next two years.

## **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, Strategic Communications and Community Engagement

## **Report Author**

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**This report was approved and recommended by:**

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