

Staff Report



To	City Council
Service Area	Office of the Chief Administrative Officer
Date	Thursday, April 16, 2020
Subject	Managing the Impacts of COVID-19

Recommendation

1. That the expanded fiscal relief measures for businesses and residents as outlined in report “Managing the Impacts of COVID-19” dated April 16, 2020 be approved.
 2. That staff continue to explore ways to assist Guelph residents and businesses as they experience the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic; and that staff continue to pursue advocacy with various levels of government.
 3. That report “Managing the Impacts of COVID-19” dated April 16, 2020 be forwarded to the local MP and MPP, FCM, AMO, LUMCO 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 provides Council with recommended fiscal relief measures that will help our local business and residents manage through this unprecedented time. Further, it highlights how the City has responded through the creation of Working Tables to quickly assess and recommend response actions in collaboration with partnering agencies.

Key Findings

The City is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic to support the community. Highlights of the City’s response include:

- Activating the City’s Emergency Operations Centre on March 13, 2020 to oversee response efforts with a coordinated, inter-departmental approach that has evolved to include key community stakeholders including the Guelph Police Services, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health and the Guelph General Hospital.
- Providing the use of both the Delhi Street facility and subsequently the Victoria Road Recreation Centre, inclusive of technology and some staffing, for the community’s COVID-19 Assessment Centre
- Quickly responding to Council’s governance requirements by facilitating one of the province’s first digital Council meetings on March 23, 2020. It has since been recognized through municipal associations as a leading approach from both a technology and administration perspective.

- Providing immediate actions to close facilities, enhanced cleaning measures, and activate supply chains for cleaning supplies and protective equipment to protect both our community and City staff from the spread of COVID-19.
- Recommending immediate fiscal relief in March while mobilizing internal staff working teams and a Task Force to consider and investigate feasibility of longer term recovery efforts and programs.
- Declaring a City-wide emergency in response to the outbreak at Guelph General Hospital on March 26, 2020. Since then, the City has been working with our partners to facilitate transportation to housing and meal preparation for the City's vulnerable populations.
- Recommending additional yard waste pick-up through the spring to help residents who cannot use the Public Drop-off at this time because it is closed to residential customers to limit the spread of COVID-19.
- Leveraging the City's Smart City win of \$10 million to ensure these funds flow quickly to the initiative's community partners to address food security issues and to directly support the development of new businesses. This funding directly supports economic and social recovery efforts.
- Leveraging our relationships with other levels of governments and organizations such as the Large Urban Mayor's Caucus of Ontario (LUMCO) and Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) to identify opportunities and mitigation strategies and obtain assistance and other supports at an accelerated pace.

Financial Implications

The cost of the fiscal relief measures to ease the burden of the COVID-19 pandemic is estimated to be \$5 million. In addition to this cost, revenue loss due to facility closures, program cancellations and other impacts from the slowing economy and investment market rate decline is estimated to be \$3.9 million.

In response to the significant financial impacts of COVID-19, the City is taking steps to reduce expenditures. These include halting all discretionary spending, reviewing staffing requirements, halting non-critical hiring, and prioritizing capital projects. Early expenditure reduction estimates total \$4.8 million, however this continues to be refined by management. These revenue and expense figures do not yet include impacts of the City's local boards and shared service agents.

Forecasting these financial impacts to year-end, the City will likely experience deficits in both the tax supported and non-tax supported businesses. It is difficult to forecast these deficits at this early stage, however they are expected to be in the range of \$2 to \$3 million for non-tax businesses and \$4 to \$6 million for the tax supported businesses. The City's contingency reserves are sufficient to mitigate through deficits in this range, however, wherever possible, continued actions to reduce these losses to protect the City's long-term sustainability is recommended.

One of the most critical financial considerations being monitored daily by staff is cash flow. The City is putting contingency financing mechanisms in place and also has the benefit of a strong and diversified investment portfolio with laddering investment maturities through May and June 2020. Collection of water, wastewater and stormwater user fees and property taxes are required in order for the City to continue to deliver the essential services to our community. For this reason, fiscal

relief efforts are focused on allowing extended payment terms where it is necessary without financial penalty rather than full deferral.

Report

The COVID-19 pandemic presents the greatest financial challenge that individuals, families, businesses and municipalities have seen in generations. In its response, the City of Guelph is providing fiscal relief to residents and businesses, while maintaining critical community services including delivery of clean water, collection and disposal of wastewater and solid waste, emergency services (police, fire and paramedics), transit, by-law and social and health services through our service delivery partners.

This report outlines the fiscal and non-fiscal measures the City is taking to help Guelph residents and businesses manage through the pandemic; preliminary financial impacts of the City's COVID-19 response and financial projections; and measures the City is planning as part of the next phase of its response.

Establishing Financial Planning Principles

Council approves an annual budget and ten-year capital forecast as part of its plan to align service delivery with community expectations, manage growth, and finance community priorities.

In a time of global crisis, plans change so that public health and critical services are prioritized. As the City manages through this crisis and Council tackles issues with a financial impact on the community, it is appropriate to establish principles to assist Council in making those decisions, drawing on the City's experience of establishing and maintaining its strong financial position. This practice is already in place in other LUMCO municipalities. The principles staff recommend guide Council decision-making during this time are consistent with those of other municipalities, and are outlined below.

1. Public health is the first priority

Services should be adjusted to respond and support our community and employee health as a first priority.

2. Allow other levels of government time to fulfill their mandates

Other levels of government have different jurisdiction, rights and obligations. The City should only consider support in areas in which it has jurisdiction and which it can provide cost effectively. The City should leave larger programs to those levels of government that have the financial ability to undertake them.

3. Use reserves appropriately to manage financial challenges

The City has contingency reserves to manage some of the financial unpredictability resulting from the COVID-19 crisis. These reserves should be used for the purposes for which they were set aside, however, where possible as a first priority, fiscal impacts should be mitigated through expenditure reprioritization and reductions.

4. Deviation from our financial plan should not be permanent

Fiscal relief to residents and businesses should be one-time or have a defined end date.

Responding to the Crisis

The City's response to COVID-19 includes fiscal relief measures for residents and businesses; non-fiscal relief measures for residents and businesses; and bringing together leaders from across the organization to form subject-specific 'working tables' to facilitate various forms of relief and recovery.

Fiscal relief measures for residents and businesses

The City's strategy is focused on giving residents and businesses more time to make payments through the waiving of interest, penalties, and fees on property taxes, user fees, licenses, rent and leases. The City has also—and continues to recommend—the full waiver of Guelph Transit fares, and parking permits and fees. Specific fiscal relief measures include:

Water, wastewater and stormwater user fees

The City is assisting residents and businesses by deferring payments without financial penalty by waiving interest and penalties on overdue amounts. Staff recommend extending this waiver through July 2020. This approach is in alignment with our billing agent, Alectra Utilities Corp. and the municipalities that are part of this organization.

Transit fees

With the need for physical distancing, we have decided to protect the health of our transit operators and passengers by offering rear-door boarding and by waiving transit fees. This eliminates the need for any direct interaction between the operator and passengers. The City began waiving transit fees on March 18. Staff's recommendation is to continue to waive fees for Guelph Transit through to June 30 to support the health and safety of the City's transit drivers and to provide a means of transportation for members of the community who need to travel for essential reasons.

Municipal Accommodation Tax

The City had planned to bring forward a report in April 2020 to recommend the implementation of a new Municipal Accommodation Tax in the fall of 2020. Given the pandemic impact on the tourism industry, staff no longer feel this is an appropriate time to add this tax on to an industry which has faced particular hardship. For this reason, staff have indefinitely paused the previously scheduled implementation of the Municipal Accommodation Tax.

Parking fees / permits / fines

Waiving parking fees is one way to help downtown businesses. City staff recommend continuing waiving fees for parking services through to June 30. This includes not enforcing overnight on-street parking restrictions or time limits, including the City's 48-hour parking restriction. It also includes the waiver of fees for metered parking spaces and parking permit fees.

Rental / lease revenue

Staff have investigated and confirmed that there are Municipal Act bonusing concerns related to waiving of rents and lease payments as this is not a benefit that would be available to the broader community. Waiving of rent and lease payments would benefit specific entities which is not allowed by legislation.

For this reason, relief in the form of lease and rent deferral, upon request, without financial penalty from April through July 31 is recommended.

Through a municipal scan, this approach is consistent within the municipal sector.

Business and other licences

The City began deferring business licence payments March 18. Staff recommend extending this deferral through to the end of July, while continuing to issue licences, as the Province deems this an essential service.

Property taxes

The City began waiving late fines and interest on property taxes, and allowing for the deferral of pre-authorized debit (PAD) tax payments on April 1. Staff recommends continuing to allow deferrals of tax payments through to July 31 for those that need the assistance via the waiving of interest and penalties, NSF fees and fees for changing PAD plans (administratively executing these waivers via a grant under the Municipal Act Section 107).

Other general fiscal relief measures

- All progressive collection activity should be paused through July 2020 so as not to put extra pressure on the community to pay past due bills.
- All interest, penalties and charges on overdue amounts for all City revenues should be waived during April to July 31 including cancellation fees for recreation programs. However, administrative fees should still be applied, for example in building services, for work completed by staff to date prior to the cancellation.
- Recommending additional yard waste pick-up through the spring to help residents who cannot use the Public Drop-off at this time because it is closed to residential customers to limit the spread of COVID-19. This enhanced program is expected to cost an additional \$100,000 based on estimated tonnage that has historically been dropped off by residents in past years. Staff will be promoting this program change to ensure all residents are aware of this enhancement once implementation details have been finalized. It is expected that this will prevent residents from hiring a commercial service to clear waste or from illegally dumping waste in other parts of the City.

Working Tables to support relief and recovery

As an important part of our response, staff have created the following working tables to deal with immediate issues and others that lie ahead. The tables are comprised of key City staff and City partners with subject matter expertise. The tables are:

Fiscal Relief Working Table

The Fiscal Relief Table (FRT) was formed with members of senior management that collectively have oversight over the largest revenue streams for the City and bring different perspectives and expertise towards the fiscal recommendations outlined in this report. All business areas have been consulting within their municipal

professional associations to gain insight and advice to support the recommended positions. The FRT has been focused on enabling quick, impactful fiscal measures to help residents and businesses take more time to meet their obligations through the pandemic period if needed.

Economic Recovery Working Table

An Economic Recovery Table (ERT) was formed to explore and implement programs and initiatives that will contribute to the recovery of Guelph's economy.

This work will focus on three, inter-connected streams: 1. financial relief, incentives and tools; 2. focused economic development activities; and 3. a dedicated task force.

The Task Force will identify supports and stimulus measures needed for coordinated short-term response, medium-term recovery and long-term resilience-building activities. Task Force composition will include the Mayor, two City Councillors, community business organizations, and private industry. City staff from the Business, Development and Enterprise and the Strategy and Innovation departments will act as leads and liaisons to ensure alignment with both the City's Strategic Plan and economic development strategy.

The ERT will outline the ongoing financial mechanisms the City might consider as part of its tool kit for stimulating the economy, and work collaboratively with the FRT to assess the viability of these options. Early discussions have resulted in the ongoing waiving of parking and transit fees, as well as giving businesses more time to make payments through the waiving of interest, penalties, and fees on property taxes, user fees, licenses, rent and leases tax payment, as outlined in this report.

The ERT will also pursue economic development activities that support the business community's access to information/resources during the pandemic and efforts to rebuild Guelph's economy post-pandemic. Collectively these activities will serve to strengthen relationships and position the City as a strategic partner in re-establishing Guelph's economic well-being. Early ideas include virtual programming; collaborating on activities, programs and events organized by external agencies; outreach with business leaders to inform policy and program development; and targeted promotions of existing programs.

Central Repository Table

The Central Repository Table (CRT) is the hub for information gathering, analysis and sharing best practices with various decision-making groups at the City of Guelph. The sharing of information between Ontario municipalities has strengthened Guelph's decision making and allowed Guelph and other cities to join to advocate for supports (financial, legislative and regulatory) from other levels of government.

The CRT produces a daily summary of Canada-wide municipal news related to COVID-19 to inform the EOC and other working tables; tracks daily announcements from other levels of government as they pertain to Guelph; and coordinates information sharing between Ontario's municipalities on facility closures, staffing-related issues, financial relief initiatives, economic and community recovery initiatives, and COVID-related financial impacts.

The CRT also leads advocacy with LUMCO mayors on COVID-19 issues including the deferral of the education portion of property taxes. Other issues include highlighting

the need for a holistic approach to supply chain management for PPE, addressing the capacity of municipal enforcement to enforce provincial emergency measures, and requesting sector-wide consultation about recovery stimulus initiatives.

The CRT collaborated on behalf of LUMCO with AMO and MARCO to jointly call on the Province to address challenges with staffing and redeployment as Ontario municipalities battle COVID-19 on the front lines.

The CRT has worked with LUMCO CAOs, in partnership with the Ontario Public Transit Association (OPTA) and Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA), to quantify COVID-related revenue losses. We have shared this information with the Minister of Transportation to begin a discussion about government supports to ensure transit can continue to operate as an essential service in Ontario's big cities.

Looking ahead, the CRT will work with other municipalities and levels of government to find creative solutions to challenges, and opportunities to strengthen our community through recovery. As stimulus programs, grants and other funding initiatives surface, the CRT, together with the ERT, will connect the City and the community to these funding opportunities.

Lift our Spirits Table

The focus for the Lift our Spirits Table is keeping our residents engaged and feeling they are contributing to the community during this COVID-19 pandemic. The group has already been posting content online, and is continuing to plan for activities like public art tours, online arts and craft programs, and activities for families to enjoy. This group is led by staff from the City's Tourism Office, and from Guelph Museums, working in partnership with Recreation staff and our Communications team.

Social and Community Response Table

The City has recently formed another table to address Social and Community Response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This table will coordinate the work of the City and the County of Wellington, social service providers, and other not-for-profit groups to support the community. One example of this work has been the provision of Guelph Transit resources to move homeless individuals into hotel accommodations so that the County and other social service agencies could better ensure their individual health and wellness. Another growing program has been the City's production of meals for vulnerable seniors, youth and others in our community who are suffering from food shortages. These meals are prepared from the Evergreen Seniors Community Centre kitchen by trained City staff who are certified chefs. This initiative is a collaborative effort with a variety of community agencies including the United Way, Wyndham House, and the Drop In Centre.

Governance Table

The Governance Table supports Council's statutory obligations as a legislative body and its decision-making authority. This involves reviewing the comprehensive agenda forecast for meetings and related items that were scheduled to come before Committee of the Whole and Council in 2020 and re-prioritizing them as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This table also supports Council's transition to remote meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Construction Working Table

With capital and operational construction projects and activities affected by COVID-19, the Construction Working Table (CWT) has been formed to prepare guidelines

to enable City staff to determine what work should continue, and to ensure consistency across the organization.

Work has been categorized as either critical (work that is required before June 30, 2020 to support the safe delivery of essential services, meet regulatory compliance requirements, provide/protect public and city staff safety, repair/replace failed infrastructure or equipment) or non-critical (work that supports the safe delivery of essential services but is not necessary or otherwise required before June 30, 2020.)

The CWT has prepared a 'project prioritization framework' tool to assess work continuity and identifying risk. Once projects are categorized using the tool, data such as financial implications can be filtered based on different scenarios. The tool also helps staff consider risks to projects and activities.

Based on initial work, it is estimated that approximately \$55 million of budgeted construction work can be delayed for at least three months to help with organizational cash flow and liquidity. In addition, there has been \$41 million of budget identified as less critical that could be paused to a future year if required.

The CWT will continue to refine these early estimates and provide updates in future reporting.

The FRT, ERT, CWT and CRT are working to advocate for infrastructure stimulus programs from the Federal and Provincial governments as a way to assist with community recovery efforts, and to help municipalities meet their infrastructure backlog requirements that continue to grow while financial resources become scarce.

Staffing Resources Table

The Staffing Resources Table (SRT) is exploring the mitigation of COVID-19-related financial impacts through strategies such as a pause in non-essential hiring and the decision to temporarily lay off casual, part-time employees. The SRT will provide recommendations to the Executive Team regarding further labour adjustments to be considered as the City responds to COVID-19 impacts. These may include Council-directed decisions relating to service levels or other provincially-determined directives that will be forthcoming, this group is working closely with other municipalities to ensure Guelph is connected and aligned with the strategies being deployed across the province.

Cleaning Table

One of the first working groups to be established, this cross-departmental table of staff coordinates the cleaning needs across City facilities and services. Working alongside our Union executives, we have adopted a collaborative approach that permits staff to be redeployed from various corporate facilities. The first of these initiatives was to assist with cleaning surfaces at Guelph Transit, and was then expanded to address needs elsewhere within City facilities and operations. The table coordinates the scheduling and training of these staff, as well as ensures that they have appropriate PPE and cleaning supplies. The early establishment of this working group to address cleaning needs at Guelph Transit helped to map out a framework for future redeployment needs, like to the Victoria Road Recreation Centre, when it was converted to a screening centre.

Facility Redeployment Table

This table coordinates and oversees the redeployment of existing City facilities as needed to deal with the broader COVID-19 community response. The first facility redeployment was for the Delhi Community Centre. The City agreed to provide the physical location to be used as a screening centre, run by the Guelph General Hospital and the Guelph Family Health Team, in conjunction with WDG Public Health. Staff from Information Technology, Corporate Facilities Maintenance, Building Services and GW Paramedic Services worked quickly to get the space appropriately converted and available to be opened to the public. While successful early in the COVID-19 response, it quickly became apparent that the Delhi location did not adequately meet the needs of the community in terms of accessibility and parking.

The second City facility to be redeployed was the Victoria Road Recreation Centre (VRRC) to accommodate the screening centre. This allowed for better parking and accessibility for the public. The VRRC was thoroughly sanitized and all equipment moved out of the ground floor, and the spaces were converted to allow for safe screening and testing of the public by trained medical staff. The facility opened to the public on Monday April 6, after the closure at the Delhi location the night before.

City staff provide the building oversight and the overnight cleaning of all clinical and public spaces. Staff were redeployed from other recreation facilities and provided full training and briefings on PPE and other considerations by staff from the Guelph General Hospital. This required a coordinated effort on the part of several City departments and CUPE241 to redeploy staff into this location.

Other facility redeployments will be identified as needed through our Emergency Operations Control Group, and in conjunction with our partners from the Guelph General Hospital and WDG Public Health. All available City facilities have been inventoried, and due consideration has been given to how best they might be used depending on the needs of the community in the coming weeks.

First Responders Table

This table brings together the Chiefs and Deputy Chiefs from Guelph Police Services, Guelph Fire Services and Guelph Wellington Paramedic Services, along with the Deputy CAO of Public Services, and the Community Emergency Management Coordinator. Recently added to the working group is the General Manager of Operations to address matters related to bylaw and enforcement. This group convenes regularly to compare and discuss matters related to our first responders. This includes discussing available supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) and which staff need to be using which kinds of PPE. The group also discusses who best should respond to particular calls in order to provide appropriate levels of service to the community while still keeping our staff as safe as possible.

Union Presidents Table

This table is comprised of the Executive Team, the CAO of the Guelph Public Library and the presidents of the seven union locals who represent staff at the City of Guelph and the Library. It is a weekly opportunity for administrative and union leadership to come together and discuss the interests and needs of City employees.

The table is one way the City is acting on the value it places on its relationships with stakeholders.

Financial Implications

Early COVID-related Financial Impacts and Projections

The cost of the fiscal relief measures to ease the burden of the COVID-19 pandemic is estimated to be \$5 million. In addition to this cost, revenue loss due to facility closures, program cancellations and other impacts from the slowing economy and investment market rate decline is estimated to be \$3.9 million. The figures are difficult to estimate across all business lines; more time is needed to refine these projections for the first quarterly variance report in June 2020. In addition to the impacts identified, early estimates of expenditures specifically related to the COVID-19 response is \$500,000 however, the City is hopeful that there will be grant program that will allow for financial recovery.

Projected cost of COVID-19 impacts	
Fiscal relief measures	
Waiver of interest and penalties for user fees including water, wastewater and stormwater	\$50,000
Waiver of transit fares	\$3,400,000
Waiver of parking fees and fares	\$1,200,000
Waiver of interest and penalties for property taxes	\$400,000
Increased residential yard waste pick in the spring	\$100,000
Sub-total fiscal relief cost	\$5,150,000
Lost revenues from COVID-19	
Parks, Recreation and Culture program cancellation	\$1,380,000
Parking fines	\$450,000
Closure of Public Drop Off for residential use	\$95,000
Decline in investment portfolio returns	\$500,000
Economy slowing reducing budgeted growth revenues inclusive of property tax supplementary billings, water, wastewater and stormwater and development related application and building fees	\$1,500,000
Sub-total lost revenues from COVID-19	\$3,925,000
Total projected cost of COVID-19 impacts	\$9,075,000

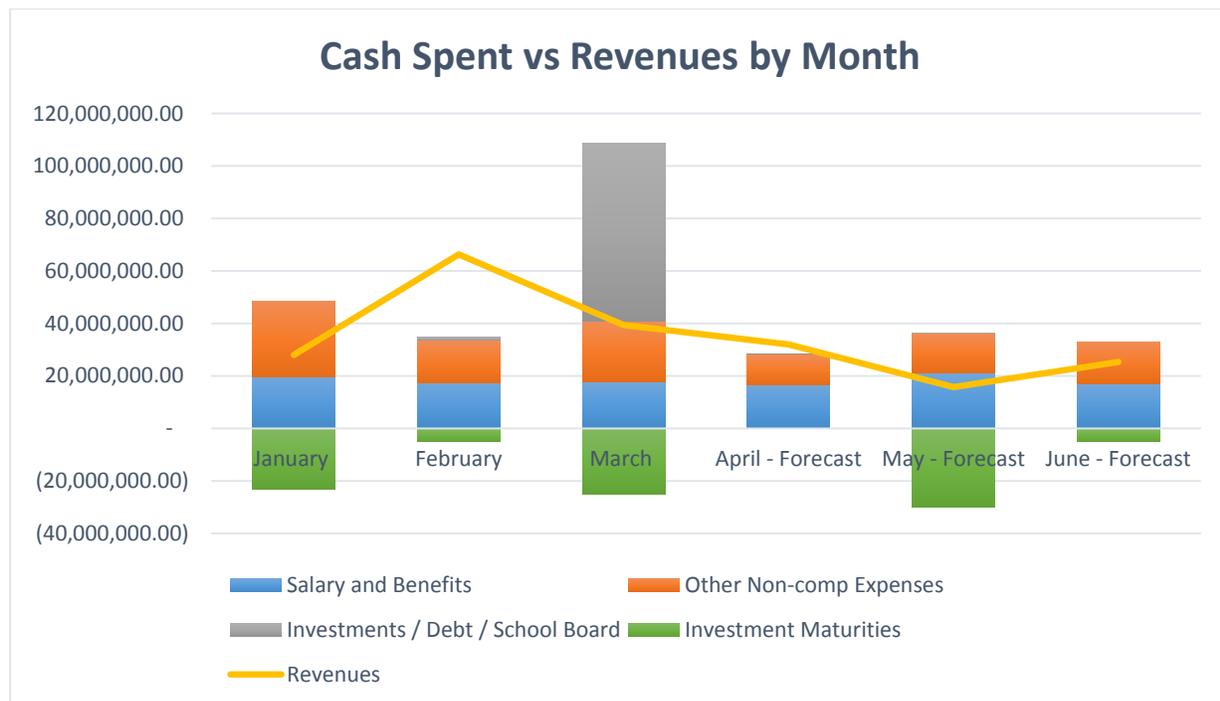
In response to the significant financial impacts of COVID-19, the City is taking steps to reduce expenditures. These include halting all discretionary spending, reviewing

staffing requirements, halting non-critical hiring, and prioritizing capital projects. Early expenditure reduction estimates total \$4.8 million, however this continues to be refined by management.

Forecasting these financial impacts to year-end, the City will likely experience deficits in both the tax supported and non-tax supported businesses. It is difficult to forecast these deficits at this early stage, however they are expected to be in the range of \$2 to \$3 million for non-tax businesses and \$4 to \$7 million for the tax supported businesses. The City’s contingency reserves are sufficient to mitigate through deficits in this range, however, wherever possible, actions should be considered to reduce these losses to protect the City’s long-term sustainability.

The culmination of all the financial impacts projected to June 30 is illustrated in the chart below. There is a steep drop in the City’s revenues, whereas expenditures are not yet following this trend. The City continues to review and consider options related to spending inclusive of both operating and capital budgets.

The City’s cash flow is being maintained due to \$35 million of investment maturities occurring in May and June 2020, which will not be reinvested and instead will be used for liquidity in the next three months. Further, contingency financing is being put into place to ensure financial stability through 2020.



Property tax deferrals

Staff have received questions from Council regarding the impact of fully deferring property taxes for 30, 60, or 90 days. The City relies on property tax revenues to meet its ongoing essential service delivery obligations when almost all other revenues have been paused.

Staff strongly advise against an ‘en masse’ deferral of property taxes given the significant cash flow challenges this will create for the City. Further, taking a one-size fits all approach is not in the best interest of the City from the perspective of either administering PAD changes, nor from a cash flow impact perspective.

Further, it does not allow our users to choose what is best for their individual situations. There is also increased risk that the ultimate collection of taxes may be impaired if the City makes deferral the default choice. The Federal and Provincial governments have put in place significant support for families and businesses that should be encouraged as a first step to access relief.

From a collections perspective, stability and predictability are the key principles in ensuring taxes are collected. Continuing to allow for tax due dates and monthly PAD withdrawals for those who can maintain their regular payments without hardship follows best practice and enables the City to meet its ongoing obligations to provide essential services to the community.

The City's next due date is April 30; in a normal year, collection would be approximately \$51 million in April and \$11 million in May. The June 30 tax due date then follows with an estimated \$73 million of collections in June.

Financial cash flow sensitivity modelling has been completed and the deferral of all these revenues into the July through September period will require the City to use contingency financing, which comes at a cost. The financial impacts in this report do not include cost of contingency financing at this point and will increase the projected year-end deficit position.

Reducing 2020 property tax rates

Staff do not recommend reducing 2020 property tax rates. To do so, Council would need to revisit the approved 2020 budget.

In consultation with other municipalities and associations who are also studying this issue, general consensus cautions against opening the budget due to the requirement by law to approve a funded, balanced budget. It would be better for the City to manage through this pandemic with the budget that has already been approved by Council. There is a significant risk, based upon the lost user fee revenue, and increased expenses, that there could actually be an increase required from taxation in order to achieve a balanced budget based on the information that we know today.

Consultations

Inputs to this report were received from the Executive Team and the working tables as described through this report.

Strategic Plan Alignment

These recommendations align with the Strategic Plan's Working Together for our Future priority to run an effective, fiscally responsible and trusted local government. The intent of the City's fiscal relief efforts are to support the community during the pandemic while not losing sight of long-term sustainability, which is critical to the development of an achievable and affordable long-term financial and resource strategy.

Attachments

None.

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