

Information Report



Service Area Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

Date Friday, October 23, 2020

Subject **Managing the impacts of COVID-19:
Interim report**

Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

This interim report outlines the City of Guelph's work towards managing the impacts of COVID-19 since staff's last update to Council on August 12.

Key Findings

Responding to and managing the impacts of COVID-19 have remained a focus of City administration since staff's last report of the subject. The City has remained agile and responsive, and has made important progress towards our community's recovery while preparing for the second wave of the virus—which is now underway.

Financial Implications

COVID-19 continues to have a significant impact on City finances, as community use of the City's revenue generating facilities, programs and services is far less than it would be in a normal year.

The City has taken steps throughout the year to reduce costs wherever possible. These measures, together with Phase 1 of the Safe Restart Funding, have mitigated the projected year-end deficit and the need to use the City's reserves in 2020.

Recovery from COVID-19 is a priority in the City's 2021 budget.

Report

Today Ontario is experiencing a record number of new COVID-19 cases in what most experts agree to be Canada's second wave of the virus. We know the pandemic is playing out differently across the country's provinces and territories and—in Ontario—differently throughout the province. In our region, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health confirms there is evidence of community transmission, with cases present across all age groups.

At the same time, the Guelph community has responded to the pandemic with resilience and resourcefulness. The community has mostly followed the advice of public health authorities and the results are encouraging in comparison to other parts of the province. By working together and following the advice of public health officials, Guelph has made progress towards recovery. Guelph continues to operate in Stage 3 of Phase 2 of the provincial reopening plan.

The City continues to work closely with Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health, Guelph General Hospital, health care partners and other community partners to respond to the impacts of COVID-19 in Guelph.

In this interim report we outline the City of Guelph's work towards managing the impacts of COVID-19 since staff's last update to Council on August 12.

Organizational recovery

The City of Guelph has continued to advocate to other levels of government for the swift release of funding. A summary of our advocacy efforts since staff's last report to Council is as follows:

Advocacy, Consultations and Delegations

- Mayor Guthrie and City staff participated in a call with the Hon. Catherine McKenna, Federal Minister of Infrastructure and Communities. Participating municipalities called on the federal government to work with provinces to expedite the release of Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program intakes and funding, including the new COVID-19 stream. As funding opportunities become available, staff are prepared to move quickly to assess the application criteria against potential projects and make application.
- City leaders engaged in ministerial delegations at the virtual AMO Conference from August 17-19 to advocate for further emergency operating and transit relief funding, as well as economic stimulus investments in critical municipal infrastructure in light of COVID-19. Staff have followed up on these delegations to advance discussions with staff from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Ministry of Transportation and the Ministry of Infrastructure.
- Together with Linamar, Mayor Guthrie hosted Premier Doug Ford in Guelph on September 15 for a provincial announcement investing \$2.5M to support the creation of ventilators at the Linamar Innovation Hub.
- CAO Scott Stewart has continued to leverage relationships with the Regional and Single Tier CAOs group and the CAO Executive Working Group for Ontario's Big City Mayors to focus on joint-advocacy related to COVID-19 economic recovery for cities, including infrastructure, support for small business, climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, and support for affordable housing and mental health.
- Members of Ontario's Big City Mayors are working in conjunction with public health leaders, front line responders, other governments, and community and business members to keep the numbers down, support those in need, and prepare for a post-pandemic normal.
- On September 28 Council passed a motion calling on the provincial and federal governments to provide further supports for local culture, social benefit and charitable organizations in response to the pandemic. The City subsequently sent a letter from City Clerk O'Brien on October 7 to the Prime Minister, Premier, Ministers of Finance, AMO, FCM, OBCM and the City's local MP and MPP. On October 8, MPP Schreiner seconded the City's advocacy by writing a supportive letter to the Premier and Ontario's Minister of Finance.
- At the October 15 meeting of Ontario's Big City Mayors, participants discussed next steps in the response to COVID-19 and the second wave with Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Steve Clark, Provincial Minister of

Infrastructure the Hon. Laurie Scott, Federal Minister of Infrastructure and Communities the Hon. Catherine McKenna and Federal Leader of New Democrat Party Jagmeet Singh. These discussions built on efforts to secure infrastructure funding to stimulate local economic recovery and job creation in Ontario's big cities.

- As Ontario prepares for a fall budget, Mayor Guthrie voiced Guelph's priorities in a COVID-19 recovery-focused virtual pre-budget consultation with the Hon. Rod Phillips, Ontario's Minister of Finance. Remarks focused on securing further emergency operating and transit funding supports from the province and federal government, economic stimulus funding in critical municipal infrastructure, advancing local economic recovery, interregional transportation, promoting a green recovery and on funding for supportive housing. Staff echoed these priorities in a written submission to the pre-budget consultation process on October 16. Staff also prepared a written submission to the pre-budget consultation process on behalf of Ontario's Big City Mayors.

Community and social recovery

Emergency Operations Control Group (EOCG)

Guelph's EOCG is now meeting three times weekly and will continue to meet until the emergency is over. The multi-organizational group continues to manage our community's response to the pandemic.

The EOCG completed a mid-action brief in late summer as part of a debriefing exercise on the first wave of COVID-19. This exercise and the resulting brief has been useful in enhancing the way the EOCG operates. It also identified lessons the partnership has learned and can apply, as needed, in the coming weeks or months.

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

In recent months [the City contributed](#) staff capacity towards a new [Vital Focus Series: Secondary Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

The publications explore the secondary impacts of COVID-19 in Guelph and Wellington. The series is led by Toward Common Ground, with key contributions from partners including the City, County of Wellington, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health 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 briefs that form the series are intended to build awareness of the secondary impacts of the pandemic using evidence-based analysis and provide recommendations to help mitigate those effects. These briefs can also serve as a baseline for the partners to track progress in the community over time.

This series follows the best practices of other communities who have begun to explore community data in efforts to encourage dialogue, collaboration and evidenced-based decision-making among governments and other organizations to better manage the secondary impacts of the pandemic and safeguard community

wellbeing in the longer-term. In addition, as the group continues to consult and collaborate, the whole community has an opportunity to learn more about this virus and its effects.

The topic areas covered in the series are broad and no single organization has the ability or purview to address all the recommendations. As a municipality, we may have a role in directly addressing some topics more than others. For example, employment and the built environment are topics towards which the City will make a significant contribution.

Providing partnership support to the project, aligning our community response efforts and leveraging our data and intergovernmental resources are important roles. This is a valuable opportunity to increase alignment with our strategic plans and intergovernmental advocacy efforts.

Our partnership in this work gives us an opportunity to strengthen data sharing relationships and increases the City's capacity to leverage local data resources, which will support the implementation of the Community Plan and the City's Strategic Plan.

Public information and communications

The City's approach to informing and engaging with its stakeholders throughout the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be rapid, responsive, multi-channeled and purposeful. Public information is a pre-existing priority in the City of Guelph's emergency preparedness approach, and two-way communication is an organizational imperative at all times.

City administration has remained diligent in communicating with stakeholders since staff's last report to Council on August 12, 2020. The City supports Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health to keep people informed in the following ways:

- Updating guelph.ca/covid19 every weekday by 4 p.m. with new information
- Posting regular updates on the City's [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) feeds
- Making public service announcements on local radio stations
- Sharing information by newspaper, web, and social media advertising
- Posting signs, digital screens and posters at City facilities, transit shelters and on public transit buses
- Sending regular emails to City staff and posting employee updates on Infonet
- Creating authentic opportunities for two-way conversations between employees and leaders during this time of uncertainty

In addition, we've made updates to a communications playbook that our administration developed early on in the pandemic. The playbook for City leadership provides a high-level overview of the roles that leaders play in keeping employees engaged during times of change, and the channels leaders can use to communicate with employees as we lead through the most challenging set of circumstances our city has ever faced.

It's the City's practice to communicate not only our decisions, but the rationale for them—and the trade-offs we considered—clearly. We have held true to this guiding principle throughout the pandemic.

Lane closures and one-way sidewalks: results and next steps

In early June, City staff closed one lane of traffic on the Speedvale Avenue bridge over the Speed River and on Eramosa Road between the Downtown Trail and Delhi Street. The City also opened one-way sidewalks at other locations to allow for physical distancing between pedestrians and cyclists during the COVID-19 pandemic, and bolstered all of these measures with interventions like “narrow sidewalk ahead” signage, social media campaigns, and an online map of affected locations.

The locations were chosen based on physical constraints such as guard rails, railings and retaining walls, and routes that serve grocery stores, hospitals and high-volume trail connections.

Staff have been monitoring pedestrian and cyclist use of the lane closures and are using the data from that monitoring to inform recommendations for the future of these amenities.

Monitoring and analysis of use shows the pedestrian/cycling lane on Speedvale is particularly well-used, with the full day total usage at nearly 700 people, and peak hour use at 90 people. This reflects an increase of about 175% compared to 2018 counts at same location.

Full day totals for Eramosa are nearly 275 people, and the peak hour usage is nearly 50 people.

City staff will maintain these measures on Eramosa until the end of October, after which they will be removed due to lower use and impacts to waste collection and street maintenance. The intervention on Speedvale will remain in place until winter maintenance is required, and the “narrow sidewalk ahead” signs will remain in place until social distancing is no longer required.

Economic Recovery

The recovery of Guelph’s local economy continues to be a focus for City staff. What follows are updates on various economic recovery initiatives since staff’s last report to Council.

Tourism Plan

Visit Guelph has successfully executed its tourism plan funded by Tourism Industry Association of Ontario’s (TIAO) Regional Relief and Recovery Fund. The \$40,000 marketing and promotion campaign resulted in the creation of new digital assets and content, including online videos and print collateral that encourages hyper local tourism.

Funding was also used for the creation of a local COVID-19 support program to offset the lost revenue incurred by tourism businesses and to adapt business strategies. Examples include support for a Guelph Beer package; restaurant gift card giveaways on Magic 106.1; and supporting physical distancing measures for Jay Walking and other tourism program providers.

Next steps include the creation of a “winter local” exploration campaign that incorporates new and existing activities. Activities include the existing Rotary Club’s Sparkles in the Park, Glow Guelph, the Merry Maker markets, and skating at Market Square, along with new outdoor lighting projects.

Tourism Activation Recovery Fund

Visit Guelph, in collaboration with the Guelph Chamber of Commerce and the Guelph Downtown Business Association, is applying for \$500,000 from FedDev's Tourism Activation Recovery Fund (TARF) to fund local businesses' and tourism destinations' environmental and virtual adaption efforts.

Guelph Shops

Guelph Shops continues to gain traction as one of the highest visited sites on guelph.ca with more than 7,500 unique page views and almost 80 new businesses added to the directory since launching in July. Seasonal programming and promotion will focus on the holiday shopping season. The second marketing campaign began October 15.

findyourjob.ca

A findyourjob.ca campaign launches November 1. With a shift to back-to-work and school, there are still many vacancies in Guelph across sectors. The findyourjob.ca website launched in July to help connect job seekers with vacancies throughout Guelph, Wellington, Waterloo, and Dufferin counties. The City will promote this site through a formal marketing campaign targeting Guelph job seekers and businesses.

The City also recently participated in and helped coordinate the findyourjob.ca virtual job fair to assist over 260 job seekers find positions offered by 20 employers across the region.

Digital Main Street – Digital Services Squad Program City staff continue to support communications for the Digital Main Street program, which funds trained specialists to meet with small businesses to help them improve their online presence. The program has been extended until November 30, and to date has helped more than 100 businesses in Guelph and Wellington County.

Digital Main Street - The Community Collaboration Program The City, Downtown Guelph Business Association, Business Centre Guelph-Wellington and neighbouring regions are taking part in Innovation Guelph's efforts to identify common issues and solutions facing main street businesses across Ontario. Collaborative solutions that help businesses combat the impacts of COVID-19 may be eligible for funding of up to \$50,000 through the Digital Main Street Future Proof Funding.

Extended Patio Season

The City continues to operate the Temporary Patio Program and Downtown Dining District, which have been extended to the end of November, in order for restaurants, bars and cafes to continue to generate revenue by serving patrons outdoors.

Farmers' Market

The Farmers' Market opened indoors on Saturday, September 5 with signage, physical barriers and stations in place to encourage physical distancing and orderly navigation through the market. A total of 65 vendors operate weekly out of the Market and attendance has consistently been between 2,000 and 2,500 each Saturday, which is about 20 per cent fewer attendees than previous years. Next

steps include opening for additional evenings for the annual Merry Maker Night Market in December and continuing to transition outdoor vendors into the market and extending physical distancing and digitization of services.

Grow Back Better: Our Food Future's 10-point recovery plan in response to COVID-19

Through [Grow Back Better](#), we are providing immediate support to our local food economy. The plan leverages \$1.6 million in Smart City funding to support the City and County's economic, social and inclusive green response to COVID-19.

Priority 1: Increasing access to affordable, nutritious food

Emergency Food Relief – The SEED's Emergency Food Home Delivery Program and the Harve\$t Impact Community Donation Platform: Since August, the SEED has delivered nutritious food baskets to about 1,114 more participants, increasing the program's reach to about 2,614 participants. To support this work, the Harve\$t Impact Community Donation Platform has raised an additional \$4,000 in cash donations matched dollar-for-dollar by Our Food Future. The total cash donation to date is \$40,000. In addition, \$1,100,000 in private and public donation program donations has been leveraged.

Guelph-Wellington Urban Agriculture Challenge: Our Food Future launched the Guelph-Wellington Urban Agriculture Challenge on September 15. The program will award \$102,000 in funding to implement ideas and projects that support circular economic recovery, accelerate food production, and increase access to fresh food while limiting environmental impact. The challenge is led by Harve\$t Impact, a social financing program of 10C and a core pillar of the Our Food Future initiative. The first phase of the application process closes October 30.

Supporting vulnerable residents – identifying needs and coordinating action: The Nutritious Foods workstream recently contributed to the Food Insecurity Vital Focus as part of the Secondary Pandemic Effects Vital Focus Series. The brief outlines our current understanding of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on food insecurity and discusses recommendations to address this issue. In addition, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health has developed a regional survey for households, which will collect information regarding food insecurity prevalence and barriers to accessing nutritious food during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Priority 2: Supporting new and existing food businesses

Seeding Our Food Future micro grant program: Since August 31, businesses have begun the [Seeding Our Food Future](#) program and received some of their allocated grant funding. The initiative is providing guidance to support circular business development through 15 mentors from three collaborator organizations.

Business tools and services for food sector to reduce waste: The second installment of Provision Coalition's [R-Purpose Micro](#) program began in September. In addition, Our Food Future collaborators launched the first [circular meal](#)—a gourmet restaurant meal created entirely from food waste—on October 15. The fully circular meal will be served for one month by Canada's largest B-corp restaurant chain.

Priority 3: Taking action to Strengthen regional food system resiliency

Food System Resiliency Table: The Food System Resiliency Table will provide actionable, on-the-ground insights and support to ensure the strength and sustainability of our regional food systems during the current crisis and better equip our food system of the future. Preliminary work to convene the Food System Resiliency Table began in September and will continue as an initiative of the existing Community Steering Table.

Waste as a Resource: Food Waste Challenge Technology Challenge: As part of Our Food Future and Grow Back Better, the City's Solid Waste Resources division has developed an innovation challenge to cultivate ideas on the inclusion of advanced sensors and AI powered camera systems within Guelph's waste collection system. This technology will help staff better understand residential food waste and associated interventions, and launched October 22. Understanding food waste is an important part of building food system resilience, so that our community is better positioned to respond to future emergencies.

Financial Implications

COVID-19 continues to have a significant impact on City finances, as community use of the City's revenue generating facilities, programs and services is far less than it would be in a normal year. The City has taken steps throughout the year to reduce costs wherever possible. These measures, together with Phase 1 of the Safe Restart Funding, have mitigated the projected year-end deficit and the need to use the City's reserves in 2020.

Staff are assessing projected year-end COVID-19-related financial impacts as part of the third quarter operating variance review in consultation with respective departmental managers. Details of the operating year-end projection will be shared November 27, 2020 through the third quarter operating variance report to Council.

The City is grateful for Phase 1 of the Safe Restart Funding that allocated a total of \$12 million in emergency relief funding from the federal and provincial governments. Staff are actively assessing eligibility to access Phase 2 emergency support funding, given the known need for these funds throughout 2021. However, based on the City's ability to mitigate a significant portion of the lost revenues in 2020, we may not qualify for this additional support.

Recovery from COVID-19 is a priority in the City's 2021 budget. The City recognizes it has a role to play in Guelph's economic recovery and in supporting businesses and residents in sectors most impacted. The budget proposes digital transformation investments to modernize service delivery, along with requests for additional funding for business retention and attraction, tourism rebuilding and emergency non-profit financial support. The City recently released a [budget podcast](#) about the impacts of COVID-19 on the budget, which provides information on the long-term recovery journey.

Consultations

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

Strategic Plan Alignment

The content of this information 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.

Attachments

None.

Departmental Approval

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This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

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