



AGENDA ITEM REPORT

Meeting: Regular Meeting of Council, Operations and Planning - 20 Jan 2021
To: Members of Council
From: David Stewart, CAO/Treasurer
Department: Administration
Subject: COVID-19 - Hastings Highlands Business Continuity Plan Update

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council accepts this report "COVID-19 - Hastings Highlands Business Continuity Plan Update" as submitted by the CAO/Treasurer; as information.

ORIGIN:

On January 12 2021, the Province declared its second Declaration of Emergency for the COVID-19 Pandemic under s 7.0.1 (1) of the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (EMPCA)*. The Emergency will be in place for at least 28 days.

In addition, beginning at 12:01 a.m. on Thursday, January 14, 2021, a Provincial Stay At Home Order will take effect. This order requires that everyone stay home and only leave their homes for essential trips to the grocery store, pharmacies, medical appointments and essential work. The Province is encouraging all employees who can work from home to do so.

The threat posed by COVID-19 to both the community and to the Corporation is significant. This report focuses upon the Corporation of the Municipality of Hastings Highlands' efforts to mitigate risk and attempt to ensure service continuity. Protection of the health and safety for staff is paramount, and guides the decisions discussed in the body of this report. Within the context of minimizing health risks, municipal staff play an important role in supporting Hastings Highlands' economy and are trying to offer services while minimizing physical contact. The plans for each part of the Corporation are detailed below.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

An individual who performs work that is essential to the delivery of core services in a municipality is eligible under the Provincial Governments Enhancing Public Health and Workplace Safety Measures in the Provincewide Shutdown document updated January 12, 2021. As a result, Municipal staff have prepared this report to outline how municipal business and operations will continue during these times. Note that the expectation is that when the Province of Ontario lifts/cancels the state of emergency declaration all Hastings Highlands operations would transition to normal operations.

Since the Municipal Emergency Control Group (MECG) in Hastings Highlands was partially activated on March 13th, 2020, there have been regular meetings to discuss the processes to ensure the safety

and well-being of the community and the Corporation. In addition, the group has met and reviewed all the operations of the municipality to develop and implement this Business Continuity Plan Update for the COVID-19 event.

CAO's OFFICE:

In addition to leading the business continuity exercises, the CAO's office is responsible for the overall management of the operations of the municipality. A primary focus has been making sure that communication is regular and consistent to Council, staff and members of the community so that everyone is kept as up to date as possible during this COVID-19 event.

The CAO/Treasurer continues to lead the MECG meetings as the Primary Community Emergency Management Coordinator (CEMC). In addition, the CAO/Treasurer catalogues any updates and information provided to Hastings Highlands by various agencies.

The CAO/Treasurer will continue to provide daily support Council, staff and all members of the community during the COVID-19 event.

IT SERVICES:

The Municipality of Hastings Highlands IT services are provided by Hastings County. Hastings Highlands has invested a lot of time and resources into IT upgrades over the last several years to update and upgrade functionality for both Council and staff. IT has implemented networks that provide staff with the capability of completing work either remotely or from home all while still ensuring security and privacy of data. This has proven to be extremely resourceful during these times of need and the Municipality will continue to work with the County to ensure we have the IT infrastructure required to service the public.

HASTINGS HIGHLANDS WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA:

The Municipality of Hastings Highlands has created a separate COVID-19 information page on the homepage of the municipality's website www.hastingshighlands.ca. This page will be continue to be used as the municipality's source of credible information that is available in one location to website guests.

Hastings Highlands continues to use corporate social media as a vehicle to disseminate the municipality's COVID-19 planning and communications information to followers.

MUNICIPAL CLERK'S OFFICE:

Committee meetings will be postponed until further notice.

Council Meetings will continue to be held as scheduled via remote teleconference which is streamed live to the public through the Municipality's [YouTube Channel](#).

In-Person Public Interaction

The Clerk's office is one of the main points of contact for the public in many aspects of work which requires face to face interactions with the public, including issuance of licence documents, Commissioner of Oath services, issuance of burial permits, lottery licence interactions with the non-profit groups and general public enquiry engagement. Four staff members are Commissioners for Taking Affidavits. The signing of Burial permits is by appointment. Any other services as noted above will be evaluated based on circumstances and needs.

Cemetery Services

Cemetery services are considered an essential service and will continue as normal. Cemeteries do not open for burials until May 1, 2021 for Grace Cemetery and for Papineau Cemetery it is weather permitting.

FINANCE SERVICES:

The Finance Team has reviewed processes to determine essential tasks that need to be performed on an on-going basis. Those items are listed below:

Payroll

It is essential that staff continue to be paid on a regular bi-weekly basis. The Financial Analyst – Payables is not able to work from home, so she is working at the municipal office. Both the Deputy Treasurer and the CAO/Treasurer are available to review and approve payroll when required. Due to the security and confidentiality associated with this function it is not something that can be completed remotely or at home.

Accounts Payable

The Municipality processes payments to vendors on a bi-weekly basis. Generally, the Municipality follows a net 30 policy, meaning that invoices are paid 30 days after receipt. It is important that the Financial Analyst – Payables completes these bi-weekly batches so that the Municipality does not incur any unnecessary penalty and interest charges. Both the Deputy Treasurer and the CAO/Treasurer are available to review and approve payments when required.

Collection of Property Tax Payments

It is essential that staff continue to process property tax payments and property tax bills. This function cannot be done remotely or at home. The Financial Analyst – Receivables and Taxes is not able to work from home so she is working at the municipal office. The Municipality accepts payments via on-line banking, on-line credit cards, paying at the bank, through regular mail and telephone banking. At the present time, as the municipal office is closed to the Public, payments by cash or cheques are being accepted through a drop box alternative located at the municipal office.

Interim property tax bills will be generated and mailed out to property owners in early February with installment due dates of March 23, 2021 and May 18, 2021.

In addition, it is important that staff stay on top of the processing of cash receipts, property ownership changes, Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) property assessment changes and the processing of information related to property sales and purchases.

Property Tax Sales

The Municipality will remain in contact with the third-party collection company it uses for all property tax sales that have been scheduled in Hastings Highlands for 2021. No new property tax sale files will be sent in 2021. All existing files with the third-party collection company will continue as per the *Municipal Act and Provincial State of Emergency Regulations*.

Property Tax 2021 Reassessment

The Province of Ontario's Action Plan: Responding to COVID-19 included a section on 2021 property tax reassessment.

The government is postponing the planned property tax reassessment for 2021. Postponing the reassessment means that property assessments for the 2021 taxation year will continue to be based on the same valuation date that was in effect for the 2020 taxation year. The Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) will continue to maintain the assessment roll and ensure that it is updated to reflect changes such as new construction.

Accounts Receivable

Staff send out invoices as required. The majority of the invoices sent out relate to the nine municipal waste site tipping fees. This is a process that must be done at the municipal office.

External Reporting

All external reporting will continue to be processed without delay. This includes the following: Month End Bank Reconciliations, HST (Harmonized Sales Tax), WSIB annual report, EHT (Employer Health Tax) annual report and annual Federal and Provincial Gas Tax Reporting.

2020 Financial Statements and Audit

The Municipality continues to work with the auditors to prepare the 2020 financial statements. The Municipality's on-site portion of the audit has been scheduled for the week of February 22nd to 26th. At this time, Hastings Highlands is not expecting any delays associated with preparing the statements from our end. The Municipality will endeavour to complete as much of the audit preparations as possible by utilizing electronic means.

2020 Year End Processing

The Municipality continues to work through year end processing and reconciliations. We do not anticipate any disruptions at this time, however, regular timelines associated with year end processing could experience delays as a result of the current operating environment.

FIRE SERVICES:

Fire Administration

Administration is provided by the Fire Chief and Administrative Coordinator, the administration is still fully functioning through remote computer access.

Fire Suppression and Rescue

The Municipality of Hastings Highlands has 63 firefighters and officers, the majority of whom are all volunteer. The Fire Chief and Administrative Coordinator are the only full-time employees within the fire department.

Fire department management has taken necessary precautions to stop potential spread of the virus by cancelling all weekly station meetings and training to maintain social and physical distancing. The apparatus and equipment are still checked weekly at each station by an officer and a firefighter (only two people) who are required to wear masks while performing these operations. One person marks the check lists while the other checks and runs the apparatus and equipment.

During all incidents and responses, the firefighters and officers will always minimize direct contact with each other and the general public. They will maintain social and physical distancing as much as possible given the risky circumstances. If physical distancing cannot be achieved during a fire response then the appropriate personnel will wear masks to protect the public and each other.

BUILDING/PLANNING/BYLAW DEPARTMENTS:

The Municipality of Hastings Highlands is taking precautions regarding the developing situation with COVID-19 in an effort to protect staff, residents and businesses as it relates to building and bylaw inspections and new building and planning applications. The Municipal Office will be closed to the public until further notice.

As such, the Municipality's Building, Planning and Bylaw Departments will be operating as follows:

Bylaw Enforcement Inspections

There will be **limited** site inspections for bylaw enforcement until further notice.

Building Department

The Building Department remains operational. For information on building permits and inspections, please refer to the details below:

New permit applications –

The Municipality continues to review and issue building and septic permit applications.

Please email the applications to: mcox@hastingshighlands.ca or alternatively, while the Municipal Office is closed to the public, building permit applications may be mailed in or dropped off at the Municipal Office by prior arrangement. Arrangements are to be made by emailing Martin Cox at mcox@hastingshighlands.ca. You will be provided with a time for drop off and a member of staff will meet you. Alternatively, use the mail box located on the Hastings Highlands Library wall, adjacent to the main entrance of the Hastings Highlands Complex.

Site Inspections: New Construction

The Building Department will be inspecting in person unoccupied construction sites only.

The Building Department staff will **not** be entering occupied area of buildings under construction including personal dwellings or occupied areas of industrial, commercial, multi - residential and institutional buildings. Details on inspections for previously occupied areas are listed in “Site Inspections: Occupied Buildings” below.

Inspection staff may ask you to answer brief, non-intrusive screening questions related to the COVID-19 health risks, and practice social distancing. Please understand this is for the protection and peace of mind of our staff who will be serving you and other members of the public.

Building inspections are to be booked by emailing Martin Cox mcox@hastingshighlands.ca or by calling 613 338-2811 extension 255.

Site Inspections: Occupied Buildings

The Building Department staff will **not** be entering occupied areas of buildings under construction including personal dwellings or occupied areas of industrial, commercial, multi - residential and institutional buildings.

The Building Department will review emailed quality photos and videos or inspect via video calls on programs such as Facetime, What’s App and Zoom. The Building Department will email the owner or builder an inspection report stating whether the inspection is satisfactory or list deficiencies. Any deficiencies can be reviewed at a later date by the same methods.

Building inspections are to be booked by emailing Martin Cox mcox@hastingshighlands.ca or by calling 613 338-2811 extension 255.

Planning Department

The Planning Department remains operational.

The Committee of Adjustment have resumed meetings by teleconference.

New planning applications

The Municipality will review electronically submitted planning applications, including minor variances and 911 addresses.

Please email the applications to: cbujas@hastingshighlands.ca

While the Municipal Office is closed to the public, planning applications may be mailed in or dropped off at the Municipal Office by prior arrangement. Arrangements are to be made by emailing Cathy Bujas at cbujas@hastingshighlands.ca. You will be provided with a time for drop off and a member of staff will meet you. Alternatively, use the mail box located on the Hastings Highlands Library wall, adjacent to the main entrance of the Hastings Highlands Complex.

ROADS, WASTE SITES AND FACILITIES OPERATIONS:

In preparation for the second Provincial State of Emergency, COVID-19 pandemic, the Operations Department has developed plans to maintain municipal operations and infrastructure at a minimum service level, while ensuring that the roads are safe for travel. Work related to road network safety,

and emergency responses to severe weather will receive the highest priority while other work will be completed based on available staff and public safety.

The Operations Department have implemented time and/or spatial separation for our road's management and road/waste staff in order to meet service level requirements, and ensuring business continuity, while reducing risk.

The Core Services that will be maintained during this period:

- Road network maintenance in accordance with Minimum Maintenance Standards (MMS)
- Emergency roadwork
- Severe Weather & Public Safety

To ensure the delivery, the Operations Department has its full complement of staff, Operations Manager and two Operations Supervisors available.

All Municipal Waste Sites are operating on normal schedules. Waste Site Attendants are asked not to have any social interaction with the public and are always implementing social distancing and wearing Personal Protective Equipment (masks, gloves etc.).

All Municipal Facilities are closed for public use and are being monitored by staff periodically. The Operations Department will make every attempt to maintain the road network as per the Minimum Maintenance Standard (MMS) including road patrolling, pothole filling, winter maintenance and regulatory sign repair. Under the MMS, roads are classified by their traffic volume and posted speed limit. Road work will follow the MMS and be focused on the higher road classes or roads with the highest traffic volume first. Downed limbs and trees are the most common result of severe weather events. Priority will be placed on removing debris from roads. With respect to the operation and level of service provided by our Operations Department, the Municipality has also implemented time and spatial separation.

Facilities/Playground Structure

All Community Centres and Recreation Facilities are closed for public use. Signs have been put in place at all entrance and exit points to make the public aware of the facilities closures.

As of March 23, 2020, signs have been posted on all playground equipment advising the public not to use the playground equipment as it will not be cleaned and/or sanitized.

Municipal Office

Effective at 12:01 am on January 14, 2021, the Municipal Office will be closed for a period of 28 days (February 12, 2021) for public walk-in entry. Services to our residents are available over the phone and through email. This closure will continue to be assessed and may be extended.

Enhanced COVID-19 Cleaning Procedures

Enhanced cleaning procedures have been put in place to safeguard staff that are currently working.

Work From Home Provisions

Employees who are able to work from home have been asked to do so. Employees whose jobs permit them to work from home comes with the expectation that they are available to their manager during work hours to get updates or provide support. Department Heads will monitor the effectiveness of work from home arrangements balanced against staff health and safety and adjust accordingly.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

Staff productivity is likely to be reduced or adjusted. Cost impacts cannot be accurately measured at this time; however, the Municipality is tracking costs associated with COVID-19 response and will provide reporting to Council via the quarterly treasury reports.

LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN:

Strategic Priority #3 – Build Our Community

REFERENCES:

CONCLUSION

This report was prepared January 13, 2021 and based on the information available at that time. As new actions are taken by other levels of government and new information surfaces, this will be modified accordingly. The protection and the health and safety for staff and our community is paramount and has guided all the decisions we have made in terms of business continuity.

Prepared By:

David Stewart, CAO/Treasurer

Reviewed By: Municipal Clerk January 13, 2021

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