

Message from Mayor Redekop
April 24, 2020

It is now over a month since the Premier of Ontario announced a State of Emergency for the province. Since that time, the number of cases of and deaths from COVID-19 has mounted. However, we have recently heard encouraging news about the flattening of the curve; a slowdown in the number of cases and an indication that efforts to contain the virus are having an effect.

This is the result of the stringent measures required by the federal and provincial governments since mid-March. The sacrifices that we have all been asked to make to protect each other have been working. However, both the Prime Minister and Premier still express caution about easing those measures too soon. Even in the face of this promising news, the front-line workers – the doctors, nurses, PSW's, first responders, by-law enforcement officers, store clerks, essential workers – remain overwhelmed. Long term care homes and retirement residences remain in precarious jeopardy.

The situation continues to evolve and restrictions will be gradually eased. However, we need to continue to be vigilant. As I have said before, this situation is not about any one of us, it is about all of us. The actions of each of us have an impact on how all of us will survive the pandemic and how quickly we can return to a semblance of normal life.

I want to comment on several issues that appear to be most on the minds of the community.

Seasonal Residents

I have confirmed with the Regional Director-General of the Canada Border Services Agency that her forces continue to follow the protocol adopted since the federal government announced last month restrictions on travel across the Canada-US border. Only essential travel is permitted – truck drivers with essential goods, essential workers, returning nationals or landed immigrants. Returning Canadians are required to self-isolate for 14 days. Those who are working on either side of the border are to go to work and return home

directly. Some of these individuals are permitted to drive American plated vehicles. However, if you see someone who appears to be violating the protocol and you have information to permit enforcement of the protocol, you should contact the Town and/or CBSA to lodge a complaint.

Short-term Rentals

Short term rentals are not permitted to operate, by provincial directive, unless for bookings after April 4th for accommodations related to essential need. That means that vacationers should not be coming into town for short stays. Seasonal residents who live elsewhere in Ontario have been encouraged by the federal and provincial governments to remain in their home communities, that is “stay home”.

Sherkston Shores has been closed to all but those Canadian residents who maintain their permanent home in Canada there. The Town of Fort Erie can be contacted at 905-871-1600 or by email by going to our website: forterie.ca. The Niagara Region can be contacted at 905-984-3690 or by going to its web site: niagararegion.ca. Canada Border Services can be contacted at 905-354-5137.

Beaches/Boat Launches, Trails, Parks, Playgrounds

For the time being, the beaches, boat launches and playgrounds in town are closed. Parks and recreational trails are open, but individuals must maintain physical distancing. We are aware that people would like to walk the beaches, but I remind everyone that the Town-owned beaches are primarily 66 foot road allowances, the exceptions being Bay Beach (1,000 feet) and Waverly Beach (about 200 feet). We are also aware that boaters would like to get out on the lake or river.

We continue to monitor the situation and will make decisions changing the status in the context of safety and adherence to physical distancing rules. In the meantime, the public is permitted to walk, run, cycle, and get fresh air, but not congregate, in the passive parks and on the recreational trails in town.

Public Health

We have received many expressions of concern about the amount of information being shared by Niagara Region Public Health agency.

While the information displayed on its website has improved over the past couple weeks, there remains important data that could and should be shared: the number of tests conducted in Niagara, results and pending results as well as a breakdown of cases by municipality. I have voiced my concerns in this regard to the Acting Chief Medical Officer of Health for Niagara Region as well as with Regional Council. I know that Regional Councillor Insinna has expressed similar concerns.

Landfill Site

The local landfill site on Pettit Road is operated by the Region. It is open for essential disposals, with a variety of qualifications. I urge you to go to the Region's website to ascertain its availability for use. In the meantime, Regional Councillor Insinna and I will be raising concerns about the restrictions imposed at the landfill site during a time when people are doing work around their homes because of federal and provincial directives and need to be able to dispose of refuse.

Town Operations

The Town continues most of its operations, including processing planning and building applications, engineering and design work on projects, maintenance of facilities, equipment and infrastructure, outreach to businesses and customer service. Over 80% of employees are working from home. Outside crews are working in shifts and maintaining physical distance. The mayors and regional chair and various senior staff meet regularly electronically with their counterparts.

Members of Council continue to respond to constituents needs and interact with senior staff. Council will be receiving a report at the beginning of May apprising us and the public of the financial implications on the municipality of COVID-19 emergency.

Vandalism

There have been a number of incidents of vandalism in a variety of areas of Town over the past couple of weeks. I cannot imagine what possesses someone to deface the property of others, including the community. I cannot imagine a more senseless act – it benefits no one. In response, the Town will be erecting security cameras in select locations to ensure that should this type of conduct persist, the perpetrators will be found out and appropriately dealt with by the law.

Volunteers

Finally, I want to say a word about the many volunteers and frequent good works that have taken place in Fort Erie since COVID-19. Many of the non-profit organizations in town have also suffered a loss of critical revenue with the closure of the bingo halls. Many individuals and some businesses and developers have offered assistance to them in this stressful time. I want to thank everyone who has been generous in a time when we are all feeling overwhelmed and I encourage those of you who can to make a donation to a service club, charity or non-profit organization of your choice.

Some service clubs, like the Ridgeway Lions (who are offering meals to those in need by pick-up or curbside delivery) and the Kinettes (who have offered to offset the cost of some of our health care providers who require accommodations away from home), have done what they always do – they have stepped up to serve their community. The food banks are struggling to maintain inventory for all those in need. These and other community organizations have been receiving donations and offers of assistance from across our town.

To all the members of the service clubs and organizations; to each generous individual and business; to everyone who is trying to brighten the day for those around you, to our healthcare providers, first responders and essential workers, I say THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU. The Council, your family, friends and neighbours are truly appreciative. We will overcome this crisis, and because of all of you, we will do it sooner and with a sense of optimism.