

## MESSAGE FROM MAYOR STAPLES

It was seven weeks ago when COVID-19 began, we were busy working on City budgets, replacing water mains, and improving our neighbourhoods, parks, and streets. We were coming together with businesses, residents, neighbours, and the provincial government to increase the safety and well-being in our community. We were part of island-wide projects focused on building a better future for our economy and climate, meeting with youth to engage them in planning for their future and enriching our present.

Then one morning, we awoke to find our world, our City, and our lives changed forever: streets quiet, playgrounds silent, businesses closed. Our Provincial Health Officer became a household name, health care workers and essential services workers became our superheroes.

The challenges we have experienced during these weeks will continue for some time as we move through this pandemic and the changes it presents. In addition to the challenges, there are stories of how we continue to rise to the occasion, again and again, that will be remembered and retold for generations to come. Like how we reached out to each other through simple gestures: placing hearts in our front windows, cheering nightly at 7:00 p.m., helping neighbours, sewing masks, planting food, and sharing seeds.

At the City we have learned to use “Zoom” for meetings. We continue work to make sure your essential services are delivered: garbage is collected, potholes are filled, and public works projects are completed. We are finding ways to help our residents and business owners where we can by waiving parking fees and penalties on water bills, extending tax penalty dates, and keeping tax increases low. We heard your safety concerns and added extra nighttime security patrols. We have kept outdoor public spaces in City parks open. We reached out to partner community organizations to establish task forces to make sure everyone has access to food and shelter, and that volunteers are ready and people who are looking for work are matched with employers. We connected with our business community to understand their changing needs and to advocate on their behalf. You have an amazing team working for you; they care about this City and every person in it, just like you do. I am thankful for each and every one of them for their dedication and for each and every one of you for your dedication.

We will continue to make sure that your needs are being met, to advocate for you, to work together, and to move forward with all of the dreams we had when this started seven weeks ago. We understand there are some things we will have to reimagine and other changes we have yet to discover as we transition from building resilience to the tasks of building recovery. This time is showing us how the character, strength and beauty of our individual and collective actions, our spirits and humanity will get us through this difficult time.

As always, I am available at 250-466-9412 or email [mayor@duncan.ca](mailto:mayor@duncan.ca), or I can be reached on Facebook or Instagram.

~ Michelle Staples, Mayor

## CITY RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The Provincial Medical Health Officer’s messaging continues to be clear, it is imperative that social distancing measures are followed to slow the spread of COVID-19. While some measures may begin to be lifted soon, many measures will likely be in place for the remainder of 2020.

To align with the Medical Health Officer’s recommendations, and support the City’s residents and business owners during the COVID-19 response, the City has undertaken, or proposes to undertake, the following:

**Reduced Council and Staff Conference and Travel Budgets by 50%.** To reduce the tax increase from 3.16% to 2.51%.

**Extension of the 2020 Tax Penalty Dates.** The 2020 tax deadline is July 2<sup>nd</sup> and those who can pay are encouraged to do so. The first 5% penalty date has been extended and will be applied on October 1<sup>st</sup> and the second 5% penalty will be applied on November 2<sup>nd</sup>.

**Waived the 5% Penalties for Water Bills due March 31<sup>st</sup> and April 30<sup>th</sup>.** The 5% late penalties applied on water bills due March 31<sup>st</sup>, and April 30<sup>th</sup> have been waived.

**Waived Parking Fees for April and May.** Parking fees have been waived for April and May to support businesses that remain open during COVID-19.

**Mayor’s COVID-19 Food Security Task Force.** Cowichan Green Community is facilitating an ongoing response to COVID-19 by coordinating resources and support for organizations providing food to people in need.

**Public Washrooms Remain Open, Park Gates Closed.** With funding from Emergency Management BC (EMBC), the City has kept the public washrooms open, with additional cleanings four times per day (McAdam Park, Centennial Park, and Canada Avenue washrooms). In addition, the City has just confirmed EMBC funding to keep the Canada Avenue washrooms open 24/7 with additional security and janitorial for the month of May.

City parks remain open; however, the City has closed the gates to McAdam and Centennial Parks to dissuade travel from other areas and reduce general crowding.

**Duncan Farmers’ Market.** In consultation with the Cowichan Medical Health Officer, the Duncan Farmers’ Market continues on Saturdays in an extremely limited fashion (limited to food and farm produce vendors) and has moved on to Ingram Street to provide for social distancing measures.

**Public Access Closures.** City Hall and Public Works are closed to the public. Citizens are advised that they can conduct their business with the City online, over the phone, or by email. All recreation facilities in the Valley are closed and similar to other jurisdictions, City playgrounds are closed.

**Review of Economic Aid Package for Businesses.** Council directed staff to review the federal and provincial business support packages and discuss the sufficiency of the aid with the Downtown Duncan Business Improvement Area Society (DDBIA).

City staff met with the DDBIA and the CVRD Economic Development Officer and subsequently recommended that the provincial government consider a business rent supplement, which has since been implemented, and also that the provincial government consider implementing a COVID-19 property tax deferral option for property owners experiencing hardship.

**Cancel Public Events at City Owned Facilities.** Gatherings of over 50 people are not permitted, and staff have worked with the DDBIA to cancel events planned for City Square, except the Farmers’ Market, until May 31st. Events in June will be considered for cancellation before the end of May. Fees will be reimbursed.

Comments, questions, or concerns?

Visit [www.duncan.ca](http://www.duncan.ca) | Phone 250-746-6126 | Email [duncan@duncan.ca](mailto:duncan@duncan.ca)

## COVID-19 VULNERABLE POPULATIONS COWICHAN TASK FORCE

Cowichan Housing Association is facilitating this group and have created a local plan to support the homeless during COVID-19.

City Parks are not included in the plan for use as tenting sites other than the very limited camping that is already permitted in the City's Parks and Open Spaces Bylaw, to comply with case law in recent years. More information about camping regulations can be found on the City's website: <https://duncan.ca/sheltering-in-city-parks/>

The first tenting site has been established to provide space for the women who were previously housed at the Cowichan women's night shelter. Cowichan Women Against Violence Society is administering the site.

The Task Force will be receiving funding to implement phase one of the plan. The Rapid Relief Fund, organized by the Victoria Foundation, Jawl Foundation, and Times Colonist, is providing \$220,000, and BC Housing is providing \$172,000.



## COVID-19 NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

Looking for a way to help out? Become a COVID-19 Community Block Watch Captain.

The City has worked with Community Policing board and RCMP to pull together a social distancing, community building, COVID-19 Block Watch program.

What is it? First, it is a response to COVID-19 to help us connect with our neighbours, look out for each other, and keep each other safe. Second, it is a way for us to build community and connection in these strange and difficult times and find new ways to support our neighbours. We have heard of neighbourhood clean-up crews, safety teams, seed exchanges, 7:00 pm cheer squads, yard helpers, shoppers, and check-in teams. We have also heard of a few healthy neighbourhood competitions brewing, all while following social distancing recommendations. We want to hear what you are doing in your neighbourhoods; Contact Councillor Carol Newington to sign up, or to share photos and ideas, at [covidwatch@duncan.ca](mailto:covidwatch@duncan.ca) or 250-709-0469.

## CITY COVID-19 GRANT PROGRAM

Please help spread the word to organizations, that they are invited to apply for a grant from the City for up to \$10,000, for the creation of an idea of a program or concept that will support city businesses or residents affected by the pandemic. The intent of the grant program is not to take the place of the financial supports that are being provided by other levels of government, but instead to generate "made in Duncan" ideas about what is needed during this time. Application guidelines and criteria will soon be available on the City's website. Questions? Please contact: the Director of Finance [bernice@duncan.ca](mailto:bernice@duncan.ca)

## COUNCIL MEETINGS GO "VIRTUAL"

Duncan City Council meetings are now being held online to comply with the Provincial Health Officer's social distancing recommendations. Members of the public can view the meetings, through the live web stream link:

<https://duncan.civicweb.net/Portal/Video.aspx> Alternately, you may view at YouTube.com by searching "City of Duncan".

Questions regarding agenda items will be answered in the order they are received during question period. Please send questions to the Director of Corporate Services [paige@duncan.ca](mailto:paige@duncan.ca). Please include both your name and address for identification purposes.

## BYLAW ENFORCEMENT UPDATE

Bylaw Enforcement patrols have increased to provide additional evening security for the businesses who may have curtailed their hours. The City is working with Blackbird Security for increased nighttime patrols in the corridor and downtown.

In addition, local government Bylaw Enforcement Departments have been asked to provide assistance for compliance of COVID-19 public health orders. Their role is to provide assistance and education only when an issue has been reported (i.e. not ticket or detain).

To report an issue please visit:

<https://duncan.ca/issue-reporting/>

## PUBLIC WORKS PROJECTS UPDATE

The Duncan Street installation of the new water main and street improvements is nearly complete. Maintenance of the water and sewer systems are the highest priorities, followed by garbage collection. Staff are also conducting the annual water main flushing, to be completed May 29, 2020.

Given the understanding that social distancing measures are likely to be in place for some time, we will be moving forward with downtown capital projects, particularly street improvements, at a time when businesses will not be impacted and while traffic flow is limited. Unfortunately, due to design issues that have arisen, the Kenneth Street/Government Street project has been deferred to 2021.

## 85 STATION STREET & WHISTLER STREET DESIGN PROJECT UPDATE

The City commenced two separate "placemaking" design projects, one for 85 Station Street and one for Whistler Street earlier this year. The process began with a free public presentation on placemaking by Mark Lakeman of Communitecture on February 28<sup>th</sup> and public workshops on February 29<sup>th</sup> and March 1<sup>st</sup>.

More workshops were scheduled for the end of April but were postponed due to COVID-19. The City is creating a PlaceSpeak webpage for each location to enable public review and feedback on the draft concept options. Please visit the City's website [www.duncan.ca](http://www.duncan.ca) for the links. Based on the feedback and staff review, final design concepts will to be presented to Council in July 2020.



## SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESSES

Many businesses are open in the City of Duncan and have taken the necessary precautions to protect their employees and customers from COVID-19. To support local businesses, give them a call or check their website or social media page to find out if they are open. Making an effort to support local is a direct investment in our community and economy.

## CITY CONTACT INFORMATION

City Hall and Public Works are closed for public access at this time. City staff can be reached by:

City Hall Phone: 250-746-6126

Public Works Phone: 250-746-5321

or email [duncan@duncan.ca](mailto:duncan@duncan.ca) for the foreseeable future.

The drop box at City Hall, 200 Craig Street, will continue to be monitored for payments or correspondence.