
Request for Decision



To: Council **File No:** 2640 Health and Safety
Meeting Date: April 6, 2020 **Submission Date:** April 2, 2020
From: Peter de Verteuil, CAO
Reviewed By: Paige MacWilliam, Director of Corporate Services
Subject: COVID-19 Update

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council direct staff to waive any 5% late penalties charged on April 30, 2020 for water bills.

BACKGROUND:

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 the virus. The province has given indication that these measures will likely last at least until the end of April 2020 but will likely need to be in place for longer.

ANALYSIS:

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 propose to undertake, the following:

Waive the 5% Penalty for Water Bills due April 30th

On March 16th, 2020, Council passed a resolution to waive the first 5% late penalty for water bills due March 31st, 2020.

Another group of water customers have a water bill due dates of April 30th. Staff recommend also waiving the first 5% penalty for these customers.

Complete Ongoing Public Works Projects

The priority focus at this point is completing the Duncan Street installation of the new water main, and complete the street works if possible. Staff are also planning to conduct the annual water main flushing in the coming weeks. Maintenance of the water and sewer systems are the highest priorities, followed by garbage collection.

Given the new understanding that these social-distancing measures are likely to be in place for some time yet, it may be appropriate to carry out capital projects, particularly street improvements, at a time when businesses will not be impacted and while traffic flow is limited. At the March 31st Special meeting, the following resolution was passed:

That Council direct staff to attempt to complete planned downtown construction projects such as Duncan Street Sidewalk Improvements, and Government/Kenneth Intersection Improvements while most downtown businesses are shut down due to COVID-19;

And that downtown construction projects that cannot be substantially completed while businesses are shut down be deferred to allow for recovery time for downtown businesses.

Staff are now preparing work plans and will be consulting with impacted property owners at the Government/Kenneth Street intersection.

Review of Economic Aid Package for Businesses

On March 16, 2020 Council passed the following resolution:

That Council direct staff to review the federal economic aid package and discuss the sufficiency of the package with the DDBIA in order to provide feedback and recommendations to the federal government.

As details are still being released on the supports for the business community, these discussions have not yet taken place. Staff have a scheduled meeting on Tuesday April 7th with the CVRD Economic Development Officer and staff from the DDBIA to discuss currently available information.

Increase Bylaw Patrol Shifts

Bylaw Enforcement Patrols have increased to provide additional evening security for the businesses who may begin to curtail their hours, and additional staff have been brought onboard to accommodate the extra shifts. The City is working with Blackbird for increased nighttime patrols within the added budget approved by Council on March 16th, 2020, and has agreed to cost sharing with the DDBIA as they have committed extra funding for night time patrols of the downtown.

Bylaw Enforcement Officers have been granted the authority to support BC Health Authorities in monitoring for compliance with Orders of the Provincial Health Officer by helping to minimize community spread of COVID-19. Our role is to respond to complaints received from the public. Our staff are expected to use education in initial contact with members of the public, provide formal warnings at our discretion, and coordinate with Health Officers to provide enforcement as required.

Public Washrooms Remain Open

Some municipalities in the province have closed public washrooms, while others have kept them open. The City has kept the public washrooms open, with additional cleanings by the janitors per day. McAdam Park, Centennial Park, and Canada Avenue washrooms are each being cleaned 4 times per day. On March 31st the City received direction from Island Health that since public washrooms were defined as non-health essential services for unsheltered persons, that they expect public washrooms in parks and public spaces will remain open.

Public Access Closures

City Hall and Public Works were closed to the public at the end of day March 17th. People are advised that they can conduct their business with the City online or over the phone. In the rare event that business must be done face-to-face (e.g. limited building inspection), members of the public are required to make an appointment with the relevant staff person.

All recreation facilities in the valley closed their doors on March 16th or 17th.

Similar to other jurisdictions, City playgrounds were closed March 21st with signage, and subsequently with caution tape.

Public Attendance at Meetings Restricted and Committee Meetings Cancelled

A Special meeting of Council took place using Zoom video conferencing on March 31st. Because that format was successful, the regularly scheduled meetings on April 6th and April 20th will proceed using Zoom. Additional Special meetings will be scheduled to take place electronically, as needed.

A special emergency minister's order has removed the requirement to provide the public with the opportunity hear, or watch and hear, the meeting; however, staff have arranged to have video conference meetings live-streamed on YouTube. Questions regarding agenda items can be submitted to the Director of Corporate Services in advance of the meeting, to be addressed during question period.

Cancel Public Events at City Owned Facilities

As public gatherings over 50 people are not permitted, staff worked with the DDBIA to cancel all events planned for City Square, except the Farmers' Market (see below). Facility Use Agreements for events in City Parks, and Street Closure Permits, have been cancelled to the end of April, and May events will be considered for cancellation early in April. Fees will be reimbursed.

Farmers Market

After initially considering closure of the Farmers' Market, in consultation with the Cowichan Medical Health Officer, other Island Health officers, and others, staff allowed the Farmers Market to continue in an extremely limited fashion (no more than 20 food only vendors). The City has received limited negative feedback about this, but staff continue to maintain and message that with appropriate measures in place, Farmers' Markets are an essential service just like grocery stores. Most complainants were not aware of the limited nature of the reduced market operation and are more comfortable with its continued operation as an essential service once this is explained.

Essential Services

On March 16th, Council approved the following essential services:

- Protective Services;
- Water and Sewer Utilities;
- Emergency Management/REOC;

- Garbage Collection;
- Financial Services;
- Communications; and
- Governance and Administration.

In addition, minimal mowing of parks and sports fields is required in order to ensure that they do not grow to a point where subsequent mowing will result in long term damage.

IMPLICATIONS:

- Financial:** Unknown at this time.
- Policy/Legislation:** Community Charter Section 128
- Strategic Priority:** Maintain and upgrade water, sewer, and storm sewer infrastructure
- Sustainability:** N/A
- Communication:** Information will continue to be issued in collaboration with CVRD and member municipalities as best as possible, advising the public of service levels.
- Staffing Implications:** The City’s first priority is to support staff.

ALTERNATE OPTION:

None.

APPENDICES:

None.