
Request for Decision



To: Mayor and Council **File No:** 2640 Health and Safety
Meeting Date: April 20, 2020 **Submission Date:** April 15, 2020
From: Peter de Verteuil, CAO
Reviewed By: Paige MacWilliam, Director of Corporate Services
Subject: COVID-19 Update

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council receive the April 20, 2020 update from the Chief Administrative Officer regarding the City's various measures and amendments in response to COVID-19;

And That Council direct staff to continue the increased night-time security patrols up to the end of June 2020, with an additional budget of up to \$10,000 to come from the policing reserves fund.

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.

While a great many businesses are impacted or closed due to COVID-19, many are able to continue to operate so long as physical distancing and other measures can be implemented to protect employees and the public. Municipal operations fall into the latter:

- Public Works is operating with protective measures in place in order to maintain City roads, garbage collection, water and sewer services, and attempt to keep construction projects on track while many businesses have reduced operations and there is less traffic on the roads.
- Engineering is working primarily from home, including working on designs for the next round of capital projects
- Planning and Building inspection are operating remotely or with extremely limited on site visits.
- Bylaw enforcement staff are working extra to provide evening and night-time patrols.
- Administration and Finance continue to support the work of other staff and of Council, and communicate with the Regional Emergency Operations Centre.
- The City will be continuing with the normal programs of downtown beautification such as flower baskets, planting flower beds and other City maintenance projects such as line painting and sidewalk repairs. Items like flower baskets were already ordered long ago, and we want our City to be as ready as possible for when the restrictions are eventually lifted; likely incrementally in the coming months.
- Our staff are faithfully practicing physical distancing to be able to keep everything operational and ready for when things return to normal, which they certainly are not right now.

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:

Waived the 5% Penalties for Water Bills due March 31st and April 30th

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

On April 6th, 2020, Council passed a resolution to waive the 5% late penalties charged on April 30th, 2020.

If these conditions continue, staff will provide Council the opportunity to consider waiving future water bill late payment penalties before they’re applied.

Waived Parking Fees for April and May

April 6th, 2020, Council passed a resolution to waive fees for the paid parking spaces for April and May, 2020 to support businesses that remain open during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Neighbourhood COVID Watch program

As Cowichan Community Policing did not have staffing capacity to deal with an interest by residents to sign up for Neighbourhood Watch in these difficult times. Council members worked on a temporary City initiative establish a parallel program called Neighbourhood COVID Watch, with the assistance of the chair of Cowichan Community Policing, until they are able to reengage.

Mayor’s COVID-19 Vulnerable Population Cowichan Task Force

Cowichan Housing Association is facilitating this group to create a local plan for application to BC Housing for funding to support the homeless during the COVID-19 pandemic. This group continues to meet and work with BC Housing and Island Health to create a local, workable solution. Announcements are hoped for in the coming days.

Mayor’s COVID-19 Food Security Task Force

Cowichan Green Community is facilitating an ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic, by coordinating resources for organizations providing food to people in need, and supports to those organizations, to ensure that everyone is being fed.

Complete Ongoing Public Works Projects

The priority focus at this point continues to be completing the Duncan Street installation of the new water main and complete the street works. Staff are also conduct the annual water main flushing from April 14 – May 8, 2020. Maintenance of the water and sewer systems are the highest priorities, followed by garbage collection.

Given the understanding that these social-distancing measures are likely to be in place for some time yet, Council resolved to move forward with downtown capital projects, particularly street

improvements, at a time when businesses will not be impacted and while traffic flow is limited. Staff are now preparing work plans and will be consulting with impacted property owners for potential early or phased construction of planned downtown capital projects in the financial plan.

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.

Staff met on Tuesday April 7th to discuss the available business supports at that time with the CVRD Economic Development Officer and staff from the DDBIA. The City has subsequently suggested that the Province consider a business rent supplement similar to the residential rent support program that was announced, and also that the Province consider implementing a COVID-19 tax deferral option for residents and for commercial property owners.

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. On March 16th, 2020, Council passed the following resolution:

That Council direct staff to increase night-time security patrols with a budget of up to \$20,000 for two months, to come from the policing reserves fund.

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 nighttime patrols of the downtown. At this time, staff are seeking Council's direction on continuing nighttime patrols with Blackbird until the end of June.

In addition, Bylaw Enforcement Officers have been directed by the Province 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, Park Gates Closed

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.

City parks remain open and people are reminded to maintain social distancing; however, on April 9th, in advance of the Easter long weekend, the City closed the gates to McAdam and Centennial Parks to dissuade travel from other areas of the community, and reduce general crowding. With the continuation of the good weather, these gates remain closed at this time.

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 May 15th. Events later in May will be considered for cancellation before the end of April. Fees will be reimbursed.

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 (limited to 20 food and farm produce vendors). As of April 11th, 2020, the market has moved onto Ingram Street to provide more space for social distancing measures and to permit up to 32 food and farm produce vendors to participate, while still spaced 10 feet apart. The vendors are still limited to those that are permitted by the BC Centre for Disease and Control, farmers, primary food producers, and vendors selling food plant starts only (no flowers).

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.