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# Request for Decision



**To:** Mayor and Council **File No:** 2640 Health and Safety  
**Meeting Date:** May 19, 2020 **Submission Date:** May 14, 2020  
**From:** Peter de Verteuil, CAO  
**Reviewed By:** Paige MacWilliam, Director of Corporate Services  
**Subject:** COVID-19 Update

## RECOMMENDATION:

1. **That Council receive the May 19, 2020 update from the Chief Administrative Officer regarding the City's various measures and amendments in response to COVID-19.**
2. **That Council direct staff to waive fees for the paid parking spaces for June 2020 to support the businesses that remain open or are re-opening during the COVID-19 pandemic.**
3. **That Council direct staff to waive the late penalty for water bills due May 31st, 2020.**

## 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 announced the Restart Plan, with phase 2 starting on May 19, 2020. Under enhanced protocols, many businesses and services will be restored:

- elective surgeries,
- medical specialist services (Dentistry, physiotherapy, registered massage therapy, and chiropractors, physical therapy, speech therapy, etc.)
- retail sector,
- personal services (including hair salons and barber shops),
- in-person counselling,
- restaurants, cafes, pubs,
- museums, art galleries, libraries,
- office-based worksites,
- recreation and sports,
- parks, beaches and outdoor spaces, child care

In the coming months, if transmission rates remain low or in decline, under enhanced protocols, phase 3 of the Restart Plan will be implemented.

While a great many businesses are impacted or closed due to COVID-19, municipal operations were able to continue with physical distancing and other measures in place.

**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 proposes to undertake, the following:

***COVID-19 Special Edition Beneath the Clocktower Newsletter***

As directed by Council, a special edition of the City’s newsletter, which focused specifically on the City’s response to COVID-19, was printed and distributed throughout the City last week. An electronic copy is also available on the City’s website.

***City Summer Students will be working this summer***

With the City’s very small crew, we heavily rely on summer students from May to September. Summer time is when a lot happens. Everything continues to grow and a great many projects and regular maintenance gets completed.

In particular, the City’s 4 students (1 on maintenance and 3 on parks) are critical to supplement the City’s 3 person parks crew

***Reduced tax increase from 3.16% to 2.51%***

Council approved the 2020 budget, which reduced the tax increase from 3.16% to 2.51%.

***Extension of the 2020 Tax Penalty Dates***

Council amended the tax penalty date bylaw to mirror the provincial change for all taxpayers, while keeping the City's normal modified 5% and 5% penalty charges. This means the 2020 due date will be July 2nd, the first penalty date will be 5% on October 1st for all outstanding amounts after September 30th, and the second penalty date will be 5% on November 1st for all outstanding amounts after October 31st. The due date will remain as July 2<sup>nd</sup> to encourage those that can pay to do so, because if everyone holds off payment it could significantly impact the City’s cash flows.

***Waived the 5% Penalties for Water Bills due March 31<sup>st</sup> and April 30<sup>th</sup>***

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

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

Staff are recommending waiving the penalties for bills due May 31st, 2020.

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

### ***Waived Parking Fees for April and May***

On 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.

Staff are recommending waiving fees for paid parking spaces for June 2020 to support businesses that are returning to normal operations.

### ***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 to establish a parallel program called Neighbourhood COVID Watch, with the assistance of the chair of Cowichan Community Policing, until they are able to reengage.

### ***COVID-19 Vulnerable Population Cowichan Task Force***

Cowichan Housing Association was asked to facilitate 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.

City Parks are not included in the plan for use as tenting sites other than what is already permitted in the City's bylaws to comply with case law in recent years. <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 Against Violence's Night Shelter, which closed due to Covid-19 related staffing constraints. Cowichan Women Against Violence Society is administering the site.

Additional tenting sites have been identified, one in North Cowichan at Fuller Lake Arena, and one in Ladysmith on Buller Street. Additional tenting sites will be announced in the coming days.

### ***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 has been completing the Duncan Street installation of the new water main and completion of the street works, which are nearing completion. Staff are also conducting the annual water main flushing from April 14 – May 29, 2020. Maintenance of the water and sewer systems are the highest priorities, followed by garbage collection.

### ***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. The cost of the downtown patrols is shared with the DDBIA and the cost of the highway corridor patrols are being shared with North Cowichan. These patrols will continue 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 Opening May 19<sup>th</sup>***

With funding from Emergency Management BC (EMBC), 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. In addition, the City has EMBC funding to keep the Canada Avenue washrooms open 24/7 with additional security and janitorial for the month of May and June. This commenced on May 10<sup>th</sup>.

City parks remain open and people are reminded to maintain social distancing; however, on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 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.

NOTE: With Provincial parks opening for the long weekend to allow trail access, the City will be reopening the McAdam and Centennial Park gates effective May 19<sup>th</sup>, to allow access to the parking lots. However, if overcrowding or issues with social distancing are experienced, the City may revert to closing the parking lot gates.

### ***Public Access Closures***

City Hall and Public Works were closed to the public at the end of day March 17<sup>th</sup>. 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.

NOTE: City Hall is working to implement additional physical barriers and sanitization protocols with a goal to facilitate a limited reopening to the public on June 1<sup>st</sup> for acceptance of tax payments.

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

Similar to other jurisdictions, City playgrounds were closed March 21<sup>st</sup> with signage, and subsequently with caution tape. These will remain closed until further notice as sanitization of the equipment remains a challenge.

***Public Attendance at Meetings Restricted and Committee Meetings Cancelled***

Council meetings are taking place using Zoom video conferencing.

A special emergency minister’s order has removed the requirement to provide the public with the opportunity to 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 of 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 31<sup>st</sup>. Events in June will be considered for cancellation before the end of May. Fees will be reimbursed.

***Farmers’ Market***

In consultation with the Cowichan Medical Health Officer, other Island Health officers, and others, staff allowed the Farmer’s Market to continue in an extremely limited fashion. Vendors are spaced 10 feet apart, and hand washing stations are provided. The vendors are 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).

**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 while maintaining service levels.

**ALTERNATE OPTION:**

None.

**APPENDICES:**

None.