



Staff Report

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Report To: General Government Committee

Date of Meeting: October 19, 2020

Report Number: CAO-020-20

Reviewed By: Andrew C. Allison, CAO

Resolution#:

File Number:

By-law Number:

Report Subject: Clarington Response to COVID-19

Recommendation:

1. That Report CAO-020-20 be received for information.

Report Overview

This report outlines how the Municipality responded to the global COVID-19 pandemic, including actions taken to adhere to any Provincial and Federal decisions which impacted Clarington's operations. Since the beginning of the outbreak, COVID-19 has been fast-moving, forcing governments at all levels to pivot in response, alter operations and implement existing emergency pandemic plans. The report outlines a timeline of Municipal responses from March, the start of pandemic-related emergency measures, until September. It outlines Municipal closures of facilities, how Clarington maintained its operations during the height of the lockdown, and how the Municipality has gradually reopened.

1. Background

Setting the stage for the COVID-19 outbreak in Canada, Ontario and Clarington

- 1.1 What we now call COVID-19 started in Hubei Province in China as an unknown mystery disease. Chinese authorities alerted the World Health Organization (WHO) of this disease on December 31, 2019. On January 30, 2020, the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, and on March 11, 2020, it was declared as a global pandemic.
- 1.2 The first reported case of COVID-19 in Canada was on January 25, 2020, in a Toronto man who had just returned from Wuhan, China. By the end of January, travellers from Wuhan had seeded outbreaks in more than 30 cities in 26 countries. In response, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. David Williams, said that patients exhibiting symptoms who recently travelled would be tested and subject to a 14-day quarantine, which correlates with the maximum incubation period for the virus. People who showed symptoms were told to self-isolate.
- 1.3 In the first ten days of March, Canadian cases continued to climb as travellers began to return from other global hotspots already infected with COVID-19. With March Break looming in Ontario and thousands of families travelling abroad, the Provincial government announced on March 12, 2020, that all publicly funded schools in Ontario would close for two weeks following March Break. This was intended to allow Ontarians travelling for a vacation to return and self-isolate for 14 days. Correspondingly, on March 14, 2020, Foreign Affairs Canada issued a statement recommending against all international travel and advising Canadians returning from abroad to self-isolate for 14 days.
- 1.4 Other than references to COVID-related financial incentives approved by Council, this report does not address the financial impacts of the pandemic. Those impacts are discussed in Report FND-035-20.

2. Municipality of Clarington responds to Public Health Crisis

Actions taken in March – COVID-19 closures

- 2.1 On the morning of March 13, 2020, a meeting of the Municipal Control Group was convened. The Control Group consists of the Mayor, the Community Management Emergency Coordinator (Fire Chief Weir), the CAO, Department Heads and the Communications Manager. This group is tasked with ensuring that the provisions of our Municipal Emergency Plan are carried out. Each member of the Control Group has a role to play in an emergency to ensure Clarington's Plan is executed.
- 2.2 The Control Group began analyzing the current status of the pandemic, its impact on public health and Municipal operations. From the outset, it became evident that the Municipality needed to take decisive action to protect public health. The Municipal Emergency Plan was consulted, specifically Annex V, which outlines business continuity in the event of a pandemic.
- 2.3 A Special Council Meeting was convened to apprise Council of the situation. The meeting was held on March 13 in the afternoon. Through Report [CAO-010-20](#), Council was advised that Clarington administration would [close all recreation facilities to the public](#) and cancel March Break camps, facility rentals and drop-in programs, effective 11:59 p.m. on March 13. At the conclusion of the meeting, Councillors gave the Mayor the authority to cancel or reschedule Committee and Council meetings as necessary. It's important to note that the Municipality decided to close its facilities to the public ahead of the Provincial order to close recreational programs issued on March 16. The following day, on March 17, the Province of Ontario declared an emergency. Following that declaration, the Province quickly began to close non-essential businesses and asked people to stay home to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This was the beginning of a Province-wide lockdown to stop the spread of the virus.
- 2.4 From that initial decision to close recreation facilities, the situation shifted and began to change very quickly. On March 16, Clarington closed the remainder of its buildings and facilities to the public. The following day, the Municipality released a list of public services that would continue to be offered during the building closure. On March 17, the Control Group also established protocols in the event a resident needed to come in and access a service urgently. They would need to book an appointment ahead of time and answer pre-screening questions. That same day, the Control Group established health and safety protocols to protect staff working in the community and Municipal buildings.
- 2.5 The Control Group held daily meetings during the first several weeks following the Provincial decision to close schools. Internally, discussions turned to physical distancing and implementing work-from-home procedures for staff who were able to fulfil their duties remotely. A work-from-home agreement was implemented on March 18, and for the following three weeks until April 9, Clarington's Information Technology Division had multiple staff members on-call from 7 a.m. until 11 p.m., supporting staff needs to set up

and work from home. For those staff members unable to work from home, the Municipality established flex hours. Internally, in the Municipal Administrative Centre and other facilities, workstations were moved around to create physical distancing for those employees working in the office. Departments also established rotating staffing schedules and some flexibility in shifts while maintaining core office hours. Clarington's Human Resources Division worked closely with the Control Group to develop protocols for COVID-19 illness and requirements for staff returning from travelling abroad.

- 2.6 On March 23, Council met with some members participating electronically using teleconference for the first time during the pandemic. This was done in accordance with the Provincial order issued on March 19, allowing municipalities to hold Council, local board and committee meetings electronically. During the meeting, Council approved a staff report, [FND-007-20](#), that would provide property tax relief for residents during COVID-19. Essentially, [Council waived tax penalties and interest for 60 days](#) for May and June. During that meeting, Council also temporarily transferred legislative authority to the Mayor to help expedite any critical municipal decisions required during the pandemic as outlined in report [CAO-011-20](#). To date, the Mayor has not been required to exercise any of the authority delegated to him on March 23.
- 2.7 Simultaneously, while responding to the Provincial emergency and making key operational decisions, Department Heads were creating business continuity plans for their work units, analyzing which services were critical and should continue. Department Heads also created a list of work duties and jobs for potential redeployment opportunities. On March 23, the Province released a list of all non-essential businesses, which excluded municipalities. Based on the available information, Clarington took a cautious approach recognizing that Municipal work still needed to proceed with robust safety precautions. With the Provincially mandated closure of recreation facilities, the Municipality made the difficult decision to place 339 part-time staff members working predominantly in the Community Services Department on Declared Emergency Leave (DEL). The Province passed legislation on March 19 for job-protected leave ensuring people had a job to return to once pandemic restrictions started to ease.
- 2.8 On March 20, the [Municipality closed all playground equipment and structures](#). On March 27, the Municipality also closed all leash-free dog parks. And on March 30, Clarington cancelled all spring recreation programs and sports facility permits.
- 2.9 On March 27, the Province issued a [ministerial designation under the Provincial Offences Act](#) authorizing Municipal Law Enforcement Officers (MLEO) to assist police in enforcing the Provincial emergency orders. Consequently, Clarington's Municipal Law Enforcement Division reached out to Durham Regional Police Services (DRPS) and other area municipalities to develop cooperative enforcement protocols. Simultaneously, as more people stayed home, calls to By-law Enforcement increased, most were parking complaints.

Actions taken in April

- 2.10 April was an equally busy time as the Municipality continued to shift with the turning tide of COVID-19 and the building list of restrictions during the lockdown period. On April 1, [Clarington declared a local state of emergency](#) that provided the Mayor with some additional powers (none of which have been exercised to date).
- 2.11 As of April 3, the coordinated enforcement of provincial emergency orders between MLEO and DRPS was well underway. Also, at this time, staff were working with local groups to determine if/how regularly scheduled festivals could proceed. On April 6, Clarington decided to allow advisory committees to continue with their scheduled meetings using teleconference or other meeting technology such as Microsoft Teams. The advisory committees had to implement a Clerk-approved protocol to ensure meeting openness and accessibility to the public. On April 8, Department Heads identified redeployment opportunities for office staff who previously supported services suspended by the Provincial orders.
- 2.12 Many Municipal services and operations, including tendering for projects, continued in a modified way. The projects that fit within Provincial regulations and adhered to safety guidelines moved forward to help facilitate economic stability. On April 14, Council received Report [CAO-012-20](#) which outlined the Municipality's Business Continuity Plans. On the same day, the Municipality closed its boat launches.
- 2.13 On April 20, [the Municipality cancelled its Canada Day event](#). While fishing continued in Clarington, many other municipalities were closed to avid anglers. The Municipality developed a communications campaign promoting safe local fishing. Simultaneously Clarington dispatched MLEOs to the area to discourage people from outside Clarington coming to fish.

Actions taken in May – gradual reopening

- 2.14 In May, we saw a gradual easing of Provincial restrictions, with Ontario entering Stage 1 of reopening on May 19. During this stage, retail stores with a street entrance could provide curbside pickup and delivery, as well as in-store payments and purchases at garden centres, nurseries, hardware stores, and safety supply stores. To support this gradual reopening, [Clarington Tourism set up a campaign to encourage residents to shop locally](#). With these amended orders, Clarington also reopened its community gardens, and on May 19, the Municipality reopened its leash-free dog parks. The following day, on May 20, Clarington reopened its tennis courts. At the same time, the Municipality made the difficult decision to cancel summer camps and indoor facility permits until June 28.
- 2.15 With the closure of our recreation facilities, the Community Services Department redeployed 16 full-time facility staff to Operations (now Public Works) to assist with road maintenance, forestry, horticulture and cemetery operations. Help in these areas during

the spring and summer months is normally provided by seasonal and student employees.

- 2.16 On May 25, Council received Report [CAO-015-20](#) which provided an update to the Municipality's COVID-19 business continuity planning.

Actions taken in June, July and August – continued reopening

- 2.17 June saw a continued move to loosen restrictions. With warm weather and more people seeking refuge outside, on June 9, Clarington launched a campaign about safe beach use promoting open spaces and urging residents to follow the rules, including physical distancing. During that time, while other municipalities across the Greater Toronto Area closed their beaches, Clarington experienced crowding at our beaches. Staff from Municipal Law Enforcement, Operations and Fire Services worked together to ensure that visitors were safe and to minimize the impact on area residents.
- 2.18 The Municipality also shared its plan for a different kind of [Canada Day celebration](#), launching a celebration kit to mark Canada's Birthday during pandemic times with a slogan: "together but apart." These celebration kits were put together with family-friendly items and an activity booklet with ideas for fun games, crafts, and snacks to help promote a physically distant celebration. Residents could pre-register to pick up a kit. The kits were launched on Friday, June 5, and within four hours Clarington ran out of the first 1,000. As a result, another 1,000 kits were secured and available to the public as of June 8. Within 48 hours, that batch was spoken for. Clarington also partnered with the Region of Durham and the other local municipalities to promote a pre-recorded Region-wide video celebration.
- 2.19 On June 15, Clarington Tourism launched an [online Business and Attractions Directory](#) based on the advice and input received from its Tourism Advisory Committee. The directory contains up-to-date information on what businesses and attractions are open so that residents can rediscover their community. Following the path to a gradual reopening, on June 19, the Region of Durham entered Stage 2 of Ontario's reopening framework. The Municipality was prepared for this, and that very same day, [Clarington unveiled its plan for a cautious reopening](#). The plan listed in detail which services and amenities would reopen including splash pads, modified summer camps, and the Municipal Administrative Centre.
- 2.20 Undoubtedly, throughout all the changes, COVID-19 had a dire impact on a lot of Clarington residents and businesses. Recognizing the need for financial support, during a meeting on June 22, [Council passed an unprecedented COVID-19 financial support package for taxpayers and businesses](#). Details of the financial support package are outlined in [Report FND-018-20](#). The support package totalled \$2 million, with \$1 million dedicated to a temporary property tax relief program for those residents whose taxes prove to be "unduly burdensome." The remaining \$1 million was dedicated to the development of a Community Improvement Plan to help qualifying businesses who had to implement safety improvements as directed by Public Health to reopen safely during

COVID-19. Through Report [FND-018-20](#), Council also approved a Community COVID-19 Support Program, totalling \$100,000; as well as rent relief for Community Agencies renting space in Municipal buildings. Attachments 1 and 2 are memos from the CAO to the Mayor and Council, dated September 21, 2020, which describe how these funds were allocated amongst our community organizations.

- 2.21 July was a busy month across Durham and in Clarington. On July 6, Durham Public Health made non-medical masks and face coverings mandatory in indoor places. To prepare for reopening, Clarington also developed a [Municipal COVID-19 Recovery and Reopening Plan](#), which was shared with all staff. The plan provides a framework and guides Municipal operations throughout the stages of the Provincial reopening. It outlines guidelines for a safe return to the workplace; it contains a workplace assessment plan; as well as the formal work-from-home agreement.
- 2.22 On July 13, Clarington reopened the Municipal Administrative Centre to the public, with strict safety protocols in place. The Municipality moved quickly to implement safety protocols as mandated by Public Health to reopen many of its services to the public throughout July, as outlined below:
- July 15 - [Municipal Law Enforcement Office reopened to the public](#), (announced to the public on July 13)
 - July 20 - [Clarington resumed its modified summer camps](#)
 - July 24 – [Clarington reopened the Orono outdoor pool](#)
 - July 24 – [Clarington reopens its playgrounds and allows field permits to be issued](#) (announced to the public on July 23)
 - July 29 – In collaboration with Lakeridge Health, [Clarington opens a COVID-19 testing site](#) at Garnet B. Rickard Recreation Complex
 - Throughout July and August, staff in planning held virtual focus groups and consulted local businesses in the development of the COVID-19 Community Improvement Plan (CIP).
- 2.23 On July 3, the Province amended its emergency orders to allow restaurants to extend their patios fast-tracking the Municipal approval process and eliminating red tape. Staff in both Planning and Engineering contacted all restaurants that had the potential to expand and assisted with setting up both private outdoor patios and on-street outdoor patios.
- 2.24 Also, in July, during Council summer recess, staff in the Clerk's Department began working on a long-term solution for remote participation in Council and Committee meetings to prepare for a September start.

- 2.25 In August, the Municipality continued to reopen services. On August 4, the South Courtice Arena reopened one ice pad for rentals; while on August 10 the fitness training centre reopened for pre-booked workout time slots. On August 12, Clarington received some good news, as the Province announced the Municipality would get [\\$2.1 million in COVID-19 relief funding](#) as part of the federal-provincial Safe Restart Agreement. At the end of August, Clarington also announced its plan for a staggered start to [fall recreational programming](#).

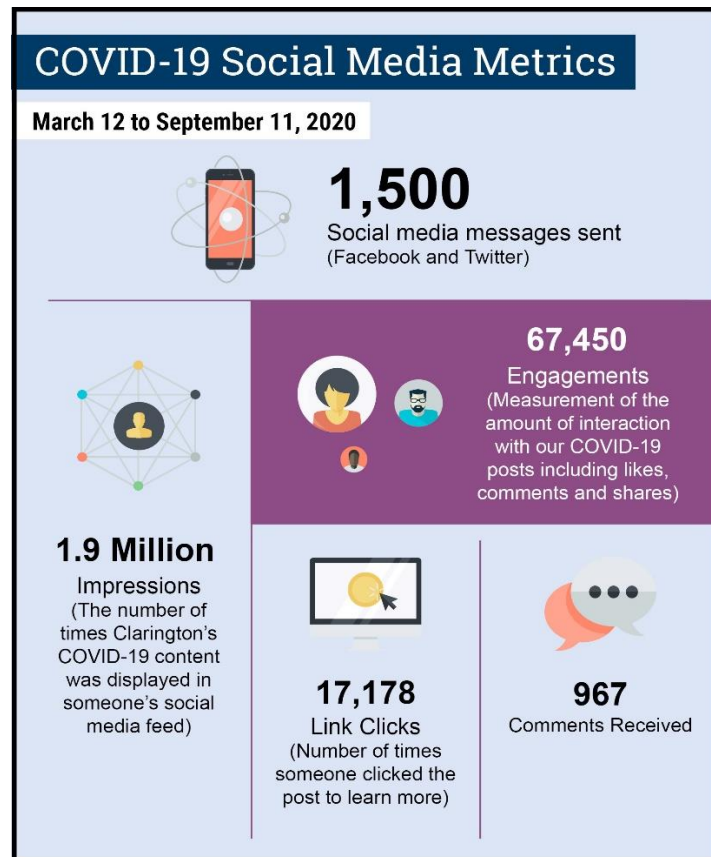
Actions taken in September

- 2.26 In preparation for the September 14 Committee meeting, staff in the Clerk's Department integrated the Microsoft Teams system with the sound, display, and the livestream webcasting systems. This new environment allows for flexibility so that members of Council can participate either in person or remotely. While members of the public are not yet permitted to physically attend Committee or Council meetings, this technology will provide presenters and delegations with the flexibility to also participate remotely, or in person.
- 2.27 As the second wave of COVID-19 looms over Ontario, throughout September, the Municipality monitored changes in Provincial legislation in screening protocols, and other safety measures as the virus case count continued to rise. On September 26, the Province amended its COVID-19 screening requirements for employees and essential visitors before they enter the workplace. Clarington staff quickly responded by creating an online application to allow staff to fill out screening questions before they enter the workplace. This information can also be filled out manually. Clarington's existing in-person screening for the public entering our buildings also continues as the Municipality follows all public health protocols.
- 2.28 On September 28, the Municipality held a [Public Meeting](#) to gather feedback for the proposed COVID-19 Community Improvement Plan. A staff report with a proposed plan, guidelines and parameters will be prepared for Council consideration in October.

3. Communications

- 3.1 From the outset of the pandemic in Ontario, the Municipality implemented a robust communications protocol to inform and engage residents as well as internal staff. A dedicated [COVID-19 webpage](#) was developed, which was updated daily during the months of the COVID-19 lockdown until mid-July. Beyond July, the page is now updated as needed. All COVID-19 page updates were also shared on social media and posted to the various Facebook community groups to ensure residents were getting the information needed. From March 12 to September 11, the COVID-19 webpage had 67,523 pageviews, that's 8.4 per cent of views for the entire website during that period. This page alone has nearly 1,000 subscribers. During that time, the Municipality issued 29 formal press releases. Clarington designed social media graphics with safety messaging following WHO, Centre for Disease Control, Health Canada and Public

Health guidance. The interaction and response on our social media accounts is documented in the following infographic:



- 3.2 The Communications Division also prepared numerous collateral materials including posters, facility signage and health and safety messages. Attachment 3, COVID-19 Communications collateral, provides a more detailed description of the amount and types of materials developed. Communications staff were recognized for these graphics created by the Association of Registered Graphic Designers. The work was highlighted in an industry newsletter.
- 3.3 Internally, Communications assisted with messaging developed for staff. An internal SharePoint COVID-19 website was developed with news and resources for staff working both internally and remotely. Communications also provides daily update emails to the Control Group, the Mayor and Council on any COVID-19-related news and developments.
- 3.4 Clarington staff have also reimagined public consultation meetings and advisory committee meetings. During the pandemic, many were held using Microsoft Teams, Zoom or conference calls. The Tourism Advisory Committee met four times during the pandemic, while the Clarington Heritage Committee has held four meetings since April 21. The Agricultural Advisory Committee has met five times since April 9. The work of

the Committee of Adjustment also continues, as the committee has held five meetings since May 7, with a total of 24 minor variances heard in that time. Two more Committee of Adjustment meetings are scheduled in October with 35 minor variances to be considered. The Planning and Development Services Department also held 11 pre-consultation meetings from May 14 to September 17, 2020. The Clerk's Department held several public information meetings using Microsoft Teams regarding the Ward Boundary Review. This is just a snapshot of the engagement that has continued throughout COVID-19.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 This report provides an overview of Clarington's robust response to COVID-19. From the closure of buildings and facilities to maintaining services at the height of the lockdown to a gradual reopening, the Municipality has pivoted and adapted its operations as necessary to respond to the pandemic and all the directives and restrictions imposed by both the Province and Durham Region Health. Clarington has tried to strike a balance, keeping public safety at the forefront while maintaining service levels and allowing residents to access much-needed amenities. Throughout the fall and into winter, Clarington is poised to respond to the second wave of COVID-19 and prepared to pivot as the Province potentially cycles back through its stages of reopening.

Staff Contact: Basia Radomski, Communications Manager.

Attachments:

Attachment 1 – Memo from CAO to Mayor and Members of Council dated September 21, 2020, regarding the Community COVID-19 Support Program

Attachment 2 – Memo from CAO to Mayor and Members of Council dated September 21, 2020, regarding rent relief for Community Agencies

Attachment 3 – COVID-19 Communications Collateral