



SUBJECT: COVID emergency response summary wrap-up
TO: Corporate Services, Strategy, Risk & Accountability Cttee.
FROM: City Manager's Office

Report Number: CM-20-22

Wards Affected: All

File Numbers: 155-03-01

Date to Committee: July 4, 2022

Date to Council: July 12, 2022

Recommendation:

Receive and file city manager's office report CM-20-22 summarizing the city's emergency response actions, decisions and impacts.

PURPOSE:

Vision to Focus Alignment:

- Building more citizen engagement, community health and culture

Background and Discussion:

The COVID-19 pandemic

Province of Ontario

"On March 17, 2020, based on the advice of Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health and other leading public health officials, the Ontario government declared a provincial emergency under s. 7.0.1 (1) of the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* (EMCPA). In doing so, Ontario was able to implement and enforce the necessary emergency orders to protect the health and safety of individuals, families and

communities from the threat of the COVID-19 virus.”¹. These protective measures included closing facilities and order members of the public to stay at home among other measures.

Throughout the ensuing months, the Provincial Government “created orders under s. 7.0.2 and 7.1 of the EMCPA and amended them in consultation with, or based on the advice of, the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the Health Command Table and/or other health experts, based on data, evidence and need.”². These orders were supported by and/or followed by various pieces of legislation including *Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020* (ROA).

Effective January 31, 2022, Ontario began the process of gradually easing restrictions under their Roadmap to Reopen. As of June 11, 2022, all Provincial public health and workplace safety measures are now lifted, with the exception of masking still required in long-term care and retirement homes.

Essentially, the Province has moved away from emergency measures to ongoing operations and has moved away from reliance on mandatory requirements.

City of Burlington

On March 21, 2020, the Mayor declared a state of emergency for Burlington as it worked through the provincial orders in closing City facilities, enabling staff to work from home, redeploying staff as necessary, and continuing to provide essential services to our community. The EMCPA [Sections 4 (1), (2), (4)] provides for the head of council of a municipality (or his or her designate) to declare a state of emergency. While the City had already activated its emergency control group, this declaration heightened the community’s awareness of the severity of the onset and rapid progression of COVID-19.

On April 20, 2020, Council received the City’s COVID-19 Emergency Response Strategy and the High-level financial impacts (CM-03-20). This strategy maintained the City’s focus on the overall goal to continue to protect the health and safety of our community and staff and do our part to limit the spread of COVID-19. It defined the City’s resource needs over the next 3-month operating period to deal with the affects and impacts of the virus on our community and staff. Essentially, it established the scope of work for continued support of:

¹ cited from [Report on Ontario’s Provincial Emergency from March 17, 2020 to July 24, 2020](#).

² Ibid.

- the delivery of essential services,
- the City's emergency operations center,
- our work from home program,
- our flexible workforce for redeployment of resources to assist in other essential areas.

Throughout the spring of 2020, work continued albeit under different conditions given the significant changes the City made to operations to keep the public and employees safe. These changes included the closure of City facilities and park amenities, cancellation of events, and modifications to service delivery in areas such as transit, operations and by-law enforcement.

On May 14, 2020, Council received the City's Service Re-design Strategy (CM-12-20) in anticipation of the Province of Ontario initiating and implementing its staged re-opening. This strategy provided the framework to re-design City services to comply with the provincial and public health guidance and harness the innovative and creative ways staff delivered services since the declaration of the state of emergency. It also defined the governance and decision making guidelines providing greater clarity of responsibility between those decisions made by Council and those decisions made by Burlington Leadership Team/Emergency Control Group/Service Lead. Overall, the guidelines proved highly effective and were followed closely in delineating and aligning the ongoing Council and staff level decision making responsibilities. Refer Appendix A for details of the guidelines.

In September 2020, City of Burlington Council approved Annex 8 to the City of Burlington's Emergency and Continuity Management Program (By-law 046-2019 as amended 076-2020). This amendment established 8 criteria to assist the Mayor/Council in determining if/when an existing state of emergency should be terminated. Of these criteria, two are excluded from pandemic situations; specifically, #2 and #8.

Since March 2020 and up to current day, Burlington's City Council continued to be responsible for overall governance of the City and strategic decisions. Emergency-related and time-sensitive decisions required on a daily, and sometimes hourly basis, and related primarily to operational issues were managed by the City's Emergency Control Group and/or the Burlington Leadership Team, in keeping with the governance and decision-making guidelines.

On March 22, 2022, City of Burlington terminated its state of emergency and downgraded its Emergency Control Group to its Crisis Management Team for continued emergency response oversight. On May 30, 2022, the Crisis Management Team officially downgraded to a Level 1 – Enhanced Monitoring Activation – reflecting normal operations.

Region of Halton and Municipalities

Subsequent to Burlington's declaration, the Regional Chair for Halton Region declared a state of emergency on March 23, 2020, and the mayors of the Halton municipalities of Halton Hills, Oakville and Milton declared their states of emergency on March 24, 2020.

Termination of these states of emergency occurred as follows:

- The Region of Halton and Oakville on March 11, 2022
- Milton on March 14, 2022 and
- Halton Hills on March 21, 2022.

Strategy/process

Overall

From the early days of the pandemic to current day, City of Burlington Council, management and staff worked to achieve our emergency response goal:

Continue to protect the health and safety of our community and staff and do our part to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Our emergency response strategy outlined the guiding principles City management and staff would always consider:

- Staff health and safety will be paramount in continuing operations.
- We will continue to support our remote work from home program.
- We will build flexibility into our workforce to support redeployment of qualified staff to respond to additional emergency situations and urgent services.
- We will be fiscally responsible in our decisions.
- We will maintain open and transparent communications.
- We will regularly report to Council.
- Services responding to an emergency or urgent situation will be a priority.
- Full-time employees will continue to work in capacities to support our designated categories of service, support the emergency control group, and/or support re-deployment of resources.
- Compliance with changes and amendments to provincial and federal regulations.

In doing so, all our actions and decisions were documented and tracked to ensure our impacts were minimized and, where possible, recovery of financial impacts could be secured through federal and provincial safe re-start funding.

Overall, the City's commitment to regular business meeting cycles at both the Council and staff level was exceptional and a major contributing factor to maintaining a high level of public confidence and achieving the overall goal outlined above.

Emergency Operations Centre/Crisis Management Team

In early February 2020, prior to the WHO declaration of a global pandemic, the City formed a taskforce to assess and adjust health and safety protocols including enhanced cleaning, sanitization and physical distancing in our services. This taskforce rolled into the Crisis Management Team (CMT) on March 13, 2020 and, subsequently, into the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), effective March 17, 2020. From this date to May 2022, the EOC/CMT met, as required, commensurate with the declared level of the response.

For the duration of 2020, EOC met daily to assess, monitor and make operating decisions. In 2021, the EOC met twice a week and, in 2022, met daily, twice-weekly, and weekly meetings as needed dependent on the severity of the situation. In May 2022, the EOC/CMT formally stood down after meeting over 270 times since March 13, 2020. The City's leadership team continues to monitor and assess as the COVID pandemic variants continue.

COVID Verbal Updates

Beginning in April 2020 and continuing up to July 2022, Council received 27 monthly updates from staff. These updates, in presentation form to ensure information was duly captured as part of the public record, shared information about the financial, operational and economic impact of the pandemic on our operations. Through these updates, we set a pace and cadence to keep our Council and our community informed of the ever-changing legislative and regulatory landscape and the effects on our operations.

Through the COVID verbal updates, services reported the impact on programming, service levels, staffing and facility operations. As the City continues to monitor the path of the COVID pandemic, the COVID verbal updates focus on the continued financial impact.

Service Re-design Decisions

City leadership developed a responsive and highly measured approach to resuming delivery of City services and operations considering the Province's direction for continued protections for vulnerable populations and continued practice of physical distancing, hand washing, respiratory hygiene and significant mitigation plans to limit health risks.

Throughout the pandemic, more so during the latter months of 2020, many of our services sought Council approval or endorsement of decisions stemming from the frequently changing legislative and regulatory landscape. Over 50 reports were included in agendas from April 2020 to March 2022 dealing with decisions related to health and safety of the community and staff, recreation and organized sport programming, transit operations, parks and facility operations, outdoor tents and patios, parking, by-law enforcement, work from home and continued service from facilities, and much more. Refer Appendix B for a graphic of our COVID journey.

From June 2020 to October 2021 as the various openings and closings progressed, Council was provided with weekly “At-a-Glance” summary to identify where services were resuming and the scope of resumption activities.

Special Council Meetings

Within the City’s procedure by-law (31-2021), “a Special Meeting of Council may be held, without notice, to deal with a situation of emergency, disaster or crisis as defined in the City of Burlington Emergency and Continuity Management Program By-law 46-2019, as amended or replaced from time to time, provided that an attempt has been made to reach the members by telephone and/or e-mail at their respective residence and/or place of business. No business except business dealing directly with the emergency, disaster or crisis will be transacted at that meeting.” While there were special council meetings conducted during this state of emergency, this specific provision was used once. On Saturday, April 17, 2021, City of Burlington council convened its meeting without notice.

By-laws

The City, like other municipalities and Halton Region, made decisions to encourage and support health and safety measures. In April 2020, the City enacted its physical distancing to authorize enforcement of 2-meter distancing and a fine penalty for non-compliance. In July 2020, the City enacted its mandatory mask by-law to require the wearing of masks or other face coverings within enclosed spaces open to the public. As with other policies and by-laws, this by-law was reviewed in light of changing situation and, in January 2021, was updated to include enclosed common areas of apartment buildings and condominium buildings. Enforcement of these by-laws was a coordinated effort between Halton Regional Police Services and the City’s Municipal Law Enforcement Officers. These by-laws were repealed with the termination of the City’s state of emergency on March 22, 2022.

In addition, the City enacted a tax relief by-law to support provisional relief of penalty and interest for property taxes and allow for provisional relief of the administration charge for returned payments. The program allowed eligible property owners who are unable to pay property taxes by the regularly scheduled tax due dates, to make payments under a pre-authorized payment plan. Property owners were required to apply for this program and if eligible, would make equal monthly withdrawals to allow for the property taxes to be paid in full by the end of the calendar year. This program was in place for 2020, 2021 and 2022.

Human Resources/Staffing

The impact on human resources was significant as staff found themselves and their families working, living and schooling in ways they had never imagined. The lockdowns, the health and safety concerns, and the work from home situations created

a level of stress and the toll on mental health within our community and within of staff has never been higher.

At the outset of the City's emergency response, the City Manager made a critical operating decision to see full-time employees continue to work in capacities to support our designated categories of service, support the emergency control group, and/or support re-deployment of resources.

Unfortunately, part-time staff, contributing to the delivery of recreation programming, roads, parks and forestry service and transportation service, were laid off as the City's facilities were closed as part of the Province's early orders. The three distinct periods of closing and re-opening played havoc with recruiting and retaining part-time staff to deliver programs and services; a lingering impact as the City has resumed new reality operations.

One of the most difficult decisions of the Burlington Leadership Team was the vaccination policy for staff. This decision required many discussions to understand the breadth and depth of the impact; yet paramount in the decision was the City's overarching goal: continue to protect the health and safety of our community and staff and do our part to limit the spread of COVID-19. As with other policies, the staff vaccination policy is continually reviewed.

There was not one department or service area that did not feel the effects of the openings, closings and multitude of changes. Health and safety policies and protocols, service delivery and other policies were continually reviewed and adapted to the changing legislation and regulations. As time passes and services resume, staff continue to feel the effects of the pandemic.

Technology

For many, this pandemic was an unprecedented situation. Where staff were delivering essential services, their service delivery became more challenging with the necessary protocols in place to protect their health and safety. Where many staff would normally be working within a City facility, they found themselves working from home. This state required a significant uptake of remote connectivity through technology and management and team support for people suddenly working apart.

Information Technology Services quickly helped the City transition from conference calling, to the use of Skype and then to the implementation of the Microsoft Teams platform – the platform currently in use today. Work continues to design and outfit our services for digital delivery and connectivity.

Work from Home/Hybrid Workforce/Future of Work

By the summer of 2020, a working group formed to design and develop a work from home policy and guidelines with interim support structures in place to assist staff in working from home. This interim policy lay the groundwork for the City's hybrid

workforce policy adopted in September 2021. While a taskforce continues to work through the implementation and set up of collaboration and hoteling spaces, the design and development of the vision of the Future of Work is in play. The City's vision for the future takes into consideration the integration of people, space, technology and leadership to create an environment supporting of the needs of the City and the needs of our staff.

Financial Matters:

The full financial impact of the pandemic will not be clear until the end of 2022 and beyond. Through the monthly COVID Verbal updates, the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) provided Council and the community with the current known impact on revenues and expenditures. As safe restart funding became available, the City made two applications and was successful in receiving a total of \$20,495,985; \$14,633,054 under the Operating Pressures stream and \$5,862,931 for Public Transit stream. In 2020 and 2021, \$17,036,441 of the safe restart funding has been used with the remaining \$3,459,544 to be used in 2022.

The COVID pandemic represents one of the most significant financial challenges municipalities have ever faced as a result of the restrictions designed to reduced transmission of the virus within our community.

As the pandemic placed significant strain on the City's budget, the City's Chief Financial Officer implemented two specific programs:

- An expenditure restraint program throughout 2020 and into 2021
- A budget technique to present annual budgets as two budgets in one:
 - Base Budget - The budget was first built under traditional business as usual assumptions with city services adjusting their ongoing base budgets to reflect service efficiencies and standard inflationary pressures offset with "normal" changes to revenues based on fee changes and volumes.
 - COVID Budget - All city services were asked to separately identify one-time budget adjustments required as a result of COVID-19. These adjustments include one-time reductions in budgeted revenues and changes in expenses to recognize temporary service redesign plans required to protect the health and wellbeing of residents, businesses and staff. Finally, services were asked to make further one-time budget adjustments to expenditures reflecting continued travel restrictions and additional savings resulting from remote working such as decreases in professional development given virtual training opportunities, meeting expenses and mileage. The net result of these one-time COVID-19 impacts were shown separately from the ongoing base budget.

Total Financial Impact

As of May 30, the CFO reported the 2022 budget shortfall of \$1,174,602 with a proposed use of \$381,683 from the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve Fund and \$792,919 from the Safe Restart Funding to balance the budget. The City continues to monitor the impact on revenues and expenditures and reporting this to Council and the community through the COVID verbal update.

Climate Implications

The effect of the actions taken by the City as it re-designed services to ensure the continued protection of the health and safety of the Burlington community and City of Burlington staff and to limit the spread of CoVID-19 pandemic resulted in reductions of fossil fuel use and other environmental impacts of facility and vehicle/equipment operations.

In 2020, the City experienced a reduction in consumption of electricity, natural gas, water and fleet fuel in some areas as the lockdowns, reduction in services and remote work took hold. Some areas of operation remained unaffected in their operation by COVID-19, including winter maintenance, street and traffic lighting, and fire stations. As the City experienced the gradual re-openings in 2021, there was a slight increase in the consumption of electricity, natural gas, water and fleet fuel. Details of the overall impact were reported in Corporate Energy & Emissions Management Plan progress report ES-06-22).

Engagement Matters:

Throughout the pandemic, telephone and Teams townhalls were used to engage with City of Burlington staff and the public. The Mayor hosted 12 public townhalls bringing together a panel of community leaders to address the questions and concerns of the audience. The total attendance to all public townhalls was just under 20,000, with an average attendance of 1,698. During these 12 sessions, the panel was able to answer just over 200 questions.

The City Manager hosted 12 staff townhalls to address the questions and concerns of staff as the City responded to and worked through the many openings and closures and changes to legislation. With the support of management, over 100 questions were answered during the townhalls and many more questions were responded to in written format and available to staff on the 360 Burlington site. The average attendance for the staff townhalls was 534 people.

Conclusion:

The City of Burlington has faced emergencies before; yet none with the significant impact on staff and the community. Our new reality is a world with COVID; we have adapted and adopted to working in this environment. Through the efforts and determination of Council and City management and staff, the City of Burlington continued to deliver services. The results of the 2021 community survey revealed a 95% satisfaction rating with the overall quality of services in the City; a testament to City staff's commitment throughout this difficult period.

Respectfully submitted,

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Appendices:

- A. CM-20-22 Appendix A - Governance and Decision-Making
- B. CM-20-22 Appendix B – Our COVID journey

Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Counsel.