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COVID-19 Re-openings Update Information Report to Council

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In accordance with the Procedure By-law, any member of Council may make a request to the Town Clerk that this Report be placed on an upcoming Committee of the Whole agenda for discussion.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to advise Council as to the actions taken to date, provide insight into provincial and public health requirements, and give a sense of overall direction in re-opening and restarting Town of Newmarket facilities and services.

Background

On March 13th, the Town of Newmarket closed all facilities and cancelled all programs in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This decision was precipitated by provincial action – the province determined that schools would remain closed at the conclusion of March Break for what was initially anticipated to be a two week period.

Subsequently, a state of emergency was declared, and the province mandated that non essential services and businesses be closed, and that schools remain closed. This included closure of recreational and cultural facilities, and cancellation of events and programs. This state of emergency also imposed significant restrictions around gathering with individuals outside one's household, social/physical distancing, and isolation.

The Town of Newmarket also declared a state of emergency shortly thereafter. In a municipal context, this declaration provided delegated authority to the Mayor and CAO on a number of issues including strategic personnel decisions and closure and re-opening of services.

These extreme measures have dramatically slowed the spread of Covid-19. While there are still instances of new infections daily both regionally and provincially, the Province has begun implementation of its recovery plan.

The provincial recovery plan identifies three stages, with various amenities, businesses and services identified for opening within each phase. These openings are predicated upon following strict public health measures. Openings are intended to be gradual within each phase – in many cases the public health requirements for opening are released much later than announcements about being able to open. York Region is set to enter stage two on Friday, June 19th.

As the Town responds to the provincial sequencing of openings, decisions have been guided by these principles:

- People first – all of our actions will ensure that our staff, residents and patrons needs and safety are the driving force
- Responsibility – we will strive to ensure that all measures are prudent, placing the safety of those most vulnerable at the forefront, and demonstrate strong fiscal stewardship
- Evidence-informed - emerging scientific knowledge, public health data and consistent measure will inform our actions
- Clarity – our actions will be clear and well communicated
- Flexibility – we will adapt to changing information and be responsive to the advice and direction of all levels of government
- Courage and Creativity – demonstrate these traits as municipal leaders who serve as a model to other municipalities, while balancing strong commitment to provincial directives and best practices developed by our colleagues

Re-opening has proven to be extremely complex. There has been significant confusion across the province with what is and is not open, and what public health measures are required. This coupled with a long period of family or individual isolation is leading many to disregard important public health measures, or even believe that the pandemic is over.

While we navigate these difficult times, there are three key themes that are emerging as critical: public health and safety; mental health and wellbeing of residents and staff; and fiscal stewardship in a time where residents are struggling financially. Opinions will vary as to which theme is of most importance. All three factors are significant and must be carefully considered with each direction taken.

Discussion

This report helps aim to provide some clarity about what municipal facilities and services are permitted and which are not, about public health requirements that have been

established, and how the Town has responded to date. Please note that the fundamental public health measures in place for ALL openings include: social/physical distancing of 6 feet is required at all times; social gatherings of a maximum of 10 people (as of June 18th, 2020) only.

Farmers Market

Farmers Markets were permitted to operate as part of stage 1 of the provincial reopening framework. The Newmarket Farmer's Market chose to open initially as a preorder drive through market as the public health requirements were less strict. They are now transitioning to a walk through market beginning on Saturday, June 20th.

Public Health/Provincial Requirements:

- Must have a separate entrance and exit; traffic flow that is one-way
- Must maintain physical distancing (2m or 6 ft) throughout the market; capacity limit must be set with a controlled entrance - the Newmarket Farmer's Market is currently approved for a capacity of 30 people within the fenced area
- Must have physical distancing spots marked out for a vendor that has a line up; vendors must be set up with displays behind them so customer's point to the product; must be space for customer's to line-up while maintaining physical distancing to enter the market
- Market vendor's must be set-up with a minimum of 6 ft between vendors
- Customers are not permitted to linger around the market; no food sampling or eating within the market; no communal seating to be made available.

Town Response:

In consultation between staff and the Newmarket Farmer's Market, it was determined that it would be impossible to operate the market at Riverwalk Commons and meet the above noted requirements. Staff offered use of the Magna Centre parking lot – the Newmarket Farmer's Market accepted that offer. The Newmarket Farmer's Market has sole discretion over which vendors are included and where those vendors are located.

As long as the public health measures identified remain requirements, the Newmarket Farmer's Market will continue to operate out of the Magna Centre Parking lot. It is anticipated that these measures will be required for the 2020 operating season of the market.

Pickleball & Tennis Courts

All tennis courts and pickleball courts were permitted to open for recreational play only, as part of stage one of the provincial plan.

Public Health/Provincial Requirements:

- Courts can be used for recreational play only. Organized leagues, socials and gatherings are not permitted; group gathering size must comply with provincial orders (current maximum 10 people)
- Only outdoor play is permitted and use of any indoor clubhouse facilities is still prohibited at this time.
- Social/physical distancing must be practiced at all times.

Governing Sport Body Recommendations (Tennis Canada & Pickleball Ontario)

- Singles play only (unless double occurs with members of the same household, or social circle)
- No handshaking
- No shared use of equipment, and no organized league or social play.

Town Response:

Courts within the Town of Newmarket have been open since early June. The Town of Newmarket has posted signage that is reflective of the rules set out by the respective sport governing bodies and public health requirements.

The Newmarket Tennis Club, recognizing the challenging restrictions, felt that it would be in the best interest of the tennis community to forego their 2020 season and offer those courts as public use courts this year.

Soccer Fields and Baseball Diamonds

Soccer fields and baseball diamonds were permitted to open for recreational play only, as part of stage one of the provincial plan.

Public Health/Provincial Requirements:

- No games, tournaments or organized play should be happening at this time.
- Group gathering size (currently 10 people maximum) must be followed
- Social/physical distancing of 6 feet must also be adhered to at all times.

Town Response:

Fields and diamonds were opened in early June for recreational use. User groups were advised that they could make use of the fields at that time.

As a cost savings measure, no summer staff were hired to assist with Parks. As such, the service level is reduced from normal levels. Grass does get cut, but less frequently than normal. Fields and diamonds have not been lined at this time. They are being ragged at reduced frequency. Given that only recreational play is allowed anyway, these services are not integral to use of the fields.

The Town is not currently issuing permits to any organizations. Given the reduced service levels, and requirements to only accommodate recreational play, it was felt that

permitting fields was not yet appropriate. This is being monitored with the groups and staff are prepared to start permitting fields should that be required – note that current service levels for field maintenance will remain. While permits are not being issued, user groups are able to access these spaces at no charge.

Outdoor Basketball Courts

Outdoor basketball courts were permitted to open for recreational play only, as part of stage one of the provincial plan.

Public Health Requirements:

- Strict adherence to group gathering size (currently 10 people maximum)
- Social/physical distancing of 6 feet is required at all times.

Town Response:

Basketball courts have not yet been opened. Given the nature of the sport, it is difficult to play the game and also accommodate the social/physical distancing requirements.

All surrounding municipalities that have opened basketball courts have reported significant occurrences of large group gatherings of teenagers with no adherence to social/physical distancing. Even with the courts closed in Newmarket there has been challenges with large group gatherings on basketball courts.

At this point in time, the strategy has been to keep basketball courts closed until social/physical distancing requirements are lessened or removed.

Spray Pads/Water Features

As part of phase 2 of the provincial framework for reopening, municipalities are permitted to open Spray Pads.

Public Health/Provincial Requirements:

- Social/physical distancing is required at all times
- Groups gatherings must not exceed 10 people
- Regular cleaning of high touch point areas is required
- Washroom facilities must be available (can include port-a-johns) and must be cleaned daily
- Handwashing or sanitizing stations must be available

Town Response:

The Town is ready to open the two spray pads (Rogers Spray Pad and Frank Stronach Park Spray Pad) on Friday, June 19th. Signage has been developed that advises users of the public health measures required. Further, the signage encourages an approach

of respect for one another, limiting time using the facility, and encourages people to come back at a different time should the facility be in high use. Staff will monitor the usage and determine if more stringent measures are required. Staff will also continue to educate patrons on physical/social distancing and group gathering sizes.

The water feature at Riverwalk Commons is anticipated to open over the weekend of June 26th, pending a mandatory inspection from Public Health. The fountains will be activated over the weekend of July 3rd after a monitoring period of compliance with social distancing and group gathering sizes. Similar signage to the Spray Pad signage will be developed. Again, staff will monitor the usage and continue to educate patrons.

Swimming Pools

The provincial government has indicated that swimming pools are also permitted to open as part of phase 2. This does not include changing facilities or locker rooms.

Public Health/Provincial Requirements:

- Social/physical distancing is required at all times; pool area capacities must be reduced to 15% to 30% of regular capacity
- Spectators are not permitted directly within pool areas; any seating provided for those coming in and out of the water should be arranged in a manner that allows for significant space (minimum 6 feet).
- Any swimming lesson programming that is done must be done in a manner that prevents staff from coming within 6 feet of participants (for example, one suggestion is to conduct lessons in which a parent is in the water with a child and the instruction is provided to a parent who in turn provides instruction and support to a child)
- Access to change room facilities is not permitted under stage two

Town Response:

It would be very difficult to accommodate these public health measures at Gorman Pool given the size, shape and layout of the building and pool area. The total capacity would allow for approximately 15 patrons at a time. Given the significant investment in opening and preparing the pool, for what would be very limited use, the pool is currently closed.

Under stage two, the Town also has permission to open indoor pools also. However, the rest of the recreational facilities must remain closed at this time. Currently, the intention is to reopen Magna Pool first, when the rest of the facility can be reopened as part of stage three of the provincial plan.

Elman Campbell Museum

Museums are permitted to open as part of stage two.

Public Health Measures:

- Social/physical distancing is required
- Separate entry and exit points
- No touch exhibits
- Reduced entry and minimal numbers of people in the facility at one time

Town Response:

Given the historically low participation numbers during summer months, a fall re-opening is anticipated.

The following facilities are identified for opening as part of stage three of the provincial re-opening plan.

Indoor Recreation Facilities

Ice pads were permitted to open only for elite level training within Stage one. All other use of ice is scheduled for opening with Stage three of the provincial plan. The Town of Newmarket has removed all ice and has not yet replaced any ice at this time. Within Stage two, only pools are permitted to open. No support amenities or additional facilities are permitted to open during stage two. Stage three of the provincial plan will allow for re-opening gyms, indoor sports facilities, fitness facilities and studios with public health measures in place, such as limits to the number of people, floor space, equipment, showers and change rooms. It will also allow for resuming training for indoor team sports and individual high-contact sports with measures in place to enable physical distancing. No formal public health guidelines have yet been developed or released beyond social/physical distancing and group gathering sizes.

The Magna Fitness Centre will be a key priority to reopen early in stage three. Fitness Centres will have specified protocols including booking times for workouts. Additional public health measures are anticipated but have not yet been developed provincially.

NewRoads Performing Arts Centre and Old Town Hall

Live performance spaces are included within phase 3 of the provincial re-opening plan. At this point the only public health measures identified include reduced seating capacity and assigned seating, in addition to physical/social distancing requirements. It is anticipated that additional public health measures around entry and exits, use of washrooms, sale of food, use of technical equipment (ie. sharing of microphones), change room capacities will be forthcoming prior to announcements of openings.

Special Events

All special events through August 31st have been cancelled, including both internally and externally organized events. The provincial plan does not specifically speak to

resumption of special events. Rather, it is implied that events can resume as social gathering sizes increase and physical/social distancing measures are lessened.

The Town of Newmarket will be a participating town in the virtual National Canada Day event planned by Canadian Heritage. Their activities include:

- 4 themed online celebration kits available to the public
- Televised and live stream performances on July 1
- Virtual fireworks app
- We are planning complementary activities that will be featured on our Home Sweet Home webpage the week of Monday, June 29-Friday, July 3 including:
 - “O Canada” video contest
 - road signs with Happy Canada Day messaging in each ward
 - Canadian flag window poster delivered to each home and apartment in Newmarket through the Era newspaper

Traditionally, each summer a moonlight movie has been combined with a ward specific gathering or barbecue. This year, events like this will be prohibited. Under phase 2 of the provincial plan, drive in movies can occur. Staff are exploring options to hold a few drive in movies this summer. This would not be able to be accommodated within each ward and would have to take place in venues with large parking lots.

Conclusion

This has been an extremely difficult time for everyone. Residents are clearly becoming frustrated with the prolonged nature of the virus and corresponding closures. Further complicating that frustration has been the lack of clarity in what can open and the restrictions under which openings can occur.

The Town of Newmarket has taken a cautious approach. It is a complex situation with no proven road map. Staff are continuing to conduct research into best practice, and are ensuring that all directions and recommendations are informed by the most current information available. By the situation is dynamic and does change quickly.

Staff are open to feedback of all members of Council and the broader community as we navigate our re-openings in the midst of what is still an ongoing pandemic.

Business Plan and Strategic Plan Linkages

The strategic vision of the Town of Newmarket is rooted in the concept of being Well Beyond the Ordinary – this vision is achieved through focus on the well being of our community. The wellness of our community has at all times been first and foremost in the actions taken to date.

Consultation

This report has been reviewed by Public Works Services, Corporate Communications, Human Resources, Planning and Legislative Services.

Human Resource Considerations

If actions differ from what is currently the approach, there will be human resource considerations that must be evaluated and considered as part of implementation.

Budget Impact

Similar to human resource considerations, change in direction will have budget implications that will need further consideration and evaluation prior to implementation.

Attachments

None

Contact

Colin Service, Director Recreation & Culture

Approval

Colin Service, Director, Recreation & Culture

Ian McDougall, Commissioner, Community Services