

## REPORT

### Council

**Meeting Date: August 9, 2021**

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**FROM:** Community Services Commission

**DATE:** July 27, 2021

**SUBJECT:** Transitioning to COVID-19 Interim Recovery Action Plan

**LOCATION:** Town-wide

**WARD:** Town-wide

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#### RECOMMENDATION:

1. That Council receive the report entitled “Transitioning to COVID-19 Interim Recovery Action Plan”.
2. That Council adopt an interim 2021 Community Investment Funding Plan that supports neighbourhood groups, BIAs and sport organizations through their restart and provide community recognition with the following recommendations:
  - That \$18,500 of unspent 2020 funds be transferred from the Tax Rate Stabilization reserve for the Sport Development Grant program as a one time measure to allow for increased support of sport recovery efforts in 2021;
  - That \$52,000 of unspent 2020 funds be transferred from the Tax Rate Stabilization reserve for the Special Event Fee Waiver program as a one time measure to support community events and activity during the recovery in 2021; and
  - That \$6,000 of unspent 2020 funds be transferred from the Tax Rate Stabilization reserve for the Community Spirit Awards as a one time measure to recognize 2019 and 2020 nominations in 2021.

#### KEY FACTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- As the case numbers continue to decrease, the town has focused on the development of a 2021-22 COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan with key recommendations for the next eighteen months.

- The Plan focuses on strategic actions being taken in five key areas:
  - Restoring our community vibrancy;
  - Supporting our local businesses;
  - Keeping our community safe;
  - Keeping our corporation resilient; and
  - Preserving our strong financial health.
- The town has introduced a number of innovations over the course of the pandemic which will be reviewed for longer term viability and integrated where appropriate as part of our business model;
- The town will continue to introduce innovations to further enhance business continuity and expand access to services.
- Many of the current Council Strategic Directions, plans and strategies can be leveraged to support recovery and “build back better” initiatives.

## **BACKGROUND:**

Our world has been irrevocably changed by the ongoing COVID- 19 global pandemic declared on Friday, March 13, 2020 by the World Health Organization. Both the Town of Oakville and our residents and businesses have had to respond to rapidly evolving circumstances for the past few months. Through an extraordinary, collaborative effort, our community has been able to sustain a strong, positive response throughout the pandemic.

The town’s Emergency Operations Committee (EOC) began monitoring the international situation as a result of media reports on emerging risks arising from COVID-19 cases in January 2020. Behind the scenes preparation for a potential pandemic began in early February. The Emergency Control Group (ECG) was formally activated on March 9, 2020 when it became apparent that a COVID-19 pandemic could have significant impact on town operations. The Province of Ontario declared a State of Emergency on March 17, 2020 and Mayor Rob Burton declared a local State of Emergency under the *Ontario Emergency Management Civil Protection Act* on March 24, 2020. The town’s emergency response was prescribed by provincial regulations and all services were impacted by COVID-19 measures. The local business community was also severely impacted by provincially-mandated closures to slow the spread of COVID-19.

On May 25, 2020, Council approved a report from Mayor Burton entitled: COVID-19 Recovery Framework” which focused on restoration of town services after the first wave. The return to service efforts were informed by key directions on prioritization, community benefits, long term financial sustainability and safety for all. Since then,

the province has experienced a significant second and third wave with services being shut down and then restored as per provincial direction.

With the accelerated provincial vaccine rollout well underway and provincial and local COVID-19 cases declining, the town can return to its focus on recovery and planning for transition to the “new normal”.

Staff have been monitoring COVID-19 trends in international jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe to help predict future challenges and potential changes in the community. In light of the current pattern of fourth waves being experienced in these countries, the Recovery Committee is not recommending the removal of the local Emergency Order at this time as local communities have not yet reached the provincial second vaccine target. The Recovery Committee will review vaccination rates, as well as other datasets, in the fall to recommend timing of its removal. It should be noted that a review of the current Emergency Plan will be conducted in 2022 to refresh key assumptions, identify lessons learned throughout the pandemic and incorporate successful innovations.

This report from the Recovery Committee represents a continuation of the work outlined in the Mayor’s initial Council report and ongoing efforts to normalize services and operations in 2021/22 to support community recovery.

**COMMENT/OPTIONS:**

The town will continue to take a strategic approach to the restoration of community services and management of internal recovery plans to reflect evolving provincial public health directives, legislative changes and local circumstances. The corporation wants to ensure it remains nimble and responsive to new opportunities and manages risks in a prudent and thoughtful manner. The Recovery Action Plan builds on Council’s Strategic Directions, plans and strategies to support recovery and “build back better” initiatives. Staff will validate assumptions, refine for the recovery phase and where appropriate, accelerate the implementation of recommendations.

The town has been an active partner in effective, regional coordination with Halton municipal partners and the broader GTHA Recovery and Prosperity Alliance since the start of the pandemic. The town will continue to coordinate its recovery efforts with all municipal partners where appropriate over the longer term to leverage opportunities and advocate for funding and influence policy. All of this work has been informed by the following:

- Protecting the health and safety of public and staff;

- Enhancing organizational resiliency and business continuity –“ Build Back Better” for future emergencies;
- Ensuring strong financial sustainability;
- Continuing the accelerated modernization of services, leveraging innovations and supporting stronger business continuity efforts as outlined in the Digital Oakville Plan;
- Planning for a successful transition to the “new normal”;
- Leveraging the current Council Strategic Directions, existing plans and strategies to support recovery and “build back better” initiatives; and
- Advancing Council’s strategic goals of service excellence, diversity and inclusion and climate change action plans.

The Plan focuses on strategic actions being taken in five key areas:

- Restoring our community vibrancy;
- Supporting our local businesses;
- Keeping our community safe;
- Keeping our corporation resilient; and
- Preserving our strong financial health.

### **Restoring our Community Vibrancy**

The town is committed to supporting the restoration and transformation of community services, reestablishment of vibrant neighbourhood activities in the sport and cultural communities through the implementation of the following recommendations:

- Scale community programs and services to reflect current provincial capacity limits and evolving community demand while maintaining appropriate safety protocols for the public and staff;
- Integrate new innovations developed during the pandemic in a new hybrid model of service delivery such as digital programming in Recreation and Culture, Fire Prevention and Oakville Public Library;
- Expand the digital services offerings of the town;
- Create arrangements to support temporary community models of service delivery for non-profit and commercial operators such as establishing designated outdoor fitness locations and extension of permitted sports field use to end of October 2021;

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- Implement a 2021 interim Community Investment Plan that supports neighbourhood groups, BIAs and sport organizations in their restart plans through the funding combination of unspent 2020 funds with approved 2021 dollars;
  - Provide well deserved community recognition for critical volunteer efforts through a special Community Spirit award event that recognizes 2019 and 2020 nominations;
  - Enhance partnerships with community organizations and other levels of government to support recovery and re-engagement of our citizens in re-establishment of vibrant neighbourhood activity through initiatives such as the review of the Special Events Strategy with an inclusion and diversity lens in 2022;
  - Explore innovative Ride on Demand Pilots for Oakville Transit (new On-Demand scheduling software and Mobile App) in 2021;
  - Introduce a marketing strategy to encourage the public to return to using transit as a safe travel option;
  - Adapt program and service delivery models in a cost-effective way to respond to shifting usage/demand patterns and community preferences with a strong inclusion and diversity lens through strategic work such as the Recreation Service Review, and Oakville Public Library Strategic Plan;
  - Deliver a modified Winter Recreation Strategy for the 2021/22 season to reflect current provincial regulations; and
  - Work with the Halton Community Safety and Wellbeing Steering Committee on critical initiatives to support community groups in their restart efforts to assist vulnerable populations.

### **Supporting our Local Businesses:**

A number of initiatives have either been implemented or are in the planning stages to support local business and the three Business Improvement Areas through advocacy efforts, accelerated digital transformation and support for temporary innovations. They are as follows:

- Staff continue to support the recovery and resilience initiatives arising from the advocacy work of the Mayor's Economic Taskforce for the following recommendations for local business:
  - Continuation of federal wage and rent subsidies for business;
  - Allowance for new businesses to access COVID support programs (those that are currently ineligible);

- Financial support from other levels of government for large industries impacted by COVID;
- Extension of funding for Digital Main Street Program; and
- Opening of borders to facilitate travel.
- To better support the development industry through recovery, we are implementing:
  - 24/7 digital option for applications, permits and licenses for planning, development, building, business, parking and community-related permits in 2021; and
  - 24/7 digital option to request building inspections.

Other areas of support recommended for the local business community include:

- Explore options for use of town's portion of the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) revenue for tourism restart efforts;
- Extend the patio program including permit fee waivers and use of town lands throughout 2022, along with a staff assessment regarding constraints, community input, and any further changes to AGCO regulations;
- Continue to support curbside pick-up spaces in BIAs to allow for customers to easily access businesses in 2022;
- Extend taxicab model year limits to address industry concerns in 2021;
- Continue partnership with Oakville Chamber of Commerce for the distribution of Rapid Antigen Test kits;
- Expedite the approval process for business licences through digital transformation;
- Implement marketing campaign in partnership with BIAs, Chamber of Commerce and Visit Oakville to shop/dine locally in support of reopening; and
- Continue to provide timely and accurate information to business on federal, provincial, and regional changes and funding opportunities.

### **Keeping Our Community Safe:**

Our beautiful park and trail system saw unprecedented use by the public both in 2020 and 2021 creating significant parking and traffic problems. This created challenges for the Municipal Enforcement team. Several innovative initiatives were introduced in partnership with Halton Region Public Health, Halton Region Police Service, Oakville Fire Services and the Multi Ministry Taskforce to address the issues of overcrowding, congregation over provincial capacity limits, beach bonfires, illegal parking. The approach has required a suite of actions to be undertaken:

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- Review the temporary by-law framework created through the Emergency Order to determine continuance of specific bylaws;
  - Adapt the local safety strategy and resourcing needs to address current provincial restrictions and emerging community concerns;
  - Continue to partner with Halton Police on the Police on Park Patrol (POPP) program that introduced patrol parks on weekends between June and September 2021 and evaluate how to provide stable, dedicated resourcing for the program;
  - Continue enhanced mobile compliance officer program to be in effect until December 2021;
  - Continue the Park ambassador program to provide positive compliance messaging in our parks and waterfront areas to be in effect until October 2021;
  - Continue the special parking provision area program with designated no parking areas near parks and waterfront areas with higher fines to dissuade overuse and negative impacts on established neighbourhoods;
  - Continue to participate on the Multi-Ministry Task Force in 2021;
  - Continue a residential paid parking program to augment 15 free overnight parking permits issued to residents each year to address gaps caused by people working and staying at home in 2021; and
  - Support virtual hearings and screenings for by-law and parking tickets.

### **Keeping our Corporation Resilient:**

Our staff have continuously adapted to emerging circumstances that have been both unprecedented and fast moving. It is important to incorporate the innovations created to address aspects of the pandemic through a refresh of the Corporate Emergency Plan. The staff deployment model for the organization also needs to be reviewed to determine how functions have evolved, creation of hoteling options and collaborative spaces with updates of associated policies, standards and procedures. Town amenities need to be reviewed to ensure strong risk mitigations are in place for public and staff safety.

- Review options for the return of in person Council meetings and consideration of opportunities for public delegations in the fall of 2021;
- Review and reimagine the Corporate Emergency Plan, incorporating best practices, innovations and lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic in 2022;

- Maintain current remote work arrangements for eligible staff until fall 2021. A hybrid service delivery model that combines remote and in person work options will be implemented by January 2022;
- Implement a health risk mitigation approach for public amenities including the following:
  - Enhance the health and safety of town facilities through the conversion to touchless washroom fixtures and HVAC upgrades in 2021; and
  - Complete the remaining conversions in 2022.
- Adapt the corporate policy framework to reflect changing federal and provincial directives as required.

### **Preserving our Strong Financial Health:**

The town has taken decisive action in a number of areas to mitigate the financial impact of the pandemic. On the operating side, savings in personnel, supplies and services, utilities and other expenses resulted due to temporary facility closures and modified service delivery. Also, a full-time staff redeployment plan was implemented which allowed the town to defer the hiring of various part-time and seasonal staff to further mitigate the impact. The town continues to keep various positions vacant and only fill critical positions. Lastly, a concerted effort by staff to reduce spending on non-essential and less critical activities resulted in significant savings. On the capital side, extensive reviews of capital projects were completed to prioritize the town's spending. To preserve our strong financial health, the town will:

- Continue to leverage federal and provincial funding opportunities for capital projects and invest in strategic infrastructure as both an economic stimulus and expansion of key community assets;
- Participate in the GTHA Recovery and Prosperity Alliance which include tables of senior municipal executives to discuss areas of interest: digital infrastructure, affordable housing, transit, procurement and sustainable finance. The GTHA CAOs group will identify opportunities for municipalities to respond to mounting financial pressures on a short, medium and long term basis. Key areas of focus include:
  - A review of the small business sub class;
  - Modernize policies that assist the GTHA without additional cost; and
  - Identification of new revenue approaches that can benefit the GTHA to meet non-transit pressures.
- Continue to mitigate operating expenses.



In conclusion, the town will continue to take a very prudent and measured approach to recovery planning; blending strategy, specific actions, innovations and advocacy to address new and existing challenges. The town will continue to build on Council's Strategic Directions, plans and strategies to support recovery and "build back better" initiatives. Timing of mitigation actions will be informed by key factors such as current provincial regulations and direction, public safety, predictive data analytics, logistical considerations and cost effectiveness. The Recovery Action Plan will continue to evolve over the next few months based upon these key factors to ensure ongoing community success.

**CONSIDERATIONS:**

**(A) PUBLIC**

The town will be working with various community and cultural groups including the three BIAs to implement the interim Community Investment Plan. The town will be supporting the delivery of the 2019/20 Community Spirit Awards event.

**(B) FINANCIAL**

2021 recommendations have been funded within the approved budget envelope. 2022 recommendations will be referred to the 2022 Budget Committee for consideration.

**(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS**

**(D) CORPORATE STRATEGIC GOALS**

To be accountable and transparent in everything we do.

**(E) CLIMATE CHANGE/ACTION**

The matter addressed in this report does not directly affect climate change.

Prepared by: Colleen Bell, Commissioner, Community Services

Recommended by: Jane Clohecy, Chief Administrative Officer

Submitted by: Mayor Burton, Chair, COVID-19 Recovery Committee