

Shelburne Council votes for report on vaccination policy

By Paula Brown, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Town of Shelburne is in the process of developing a mandatory vaccination policy for all municipal staff members and elected officials, after a 6-1 majority vote from council.

During Shelburne Town council's meeting on Monday (Sept. 13), Deputy Mayor Steve Anderson brought forward a motion to have staff come back with a draft report on a vaccination policy by November that is in line with the County of Dufferin's policy.

"As leaders I think it's important that we do just that. Demonstrate leadership in a time where leadership is required," said Anderson. "This might not be popular in the eyes of some, but at the end of the day it's not a popularity contest as far as I'm concerned. It's about saving lives."

The draft report being brought back to council will include two policies; one focused on municipal staff and another for elected officials, as they are not considered municipal employees.

"It is a policy for municipal staff and a separate policy for elected officials that would mirror that of the one for municipal staff," said Anderson.

Dufferin County Council, during their meeting last Thursday (Sept. 9) voted in favour of implementing a vaccination policy, which will go into effect on Nov. 1. Details on the County's vaccination policy are still in development.

Dufferin County councillors received a report that provided statistics from the Public Health Agency of Canada during their meeting, which Anderson cited as part of his reason for bringing forward the vaccine policy motion.

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada from December 14 2020 to August 2021, 0.04 per cent of fully vaccinated individuals became infected with COVID-19, while in recent weeks (July 18- Aug. 14) the weekly rate of new cases in unvaccinated people was 12 times higher than those fully vaccinated.

Coun. Walter Benotto, who seconded the motion, shared a similar sentiment of demonstrating leadership and added that the policy provides clarity.

"I respect people have the right to make choices in their life, but at the same time sometimes those choices affect other people," said Benotto.

Regarding a separate policy for elected officials, Benotto added, "We can't be telling staff what to do and at the same time not doing what we should."

Coun. Shane Hall shared his concerns with the vaccine policy specifically related to exemptions for health.

"I would certainly hope that an actual policy covers those other items that do truly require exception and ensure that it's all inclusive in that manner," said Hall.

The current components of the Dufferin County policy, which will act as a model for the Shelburne one, will include specifics on exemptions under both medical and Ontario Human Rights Code.

Coun. Lindsay Wegener was the only member of council to vote against the vaccine policy motion.

Wegener said there is science on both sides of the vaccination argument and that she is pro-choice.

?I cannot in good faith force anyone to take a medical procedure that they don't want or they cannot have in order to remain employed and provide for their livelihood and their families,? said Wegener.

Prior to the vote Mayor Wade Mills thanked councillors for the debate and their respect for each other's opinions.

A recorded vote was held, with the motion passing with a 6-1 favour.

Staff will return to council in November with a report on a vaccination policy.