

Town keeping vaccine policy, will reassess in July

Written By **Paula Brown**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Town of Shelburne is keeping its mandatory COVID-19 vaccine policy for its staff members.

During their meeting on Monday (March 28), Shelburne Town Council made the decision to keep the policy and re-evaluate in July, despite the provincial government lifting proof-of-vaccination requirements earlier this month.

Shelburne's chief administrative officer (CAO), Denyse Morrissey, said the recommendation for the policy to remain in place was based on input from staff members and a number of municipalities keeping their mandatory vaccination policies.

A confidential survey consulting town staff was held from March 17 until March 22 and asked staff if the town should keep the vaccination policy currently in place.

According to the report presented to Council, 20 staff members responded 'yes' in support of the continued vaccine policy while nine staff voted 'no'.

The COVID-19 vaccination policy that applies to Shelburne staff members including third-party contractors went into effect in November 2021.

The vaccination policy required town staff members to provide proof of vaccination against COVID-19 or a medical exemption by Nov. 26. Staff members who chose not to provide proof would need to perform rapid antigen testing minimum twice weekly to verify a negative result for COVID-19.

According to the report, 96 per cent or 24 of 25 Shelburne full-time staff members provided proof of being fully vaccinated while 95 per cent or 21 of 22 part-time staff presented proof of full vaccination.

The Ontario government ended proof-of-vaccination requirements in most public settings on March 1. Many municipalities across Ontario have chosen to keep the vaccination policies including Guelph, Toronto, Orillia, York Region, Sudbury, Clarington and Windsor.

Within Dufferin County the Town of Orangeville as well as the Township of Mono have also decided to continue with the policies.

'I tend to defer to staff and their wishes, they're the ones that are working in the environment so far be it for me to try to tell them otherwise,' said Mayor Wade Mills regarding the recommendation.

Concerns were raised by councillors about continuing the policy, specifically how it would affect request for proposals (RFPs), and town projects with thirdparty contractors.

'The way to accommodate that is I could amend the town's policy to remove the section that applies to third party contractors since that was a CAO directive, and that the town's policy would be specific and exclusive to town staff,' said Morrissey.

Mayors Mills questioned how many upcoming projects in the town would be outdoor versus indoors.

Morrissey noted majority of the town's big projects would be outdoors such as the tennis courts, off-leash dog park and the Jack Downing Park revitalization, but there could be indoor needs.

Council suggested a hybrid approach for third party contractors exempting those working outdoors from the vaccination policy.

?I don't believe that we see any problem, or I do not, if you wanted to amend the policy to remove contractors that are predominantly working in an outdoor environment from that restriction to not jeopardize firms that would otherwise maybe not consider working with us,? said Morrissey.

An amendment was made to the final motion excluding third party contractors from the COVID-19 vaccination policy subject to projects located outdoors. The amended motion also requires contractors to wear masks when accessing town property.

Masks are no longer mandatory, but encouraged for staff members.

Council will be readdressing the vaccination policy come July.