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Shelburne Council establishes new ?Blueprint for Recovery? following COVID-19 pandemic

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Council met on Wednesday (May 13), in a Special Session, to discuss the COVID-19 ?Blueprint for Recovery', a high level document intended to give an overall view of the process of reopening the Town once the pandemic dies down.

Primarily drafted by Mayor Wade Mills, the document was divided into three stages - Restart, Realign and Reassess. The intention being to help guide the Town's transition to the ?new normal? following the first round of this pandemic. It is understood that this pandemic will have far-reaching consequences and will require everyone to rethink how they operate.

The report was predicated upon certain guiding principles, wit the first and foremost being the health and safety of the residents and staff. Following this, was that actions be as transparent ad equitable as possible, that decisions be based upon scientific and fact based data and that actions taken should help Shelburne emerge as a stronger and more resilient community.

To this end, phase one, Restart, would see a gradual reopening of public facilities and amenities, consistent with provincial and public health directives, while addressing local needs and realities. It would continue support for local businesses and community groups, to ease their reopening transition and would consider and implement new public safety protocols following reopening, such as social distancing and sanitization.

Phase Two, the Realignment, would look more to governance. Council's Strategic Priorities, established for 2019 through 2022 would be reviewed to ascertain whether changes were appropriate. Staffing would be reevaluated, to enable appropriate response to necessary adjustments and the 2020 Budget would be reviewed, along with the 2021 to 2023 budget estimates, to conducer possible realignments. Overall governance models and structures would also be reviewed to ensure they remained consistent with the needs of the Town.

The final stage, Reassessment, would prepare the Town for what will undoubtedly be the rapid changes in information and conditions, which will occur going forward.

This would include the continuation of an Emergency Operations style reporting structure until the recovery plan is fully implemented. It would see the development of a Response Plan to prepare for subsequent ?waves ? of COVID 19, which have been predicted and ended seen already. There would also be a Monthly Report Card on all ares of town services to ensure they remain responsive.

The community has effectively been on pause, since the beginning of the Pandemic, in March and must now begin to get restarted in a safe and responsible manner. One thing is certain, many of the ?old rules?, will no longer be applicable going forward. Going back to the way things were , is simply not possible. It will be necessary to remain adaptive and responsive to changing conditions and both ready and willing to reevaluate responses .

A few points were brought up by Council members, in response to the Blueprint. One was the manner in which meetings would continue to be held. Since the Municipal Act was only temporarily amended to allow virtual meetings, the existing Council Chambers will no longer be suitable for in person meetings, as they are too small to allow appropriate social distancing. Under the Municipal Act, a quorum of members must be present, in a room, to allow a meeting to be held and business to be officially conducted. Council members may participate virtually, but they do not count towards a quorum being established. CAO Denyse Morrissey stated that the May 25th Council Meting will be held in the CDRC, to allow for appropriate spacing to be maintained. At this point, public participation my appear uncertain at that meeting.

Councillor Wegener, asked how the Town could contravene the Provincial opening of public parks and after discussions, was told

that as the parks are town property, they could be subject to town by-laws and rules. Thus for example, they could be opened for public access, with appropriate social distancing in effect, but the playground equipment could still be off limits due to safety concerns. All of these types of concerns are what the Blueprint for Recovery is designed to address.

Overall, the document was well thought out and will ensure that the Town is well prepared to deal with the reopening of services and the community in the weeks and months to follow. Further COVID 19 outbreaks and problems are inevitable, but a mobile and reactive recovery plan should insure that Shelburne will weather them and come out stronger ad more resilient in the end.