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Export date: Sun Nov 1 1:53:30 2026 / +0000 GMT

Shelburne declares State of Emergency, develops new community relief plan

Written By MIKE BAKER

The Town of Shelburne has declared a State of Emergency in response to the continued COVID-19 pandemic, however Mayor Wade Mills is keen to nip any immediate panic or worry local residents may feel in the bud.

?Let me be very clear, this is a legal declaration and does not mean that we face an immediate increased threat, nor does it mean that we face an impending loss of control of the situation,? Mayor Mills said. ?To the contrary, in fact, this declaration will allow us to get a tighter grip on the situation and will expand the weapons in our arsenal so that we can fight this threat more efficiently and effectively.?

Shelburne is the latest municipality in the area to enact its emergency protocols. The Town of Caledon was the first to do so last Wednesday (March 18), with the Town of Mono and Town of Orangeville following suit.

?I want you to know that I have not come to this decision lightly. We are facing an unprecedented situation and it is incumbent upon us to provide an equally unprecedented response. As part of the declaration, I have ordered that all public playground equipment be closed immediately. As of today, park hours shall be reduced from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. until further notice,? Mayor Mills said. ?During these hours, parks will be open but those visiting should practice social distancing and not be congregated in groups of ten or more people.?

He added, ?More generally, I am strongly encouraging all residents to continue strict social distancing practices and to say at home to the extent possible. I realize that this is difficult, but limiting our non-essential social interaction is currently the surest way we have of limiting the spread of this virus and flattening the curve.?

Shelburne Council gathered for an unprecedented teleconference on Monday, discussing a number of issues currently impacting the community during the COVID-19 crisis. Born out of that meeting was a new community relief plan, which aims to provide some financial wiggle room for residents who have been laid off, or had their work hours scaled back in recent weeks.

The first thing Council has done is waive all penalty charges for non-payment of the May 21 tax installment, giving residents until June 19 to pay their bill. A similar thing is being done with water and sewer rates. Council has agreed to waive all penalty charges for non-payment on the March 27 water and wastewater bill, giving residents until April 27 to pay it off.

Any resident who is currently set up to pay taxes and their water/wastewater bill on a pre-authorized payment plan is asked to contact Town Hall as soon as possible if they would like to have their payments deferred. Any NSF fee incurred will be waived.

?We have developed this plan knowing that some residents are facing some difficult financial times right now, and the hope is that what we're offering will ease that burden slightly,? Mayor Mills said. ?What it's not designed to do, obviously, is provide a solution to everyone's financial problems. The reality is that the Town just does not have the capacity to do that. There are a number of provincial and federal programs being offered right now, but on a local level what we wanted to do is take some small steps within our means to provide whatever assistance we can to our residents.?

The municipality has also lifted its overnight winter parking restrictions, effective as of this past Tuesday (March 24). Dog license payments, scheduled to come in on April 1, have been deferred to June 1.

One of the most significant things to come from the plan, Mayor Mills says, is a new working group designed to determine critical needs and facilitate relief efforts for local businesses.

?As many of you know by now, the Province has mandated the closure of many businesses. They have released a list of what it

considers to be essential services, which will be permitted to remain open,? Mayor Mills said. ?For those businesses mandated to close, this is going to provide even more significant pressure and difficulty upon you. As such, it's critical to get this working group up and going so we can start directing resources available to businesses in town that may need them and help them weather this storm.?

In closing, Mayor Mills called on local residents to embrace the feeling of community Shelburne has long been known for in an attempt to ensure we all make it through this crisis together.

?This virus is demonstrating perhaps more than ever before just how independent we are. Our own health, and that of our families, depends almost as much upon the actions and decisions of others within our community as it does upon our own,? Mayor Mills said. ?Accordingly, I am calling on each and every resident to set their self-interest aside and do what is right for the rest of the community ? it's time for the better angels of our nature to show up.?

He added, ?Let me be clear, we will get through this and we will eventually see a return to normalcy. But the actions we are willing to take collectively now will determine how quickly, and fully that return is realized. I am confident that Shelburne will meet this test of our time and ultimately emerge even stronger and more unified than before.?