



April 15, 2020

### **Statement from the Mayor and Council**

As we come out of the long weekend, we continue to face adversity and new challenges. 2020 surely will be a year that is remembered for many things. It's not enough that we have this pandemic on our hands, we are also dealing with record high water levels. Those out along the shores of the lake not only have to manage their ability to distance and/or isolate themselves, they have roads and cottages that are in peril due to the ongoing wind and water surges. The organizations such as the LPRCA and GRCA along with both Counties have been working very well together and many are able to get the updated information ahead of time to help plan for weather events like this past weekend. Does not make it any easier but it does help to manage the potential damage. I know that those involved are grateful and on their behalf I just want to thank all of those involved in helping residents along the banks of the lake.

This week we announced the temporary layoffs of many within the County. It was a very difficult decision to make in these times. Every employee since I have been Mayor is like family, they have poured their hearts into their duties to provide the residents of Haldimand the very best of service. They are the backbone of the organization and these layoffs are by no means a reflection of their efforts. It is our responsibility like all other businesses to ensure that we are financially responsible and so these tough decisions needed to be made.

As I update you with any stats or medical information please understand that I am only passing the information to you that I am receiving from our Chief Medical Officer. I am by no means an expert in this field. Haldimand plays an advisory role with the Haldimand-Norfolk health unit. It is run by our CMO and the board is Norfolk council with Mayor Chopp as the board chair. Currently we meet virtually to practice social distancing or by conference call every other day to discuss ongoing issues as they affect our Counties.

It is clear and as expected our more vulnerable people are the ones most affected with this virus. Today we are at 19 deaths from Anson Place and while there are still many affected, the good news is that there have been no new cases since April 8. This does not take away from those deaths. While it is a number, it is 19 families, 19 of our families within Haldimand in the community of Hagersville of just 3000 people. Everyone in Hagersville is directly or indirectly affected by these 19 poor families. For this and other reasons the CMO has decided to not share where all the positive cases are located, solely to protect the vulnerability of those families possibly affected by the positive tests.

I have been asked many times and told that other cities are being more specific with their data and I continue to say it should not matter as the health unit believes that there are approximately 10x the



actual reported positive cases out there in the Province and we are likely no different. I have asked Our Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Shanker, in every meeting and his response has been one of compassion for those tested positive. He did say to me that they would CONSIDER, (no guarantee) releasing more data than just the numbers such as the age and county demographics but would need to work those details out.

I am getting many calls on whether your business fits in the essential or non essential categories. First let me say that I do not agree with the many decisions made from all levels of government and I am sure that many of you may feel the same way. Including how we as County may or may not be functioning through this pandemic. I applaud all levels and including ours here in Haldimand-Norfolk as we navigate through this, where every day is a new one. There is no script for this and because it is so fluid, each day, each hour the information may change. I have never seen government move so fast in trying to manage so many different aspects of this virus and its effects on us all.

I have always said that living in H-N is a luxury and in some cases a privilege. Today that is never more appreciated. Social distancing and isolation in its primary definition is not much different than how many of us live day to day here in rural Ontario. So with that in mind, I believe that it is our duty to continue to advise business to follow the rules set out by the Province, but within the very definition of essential and non essential, it is our duty to also help our local small businesses to redefine how they can provide services and do it respecting the safety of the community. I believe that where we can, we need to support their efforts to garner an income and to be able sustain themselves through this and most importantly be here on the other side of the pandemic to provide the valuable services they do to our communities. An example is the landscape companies, I believe that those requiring the services such as grass cutting, etc. should be able to do so yet under the province it is deemed as non-essential. Do not simply discount yourself, think outside of the box, and maybe there is a business and safety plan for you. Now this is not possible for every business but even if we can help just one, it is worth the exercise.

I believe that like all other statements made, we must take them all and apply them in how best it fits with our local situation. You have heard everyone say "stay at home." It has been a month, and I encourage you to continue doing just that, but if you need to get out because the walls are closing in, then make that decision again practicing the protocols required. Our mental health carries value as well.

Remember that while Ottawa and Toronto can say this is what is required. We can endeavour to meet those objectives but you must also do what is best for your health without sacrificing the health of others. Take the advice and apply it to each of our situations and be sensitive to the idea that everyone's situation is different. Broken families, young kids, older kids, in laws, roommates, etc. In every home there is a reason for what you are doing and only you can make that decision and then apply into the advice that has been given and be sure to follow those rules that are hard and fast such as the public spaces, large groups etc.



It is all too easy to judge the many mistakes and while there will be many more before this is all over, I hope that for now you can rally with me and support those that are fighting for us, those that are fighting for their lives, those that are in isolation and the that are showing up to work everyday to keep the basic needs on our shelves. The time to point the finger will come and there will likely be many but we need every one to pull together and pick up the fight where you can.

The spirit and intent behind these hotlines is to report those that are in complete disregard. I had a call about a family of six out for walk and they were all living together in the same home. Before you jump to the conclusions of automatic disrespect, remember that there are many more that are respecting our community than not.

If you witness something that is in contravention to any of these new orders as set out it is your duty to protect your community and contact the following with names and/or license plates etc any information that would be helpful. You are not in the wrong and you are not to feel guilty. The guilty party is the one that is disrespecting you and everyone else and there is no patience left for those people.

1. OPP Hotline - 1-888-310-1122
2. Haldimand-Norfolk COVID-19 Enforcement Hotline - 519-428-8019

Please do not call or send me or council members the information, as we are simply passing the information across to the hotlines as well and it would be more efficient for everyone to use the hotline. Furthermore it tracks all calls and cases which is important for enforcement.

I have been asked about my thoughts on cottagers, and while I believe that if you are not from H-N you should stay in your community. Anyone coming into H-N is another mouth to feed, another patient in our public health system. It is not a personal attack and it's a reality of our system. We have 8 ventilators in both Counties. I have many friends in the GTA who appreciate our position. I have also been asked from Norfolk residents and Haldimand residents who share property in both Counties and I have stated that they should choose one location and stay put so that they are not risking themselves anymore than necessary. I say this from my place in Turkey Point where I have been living with my Norfolk girlfriend and her girls for the past 3 weeks and will continue to do so. My son and his girlfriend are living at our house in Caledonia and my daughter is living in Port Dover. If all my family and my girlfriend's family were together the impact on H-N does not change. I say this to provide some context as many of us are being challenged on our personal decisions. I am fully comfortable with my decision as it best meets my personal requirements while still protecting the community.

This coming Tuesday, Haldimand Council will be meeting virtually for the first time since the outbreak and I look forward to moving some matters forward and part of those discussions will be the final budget. I can assure you that while we are in the strangest times, building a budget is not easy, but



unlike the Province and the Feds we cannot run a deficit, we must run a balanced budget and right now we have no real indication on how these costs will affect us. I can tell you that we will be approaching the budget with the most careful consideration of everyone's situation. At this time I continue to lobby the upper levels of government to consider all options, to help us deliver the essential services required but reduce the costs of those services required.

I have spoken to several corporations and I am excited about the potential opportunities that may come for us and I am hoping to share with you shortly some plans to help our vulnerable in Haldimand-Norfolk. Stay tuned...

"Nothing is our friend, nothing is our enemy. Everything, including our mistakes, is our teacher."

Stay safe,

Mayor Ken Hewitt