



April 29, 2020

Statement from Mayor Ken Hewitt & Council

For the numbers today go to:

<https://hnhu.org/health-topic/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Over the past few weeks you have heard about all the things you can't do and when you turn on the news it has either been about some new government funding plan or that there is a roadmap, not a timetable, but a roadmap. Like you, I wanted to hear more positive news. We all want to feel validated for our efforts to date.

I know that it is frustrating as we have been at this now for just over 6 weeks and it likely seems like a lot longer than that. I too, was hoping to hear more as we all see other parts of the world starting to open and it is hard to hear that we are not quite there yet.

I do however appreciate that we must get it right; while we cannot afford to prolong this phase we are in with no one working, getting hit with a second wave would be much more catastrophic. I do believe that the approach taken will be more lasting and will get us stronger and better results than some of the other areas North and South.

We all want the same things: to get back to daily work, be with our families, be with our friends, and to enjoy what many of us love to do, enjoy the best of our summers. I know that you want to get out and fish, get out on a trail, get out just for the sake of getting out. Remember the initial directive by both the PM and the Premier: STAY HOME. That directive has not changed.

Over the past several weeks there has been plenty of debate on what we can and cannot do. I agree with every argument that has been put forth that supports why you should be able to get out of your house for whatever the reason may be. I also know that from the historical statistics from our Chief Medical Officer and what he has been able to share with us, *the more you go out into the public, there's a higher likelihood that the pandemic is prolonged*. It's our call. Actually it's not, it's our obligation to be considerate and respect the orders from both the Province and the CMO.

The philosophy behind trails and fishing: both very good conversations and with nothing being normal today, the views on them are just the same. What led to the closure of boat ramps?



I have a letter from Premier Ford that specifically states that boat ramps and marinas are to be closed except for commercial fishing and for those requiring access to private residences. It specifically says that they are not to be open for recreational fishing. When asked when we will the ramps open, it will be when the Province says to open them. I can assure you that both Mayor Chopp and I believe that they should be open in a safe manner so that boaters can get out on the water. We will await news from the Province.

Why can we not simply fish on the banks of the river or a the dam? The Chief Medical Officer made the call to close the public spaces and trails which went beyond what the Provincial order stated and this was the Public Health decision to do so. While I struggled at the time with this decision I do appreciate his reasons for the decision because he did not want people coming to H-N for non-essential reasons. Yes that means no fishing at the dam, that means no hiking down the trails.

Unfortunately in an effort to prevent those from outside coming here, it catches those that are living within the community as well. So the reasons for not fishing or walking on a trail are not some well thought up conspiracy but were an effort to protect the community from our public health perspective. Every other argument you can make is a moot point. It does not matter if you believe you have the right to fish or not, or to hike or not. Hang in there as I am confident that ramps will be open soon.

In a pandemic, the public health directives far outweigh what any one person thinks or believes what their rights are. Asking everyone to make some small sacrifices so that not just a few can enjoy their vices but everyone can reap the rewards of our collective efforts is the goal of the public health authority and ours as a County.

Please understand that this information is difficult to report. There is nothing political about it. Telling people what they cannot or can do is not easy, and all politicians are listening to our medial officers giving us the best advice to fight this virus. We are used to telling people why coming to H-N is so great and today we are telling them to stay away. Goes against everything we normally stand for. It is our duty to protect those that cannot protect themselves and it our responsibility as citizens to honour and respect those that are fighting on the frontlines for the lives of our neighbours. We need to continue to do our part.

With the encouragement of both myself and Mayor Chopp, H-N staff and the public heath unit are working together to begin the process on how to open the trails in an effective and protective way so that individuals, particularly our residents, can get out and enjoy the trails and gain that much-needed physical and mental exercise and also some of that vitamin D that we all so long for. The weather is breaking and we are hoping that we can all work together to practice social distancing, respect each other and be sure that we are all doing our part to flatten the curve and kill this virus. We are working together to do this and our hope is that those from outside of the communities will stay there and that they will not come and invade the space that right now is for the benefit of us locals.



With the possibility of trails and parks opening, it is still with the intent that you remain local. We will be asking residents to not travel to their favourite location or park, but to simply stay within their jurisdiction and be sure that there is plenty of distancing where they choose to go. It will be monitored that these places are not met for congregation or picnics but for walking and exercise. I know that I should not state the obvious but believe it or not we actually have had a few attempt at family picnics in the parks.

Car washes? As a local businessman, I see every business as essential. Essential in providing an income for that family, essential for employing one or more employees. Today that is never more important. As a municipality we should have never been put in the position of choosing winners and losers in this and that is what has happened.

While it is important that we follow the Provincial orders, there are certain instances where the order is not very clear. Car washes are one of them. With no assistance from our local MPP and direction, both Mayor Chopp and I have been working with staff and the health unit in an effort to help these car washes remain open rather than be closed. I know that it is has caused some confusion, and I have asked for some patience. If the orders from the PROVINCE were clearer we would not be wasting time trying to determine for our valued businesses what fits and what does not. In the end, if we can help save some businesses in all of this, I would rather do that than simply be taking the easy route and leaving them to flounder.

Farmers markets are another example where we have asked for the operators to put forth a safety plan to the public health unit whereby they can open and operate with the public's protection in mind. It is our goal to support their efforts with the health unit and our hope that they will be open shortly.

Haldimand County is currently developing an economic recovery response plan to help our local economy. Any assistance we can provide our business to hit the ground running is crucial. When the Ford government puts dates on the roadmap, we know that how business is run will be very different. The communities that are best prepared are the ones that will recover the quickest and Haldimand is and will be poised to be there.

Currently we are prioritizing and working hard to get our capital projects ready for tendering/ construction in recognition that the construction sector will be a primary economic driver. The 2020 capital budget was set at \$37.1 million.

We are also preparing ourselves to respond to the stimulus packages that will be coming from the Province and the Federal government. These infrastructure programs will be significant to stimulate the economy but also hello us achieve the funding for the many projects that will enhance and strengthen our County for future growth.



In this time we are working with both private and public sectors in getting planning approvals, site plans, getting key infrastructure installed in the least disruptive way to the local community.

Staff are working with key stakeholders in defining a strategy that will help businesses recover. As Mayor, and through our business development committee, I will be reaching out to them as well for further input and advise on key practices and steps to recovery.

Again, I cannot reiterate more how important it is that we all work together to achieve success and ask that you appreciate that we are all trying to find our way through this and along the way there will be bumps in the road and lessons learned, but every decision is done with the best of interests in mind.

“This journey, just like the one you’re on, is all trial and error. We learn as we go, make mistakes along the way and pray we learn form them.” — Humble the Poet

Stay Safe,

Mayor Ken Hewitt