



July 27, 2020

Statement from Mayor Ken Hewitt & Council

For the numbers today go to:

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

Today, Haldimand County Council passed a bylaw requiring people to wear a face covering inside of specific retail and public spaces.

Over the past few weeks, we have spent considerable time discussing with our business owners, various members of the public, other municipalities, our public health services and our Chief Medical Officer. The discussion is very polarizing in that in almost every instance, a sample group of 50 people would result in a range of 40% to 60% for or against the idea of wearing masks in public spaces. Basically 50/50. So how do you respond to the people who will say my voice was not heard? Regardless of the decision made, almost half would feel their voice was not heard.

I can tell you that every voice was heard, every e-mail read, almost every call returned, (I still have a few). In every instance the comments made were very logical and arguments for and against had plenty of good information to digest.

So why did Council pass the bylaw? While I truly believe that the directive should have come from the Ford Government and every health unit in Ontario, their comments were very clear in that despite the numbers today, a mask will help reduce the risk of another wave coming or at best it will help reduce that wave.

I know that all of us on Council have no medical experience nor any real background on what is right and what is wrong with respect to medical decisions made during this pandemic. We have always looked to the advice of our CMO and the rest of the medical experts to help guide us through this very difficult time. That continues to be our process. Entering stage 3 and allowing larger groups to socialize together is even more reason to consider all options to protect ourselves.

Every community within an hour's drive has passed some form of face covering bylaw. We waited to gather the right information, to engage the public and to ultimately put something in place that we felt would best protect Haldimand County. Educating the public on how to wear a mask and protect themselves is the best path to success and with this bylaw, we believe we can get there. It is an education campaign, one that we would be remiss if we did not follow through on. Given the amount of



people that come into Haldimand from the outside, it would not be responsible of us to not take the same measures in our local retail stores as they do just down the street.

I know that some of you would argue against that, and I frankly would not disagree with many of the points raised but if we are the only place left without a face covering bylaw and god forbid our numbers did expand, we would certainly be judged much worse for it then we are being judged today.

Why was this not done a few months ago? I asked that question too, but ask yourself when was the last time you went through this very scenario of a pandemic and draw your experience from that time. Being facetious but regardless of who you are, we are all learning about this virus, and the actions required to prevent it. Looking back now I am sure that there are many experts and leaders that would say something different now than they did back then.

I have never believed in government getting in the way, I have always felt that the best governments are the ones that get out of the way. During the pandemic, nothing is at it seems and today Haldimand County Council made the best decision it could with the knowledge that they had and the guidance of the CMO. Staff were able to construct a bylaw that is the least intrusive to the employers and the employees but still protects the greater population.

Lastly, the argument of right. Who has the right to wear or not wear a mask? Many years ago a similar smoking bylaw was introduced that challenged the very right of those who wanted to smoke in public spaces. The rights of those who want to feel safe are just as important as the rights of those who feel masks are not appropriate.

I urge you all to take the time and the care to wear a mask, to protect yourselves, and mostly to help our local businesses get through this.

If it is a small inconvenience and sacrifice of ourselves to ultimately give the right of preventing someone from entering the hospital with this deadly disease, it no longer seems like much of a sacrifice.

The virus is the enemy and the sooner we can kill the enemy the sooner we can live our daily lives as we all once did.

Stay Safe,

Mayor Ken Hewitt