



MUNICIPALITY OF **West Elgin**

Staff Report

Report To: Council Meeting
From: Jana Nethercott, Clerk
Date: 2020-08-27
Subject: Emergency Declaration – Information on termination of declared emergency

Recommendation:

That West Elgin Council hereby receives the report from Jana Nethercott, Clerk re: Emergency Declaration – Information on termination of declared emergency for information purposes.

Purpose:

Bettina Weber, CEMC for West Elgin provided the below information regarding terminating of a declared emergency as points for Council to think about:

“There have been some questions regarding the right time and process to terminate an Emergency Declaration. I know you are all familiar with the attached document from OFMEM, the *Checklist in Consideration of a Declaration of Emergency*. This checklist has long been a helpful tool to help municipalities determine when to declare, but it just as helpful in considering the termination of an emergency. If your Emergency Control Group (ECG) checked off a number of points to declare an emergency, simply reverse the procedure— are those same issues no longer of concern? If all the problems have been addressed or no longer exist, then termination seems a logical next step; but if the concerns are still active and significant risks remain, then termination of the emergency would not be prudent.

Perhaps some are worried about the length of time that the Emergency Declaration has been in place. Across Ontario, in many emergencies declared over the past several years which are water quality or health related, the declaration has remained in place for months, even years; this is particularly true for some declarations in First Nations communities, where the health and/or water quality issues have not been addressed or eliminated. Similarly, COVID-19 is still an active world-wide pandemic, and the highly anticipated “Second Wave” is coming this fall, as school, cooler weather and a return to a more indoor lifestyle begin. Local and national COVID numbers have increased and are expected to spike in September after school opens—this is certainly not the time to terminate the emergency.

The recent adoption of local bylaws that require face coverings/masks to be worn in all indoor public spaces is unique to this emergency and has proven to be controversial. To encourage citizens to wear masks, an Emergency Declaration provides proof that the municipality recognizes this situation is serious, dangerous, and widespread; terminating the emergency but still requiring masks to be worn would be very confusing

indeed. As long as community spread of the virus is a risk and wearing a mask can reduce that risk, an Emergency Declaration would be an important source of support to encourage the use of face coverings. It can also be argued that terminating the emergency will be seen by many people as a confirmation that “everything is back to normal and the danger is over”—and as a result, new COVID protocols like physical distancing, installation of plastic barriers and frequent use of hand sanitizer can just stop... and we know that’s not safe.

Some might believe that the municipality cannot resume business or open its office under an Emergency Declaration, but this is not the case. As a result of recommended COVID safety guidelines, municipal offices are opened and staff are working in ways we would never have considered just a few months ago—but they are still working. Virtual meetings are the norm now, and seem to offer many advantages that were not considered before they became necessary. Councils have been live streaming their meetings online, and some municipalities report greater public interest and participation than they have ever experienced; maintaining an Emergency Declaration helps to ensure these new and different practices are accepted and encouraged, providing greater safety for staff, elected officials and the public.

In short, all the reasons we declared COVID-19 to be a County and municipal emergency are still relevant:

- To provide protection from personal liability to staff and elected officials working and making decisions in difficult circumstances,
- To raise public awareness regarding the gravity of the current pandemic situation,
- To protect any registered volunteers that are called to assist,
- To maintain the possibility for future compensation should it become available; and
- To ensure our organization can quickly respond to other unforeseen events should they arise.

Please, do not rush to terminate the current Emergency Declaration. We are experiencing the biggest emergency of our lifetime, which affects public health, the economy, domestic and international travel, trade and even our national security. To be realistic, there will be long months, perhaps years, of living with the “New Normal”, but maintaining our Emergency Declaration provides many current and possible future benefits with no real drawbacks.”