

## COVID-19, what is next for the community?

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COVID-19 and what is next for the community were the two topics that were discussed during the Peterborough and Kawartha Association of Realtors town hall meeting on Tuesday, May 19. Local real estate agents, local business owners and government officials gathered electronically via Zoom to see how the community can best work together to take the next steps moving forward as things start to open and COVID-19 related restrictions start to loosen. The meeting started with the PKAR representative and local real estate agent Cheryl Easton asking several questions of council members and organization representatives about next steps, what plans are moving forward, and how PKAR can help. Easton's first question was about what is currently being done and what needs to be done. The point of this event was to sort of hold out the hand as an association that represents many members in the Bancroft area as far as the real estate community. One of our driving forces is to reach out to the rest of our community, and we wanted to start a conversation to let you know we are here to help and [ask] how can we help. She started the questions by asking Mayor Paul Jenkins about the challenges the town is facing now that things are starting to open again. Jenkins' reply was that so far things have been successful. The town has been talking about social distancing a lot and says that those who are transient residents, who are those who live out of town who come to the cottage or those who live in the area but go shopping or work elsewhere, are welcomed to be here, but are asked to stay home for the recommended two week period whenever they travel outside of the community. Once you have been at home for the two week period you are no longer transient, you're a resident and we invite you to come and frequent the shops. Because the town is so tourism and retail based, which are two of the hardest hit during this time, Jenkins says the town is concerned about their local business owners. Bancroft Business Improvement Area coordinator Jody Didier agreed with Jenkins saying that many BBIA members have contacted her feeling overwhelmed by what has been happening due to COVID-19 and are unsure what to do moving forward saying that many are feeling very paralyzed by it. Mike Daly from M. G. Daly Funeral homes suggested that businesses and organizations in Bancroft and the surrounding area start a resource tool so that if someone needs something they can use the tool to see who has what they need and who can help them. Daly used his business as an example saying that he has donated personal protective equipment to local health care agencies and could start ordering face masks in larger shipments so that other businesses who don't normally order such items can have a supply for their staff. If we can handle things locally that would be great, that way businesses and the public don't have to get stuff from out of town and we can support each other. Didier agreed saying that the BBIA would like to create such a tool with its members. The health and care of the local seniors was the main concern for Mayor of Tudor and Cashel Libby Clark. She stated that the majority of the township's population is seniors and that isolation, connection to the internet and transportation are large issues. She wants to see the county continue their hard work to address the internet issues that are found in the area. Easton then opened the meeting to discussion and asked those in attendance if there was anything that PKAR or the real estate agents could do to help their communities. Jenkins replied that the biggest thing that they could do was to promote the area as they talk to buyers and sellers. Don't just sell the home or the business, but sell the area as a whole. Jenkins continued to say that there are two issues, the short term and the long term, and he said he could see the realtors helping in the long term the most. As you deal with people just spread the word. Currently Jenkins said that roughly 64 per cent of businesses in Hastings County are without internet service, and post offices are backlogged with online orders. So whatever can be done to help support local small businesses would be great. Online support and preparing for a possible second wave of COVID-19 that could result in closing all the stores once again, were the two big concerns that were talked about during the town hall meeting. One point for the long term was brought up by Didier saying, I think this is going to change the way the consumer engages with the marketplace. Businesses will have to make adjustments and change their ways of doing business in order to facilitate the concerns of their consumers.