

HH adopts guidelines and protocol to protect public and staff from COVID-19

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By Nate Smelle

Hastings Highlands council recently passed a bylaw that puts in place a set of guidelines and protocol to help protect the public and staff from the spread of COVID-19.

Council was presented with the bylaw in an 18-page report produced by staff, which outlines the municipality's protocol prior to the online meeting held Aug. 5. The report was created under the direction of the federal and provincial governments, as well as public health. Aiming to help keep those who work, live, and visit Hastings Highlands safe, and to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 throughout the community, the report was designed to act as a guide for municipal employees and the public to navigate work and daily life during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before voting each of the council members took a moment to comment on the plan, and express their gratitude to staff for their efforts in putting it together.

"This booklet is part of a really comprehensive plan," said Councillor Nancy Matheson. "It has involved a tremendous amount of conscientious and proactive work outside of the scope of the staff's regular duties, in order to ensure the health and safety of all the residents of Hastings Highlands. Moving forward carefully and cautiously has been, and will continue to prove to be beneficial."

Pointing out that some of the procedures in the bylaw had been updated since it was published in the agenda prior to the meeting, Matheson noted that the municipal offices would now be reopening by appointment only every Tuesday and Thursday starting on Aug. 11.

To make sure that residents are aware of the plan and can access it, Hastings Highlands CAO/treasurer David Stewart indicated that the municipality would be promoting and sharing it online via social media and their website. To reach residents who do not have internet access, he said they are also looking into sharing it in the local media.

Administrative assistant Chantelle Beaumier was one of the staff instrumental in developing the guidelines and protocol outlined within the booklet. She is currently working on the poster that will be used by the municipality to raise awareness of the report. Explaining what the poster will include, Beaumier said "It's going to include the 'how,' 'when,' and 'what' for appointments so both the public and staff alike can understand what to expect in booking these. It will have all the supplemental information attached. That includes the screening that we are hoping to conduct prior to them entering the building, as well as the safety measures that we have in place so everyone involved will know what to expect before arriving."

Describing the new bylaw and emphasizing its importance, Mayor Vic Bodnar said "The document is not only timely, but completely relevant to what our situation is at this time. I will caution though for people to continue to be diligent even as we move forward. So maintain social distancing, wash your hands, and wear your mask. It isn't gone yet, and it won't be for a while, so please be cautious out there."